



## **Stella Chester**

Adapted from the play by Molière, *Sganarelle, ou le Cocu Imaginaire*

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## The foolish husband

**FARCE.** Adapted from the play by Molière. Misunderstandings, mishaps, and misconceptions abound in this madcap play that has more love triangles than characters! Celia and Lelio are in love and wish to marry, but Celia's father wants Celia to marry a wealthy gentleman since "gold will make even the most ugly charming." Meanwhile, Sganarelle, a foolish, cowardly husband, believes Lelio has stolen his wife and reluctantly dons battle armor to defend his honor. However, Sganarelle's wife suspects Sganarelle has fallen madly in love with Celia. In the end, Sganarelle laments, "Never believe anything, even if you see it with your own eyes!" Accessible and easy to stage, this uproarious play provides an ideal opportunity to introduce the comedic genius of Molière to young actors.

**Performance Time:** Approximately 30 minutes.

## The foolish husband



Molière, 1622-1673

## About the Story

Molière is the stage name of Jean-Baptiste Poquelin (1622-1673), who was born in Paris to a wealthy family. One of the greatest comedic playwrights of all time, Molière worked as an actor and used this experience to hone his comedic talent in which he combined elements of French comedy with the Italian commedia dell'arte to satirize French society. Molière's 1660 play, *The Imaginary Cuckold* (*Sganarelle, ou Le Cocu Imaginaire*), is the first play in his "jealousy series," which includes *Don Garcia of Navarre*, *The School for Husbands*, and *The School for Wives*. While playing the role of the hypochondriac Argan in his play *The Imaginary Invalid*, Molière experienced a coughing fit onstage, managed to finish the performance, but collapsed and died hours later. French law at the time prohibited actors from being buried in cemeteries, but the King granted Molière a night funeral and a burial plot in an area of the cemetery where unbaptized infants were buried. In 1817, Molière's remains were transferred to the Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris. Some of Molière's best known plays include *The Misanthrope*, *The School for Wives*, *Tartuffe*, *The Imaginary Invalid*, and *The Miser*.

## **Dramatis Personae**

(5 M, 3 F, 1 flexible)

**LELIO:** In love with Celia; male.

**CELIA:** In love with Lelio; female.

**GORGIBUS:** Celia's father who wants Celia to marry a wealthy gentleman instead of Lelio; male.

**SGANARELLE:** Egotistical, cowardly husband who thinks his wife may be in love with Lelio; wears knee breeches, a doublet, a cloak, a collar, and shoes, all in crimson red; male.

**WIFE:** Sganarelle's wife; +thinks Sganarelle is in love with Celia; female.

**MAID:** Celia's maid; female.

**GROS-RENÉ:** Lelio's tired, hungry servant; male.

**RELATIVE:** A relative of Sganarelle's wife; flexible.

**VILLEBREQUIN:** Valère's father; male.

## Setting

1600s, Paris.

## Set

**Public place.** Backdrop of a Parisian street may be used, or a bare stage will suffice.

**Exterior of Sganarelle's home.** A backdrop of a Parisian house may be used, or a bare stage will suffice.

## Synopsis of Scenes

**Scene 1:** Public place.

**Scene 2:** Public place.

**Scene 3:** Public place.

**Scene 4:** Outside Sganarelle's home.

**Scene 5:** Public place.

**The foolish husband**  
7

## **Props**

Small portrait of Lelio with gold frame  
"Battle armor," for Sganarelle  
Sword (plastic)

**"Never believe anything  
even if you see it  
with your own eyes!**

**—Sganarelle**



## Scene 1

(AT RISE: In tears, Celia enters. Gorgibus, her father, follows. They are arguing.)

CELIA: (*Upset.*) Ah! Never expect my heart to consent to that!

GORGIBUS: (*Upset.*) What do you mutter, you impertinent girl? Do you suppose you can thwart my resolve? Have I not absolute power over you? And shall your youthful brain control my fatherly discretion with foolish arguments? Which of us has most right to command the other? Which of us—you or I—is, in your opinion, best able to judge what is advantageous for you? You must accept without any more ado the husband intended for you. But you say... (*Mimicking Celia.*) ...“I do not know what kind of temper he has. And I ought to think about it beforehand!” I know that he is heir to a large fortune. Ought I, therefore, to trouble my head with anything else? How could this man—who has 20,000 golden coins in his pocket—need contemplation? Come! Come! Let him be what he will! I promise you that with such a sum, he is a very worthy gentleman!

CELIA: (*Sighs.*) Alas!

GORGIBUS: (*Flabbergasted.*) Alas, indeed! What is the meaning of that? A fine “alas” you have uttered just now! Look here! If you further anger me, you will have plenty of opportunities for shouting “Alas!” (*Sighs.*) This comes from that eagerness of yours to read novels day and night. Your head is so full of nonsense about love. Throw into the fire all these mischievous books, which are every day corrupting the minds of so many young people. Instead of reading such nonsense, read, as you ought to do, *The Guide for Sinners*, which is also a good book. Such writings teach people in a short time how to live their lives well. If you had read such moral books, you would have known better how to submit to my commands.

