The Mail Order Bride

by C H A R L E S L. M E E

Coney Island Avenue, Brooklyn.
A street of Turks and Pakistanis and Russians
of Muslims and Jews as business partners
of Sikhs in turbans wearing sweatshirts that say
"Brooklyn, N.Y."

1. Argan

[Argan enters,
a whirlwind energy, motion, and fast talk,
a blood pressure monitor attached to his arm.
He is followed by
Tina, his stylist and arts advisor,
with a little bowl of hair coloring in her hand
and Angie, in sweats,
his alternative medicine physician and fitness advisor,
carrying towels.

Argan's hair is done up in pieces of aluminum foil
and Tina is putting blonde streaks in his hair.

ARGAN
I don't see quite why
I should have a sore throat
if I've taken my hawthorn berry this morning
and my horehound stems
and my back
I have a little
what chamacallit in my back
what do you call it?
a little
stitch
is that what you call it?
the medical term?

TINA
Can’t you sit?

ARGAN
No, I can’t sit!

ANGIE
He has to keep his heart rate up.

ARGAN
I have to keep my heart rate up!
You’ve no idea what I have to do to stay alive.

TINA
and young

ARGAN
And young!
The Avapro every day
two Juvenon with the alpha lipoic acid
the protein shake
with manganese and lysine

[is he doing arm and shoulder stretches?]

arginine
methionine
the Acetyl L Carnitine
I don’t even mention the fiber supplements,
the superoxide dismutase
the telomerase
ANGIE
and your tansy, have you had your tansy

ARGAN
yes, yes, of course, my tansy
my compound bistort with bayberry oil
my Pinus Can,
my Potentilla Tormentilla
my safflower
my St. John’s Wort

[is he doing deep-knee bends?]

my sabadilla
sassafras
common sanicle
saw palmetto and saxifrage
I’m half way through the S’s
and almost up to T
I’ve already taken the elixir of jade,
the injections of crushed goat testicles
dog gonads
essence of nematode worms
I’ve inhaled the breath of virgins.

ANGIE
Perhaps an enema.

ARGAN
No, no, not another enema.

ANGIE
In my professional opinion
a man in your condition
cannot have too many enemas.
TINA
Or it might be
you should do another fifty male kegels
with the knees bent.
and the arabesque
have you done the arabesque?

ARGAN
yes, yes,
I do that every day

TINA
there's nothing like it for your
heterolateral axial rotation
for your extension and your flexion
and for the kinematics of your lower lumbar region

ANGIE
Still, an enema....

ARGAN
Wait! Wait!

[looking at his blood pressure monitor]

Look at this!
280/160!!!!!!!!!!! and a heart rate of 195!
My god I'm in good shape!
This is amazing!
Right.
Good.
Empty the mind.

[he empties his mind]

All right. Good. Good. Now I'm ready to go.
Let's learn to dance.
These young people.
They want to go out every night to dance.
Now let's see.
[he makes some dance moves]
I used to be quite a dancer myself you know.

TINA
Of course, there are some new steps these days.

ARGAN
New steps. New steps. Of course.

TINA
The cutting edge.

ANGIE
Be there first.

ARGAN
Because we are a people
moving ahead every day into the new
making up our lives as we go along
because
as my high school basketball coach always said to me:
Argan: Argan: you can’t score
if you don’t take out the ball!
OK Good. Good. How is this?

[he is dancing]

TINA
Wait a moment. No, no, no. Watch me. Like this.
First: Music!
Go.

[music up;
Tina and Argan begin to move together]
ARGAN
Ah, yes. Good. Good.
This feels good to me.

[so all three,
dance to the music—
a Tai Chi style of dance—
and Argan begins to sing, too]

May God bless and keep you always,
May your wishes all come true,
May you always do for others
And let others do for you.
May you build a ladder to the stars
And climb on every rung,
May you stay forever young,

ALL SING
Forever young, forever young,
May you stay forever young.

May you grow up to be righteous,
May you grow up to be true,
May you always know the truth
And see the lights surrounding you.
May you always be courageous,
Stand upright and be strong,
May you stay forever young,

Forever young, forever young,
May you stay forever young.

2. Harriet

Harriet enters
taking off her coat and gloves
HARRIET
What's this I hear?
You're getting married?
You've told no one?
And you have a bride hidden somewhere in the house?
You know: I can change my name
if you are planning to humiliate me!

ARGAN
Humiliate you?

HARRIET
I may be your biological sister,
but I can change my identity entirely
as far as the outside world is concerned
so no one will know we are related any more!
How would you like that?
What are you doing?

ARGAN [as he continues dancing]
I am getting in shape, Harriet,
my inner soul, my outer fitness,
and my dancing skills, if I do say so myself,
are developing like a third world country on fire

HARRIET
Married at your age!
A widower for less than a year
you think this is even something you can say out loud?

ARGAN
how so?