**The foolish husband**

10

CELIA: Do you suppose, dear Father, I can ever forget that unchangeable affection I feel for Lelio? I am wrong to go against your will, but you yourself promised me to Lelio.

GORGIBUS: Even if you were engaged, another man has made his appearance whose fortune annuls your engagement. Lelio is a handsome fellow...but there is nothing that does not give way to money. Gold will make even the most ugly charming, and without it, everything else is but wretchedness. I am aware you are not fond of Valère, but even though you do not like him romantically, you will like him as a husband. The very title "husband" endears a man more than is generally supposed and love is often a consequence of marriage. But what a fool I am to stand arguing when I possess the absolute right to command! Let me have no more of your foolish complaints. This evening, Valère intends to visit you. And if you do not receive him well and look kindly upon him, I shall— *(Pause.)* But I will say no more on this subject.

*(Gorgibus storms off. Celia is dismayed. Blackout.)*

## Scene 2

(AT RISE: A short time later. Celia and her Maid enter.)

MAID: (*Flabbergasted.*) What, madam?! You refuse positively what so many other people would accept with all their heart?! You answer with tears a proposal for marriage and delay for a long time to say "yes"?! (*Sighs.*) Alas! Why does someone not wish to marry me? And so far from thinking it any trouble to say "yes" once, believe me, I would very quickly say it a dozen times. Your brother's tutor was quite right when, as we were talking about worldly affairs, he said, "A woman is like the ivy that grows luxuriantly whilst it clings closely to the tree but never thrives if it be separated from it." Nothing can be truer, my dear mistress, and I have found it out. Heaven rest the soul of my poor Martin! When he was alive, my complexion was like a cherub's. I was plump and beautiful. My eyes sparkled brightly, and I felt happy. Now I am melancholy. In those pleasant times, which flew away like lightning, I went to bed in the very depth of winter without kindling a fire in the room. Even airing the sheets appeared then to me ridiculous. But now I shiver even in the dog days of summer. In short, madam, believe me that there is nothing like having a husband at night by one's side were it only for the pleasure of hearing him say "God bless you" whenever one may happen to sneeze.

CELIA: How can you advise me to act so wickedly as to forsake Lelio and take up with this ill-shaped fellow?

MAID: Upon my word, your Lelio is a mere fool to stay away the very time he is wanted. His long absence makes me suspect a change in his affection...

CELIA: Oh! Do not distress me with such dire forebodings! (*Showing Maid a small portrait of Lelio.*) Observe carefully the features of his face. They swear to me an eternal affection. After all, I would not willingly believe them to tell a

**The foolish husband**

12

falsehood but that he is such as he is here depicted as art and that his affection for me remains unchanged.

MAID: To be sure, these features denote a deserving lover whom you are right to regard tenderly.

CELIA: And yet I must. Ah! Support me! *(Faints and falls to the floor, dropping the portrait of Lelio on the floor.)*

MAID: Madam, what is the cause of—? *(Spies Celia on the floor.)* Heavens! She swoons! Oh! *(Shouts.)* Make haste! Help! Help!

*(Sganarelle rushes on.)*

SGANARELLE: What is the matter? I am here.

MAID: My lady is dying.

SGANARELLE: *(Disappointed.)* What? Is that all? You made such a noise, I thought the world was at an end. Let us see, however. *(To Celia, poking her.)* Madam, are you dead? *(Celia doesn't respond.)* Hmm...she does not say one word.

MAID: I shall fetch somebody to carry her. *(Exits.)*

SGANARELLE: *(Touching Celia's arm. To himself.)* She is cold all over, and I do not know what to say to it. Let me draw a little nearer to see whether she breathes or not. *(Takes Celia in his arms and listens to her breathe.)* Upon my word, I cannot tell, but I perceive some signs of life.

*(Unseen by Sganarelle, his Wife enters.)*

WIFE: *(Aside.)* Ah! What do I see? My husband holding in his arms—? *(Enraged.)* He is false to me most certainly! I should be glad to catch him!

SGANARELLE: *(To himself, indicating Celia.)* She must be assisted immediately. She would certainly be in the wrong to die.

*(Sganarelle picks up Celia and carries her off. Wife goes CS.)*

## The foolish husband

13

WIFE: (*Aside.*) He has suddenly left this spot. His flight has disappointed my curiosity, but I doubt no longer that he is unfaithful to me. The little I have seen sufficiently proves it. I am no longer astonished that he returns my modest love with strange coldness. The ungrateful wretch reserves his caresses for others and starves me in order to feed their pleasures. This is the common way of husbands! They become indifferent. At the beginning, they do wonders and seem to be very much in love with us, but the wretches soon grow weary of our fondness and carry elsewhere what is due to us alone. Oh, how it vexes me that the law will not permit us to change our husband as we do our linen! That would be very convenient. And, truth be told, I know some women whom it would please as much as myself. (*Spies the portrait of Lelio on the floor and picks it up. Admiringly.*) But what a handsome thing fortune has sent...

[END OF FREEVIEW]