[still doing tai chi]

HARRIET
is this not so disrespectful to your wife?
ARGAN
it is a tribute to my dear, deceased wife
that I loved my marriage with her so much I want to do it again

[they stop the tai chi, and Angie takes his pulse
while Tina touches up his hair
and removes the aluminum foil,
and tries different scarves around his neck]

HARRIET
did you tell me this, that you wanted to be married again?

ARGAN
of course I told you this
I told you and I told you
but do you listen to me?

HARRIET
no, no i don’t

ARGAN
you see?

HARRIET
well, one assumes you are talking
in some general way
about your feelings,
but not that you mean it in any particular way
and now what?
where did you find this new wife?

[Tina and Angie have one arm each
and are relaxing them, massaging them, loosening him up—
do they have him on a massage table now
working him over?
as Tina touches up his makeup]
ARGAN
the way everyone is finding wives these days
I found her by mail order

HARRIET
in a catalogue? sight unseen?

ARGAN
there was a photograph

HARRIET
and she what? she has what? she has youth?

ARGAN
she has youth, yes, and innocence

HARRIET
no one has innocence any more, not even babies

ARGAN
this person, Harriet, is an asian person

HARRIET
so! you've ordered up an asian bride?
that makes her innocent?

ARGAN
certainly not being a westerner
she is innocent of all those individualistic impulses

TINA
the grabbing the taking the getting the using

ARGAN
she has rather the impulse of giving the gift of the self to the other
of the communal spirit
of the offering of her service to the world
HARRIET
so you have an asian house servant?

ARGAN
of course not, of course not
I, too, will be serving her you see
because I myself am learning how to...how to

TINA
set aside the ravenous ego

ANGIE
the all consuming appetites of me, me, me

ARGAN
and evolve into a better human being

HARRIET
oh, dear, Argan, I don't think you need a wife, when you have me
you know I can move in with you here
and see that everything is OK for you
I'm sorry, Argan
I haven't been attentive enough to you
facing your mortality by yourself
we try to minimize it
but there it is
the dark shadow in the corner of our minds
we long to live forever
but we have to face the fact

and think, too,
let's be realistic
what if there is a life after death
no one knows for sure
do you have money in the bank for your next life?
is there some place you can write down
the number of your bank account
so that you can find it in the next life
and have a little something to get you started
think of it:
if all you put away is $150
compounded semi-annually
if you don’t come back for 150 years
it will be worth a half a million dollars
have you thought of this?

ARGAN
no

[has he now been placed in the lotus position
by Tina
and everyone is in the lotus position?]

HARRIET
because your mind is preoccupied with this young woman
I suppose you think you will spend all your money on her
all OUR money if the truth be told!
because, frankly, Argan
don’t imagine you can squander our common fortune
on any whim that takes your fancy
haven’t we been the best of friends
all our lives long
friends from the cradle
and now friends to the grave
we can console one another, Argan, you and I,
in our old age

ARGAN
old age?
i don’t think I’m going to be settling for old age
no, no, no

HARRIET
what are you saying?
all this is about nothing but buying youth
ARGAN
of course it is
what else in life could be worth spending money on?
slippers to wear around the house?
a nice sweater for sitting by the fire?
or do you think I ought to spend my money on a nice new walker?!?!?!
what do you take me for
an abject idiot?
spend your money on living long, that’s what I say,
because: what else is there?
Like everyone else,
I'm just trying to buy some time.

HARRIET
But, Argan, you are too old to live much longer.

ARGAN
Too old to be married to a young woman
isn't that what you really mean?
And how can you say such a thing?
I think you would criticize me if I were a sexist
if I were a racist
if I were a jingoist
if I were a polemicist
but you think it’s OK for you to be an agist?
no, no
I don’t think so. I don’t accept that.
and this time, frankly
with this marriage
not to say anything against my dear deceased wife
but this time
I will have a bride who knows nothing
before I marry her—
of course she will know something
but not very much,
so that I will have an opportunity to school her, as it were,
in the ways that will make us both completely happy
no one ever getting on anyone’s nerves
demanding this, requiring that, no
I will raise her to an appreciation of the arts
these asian women are very smart
you know at UC Berkeley
it’s nothing but asians these days
because these asians are the new jews
very clever
very hardworking
very good at simple tasks
as you will see

HARRIET
where is she, this bride of yours?

ARGAN
in her room

HARRIET
in her room?

ARGAN
Yes.

HARRIET
Have you locked her in her room?

ARGAN
Oh, Harriet, goodness, no.
How can you say such a thing?

[he laughs at the idea
he scoffs]

Locked her in her room—
I shouldn’t think so.

HARRIET
I’ve heard talk among the household staff.
ARGAN
well
it might not be a bad thing if I had locked her in her room
she being a stranger in this country

TINA
not familiar with the ways of New York

ANGIE
where everyone is a hedonist

TINA
thinking only of themselves

ARGAN
grasping and swindling

TINA
the divorce rate out of control

ARGAN
narcissism run amok

TINA
the culture of immediate gratification

HARRIET
old men marrying young women

ARGAN
exactly my point
who knows if someone else might try to steal her for his bride?
so the truth is, yes,
I DID lock her in her room to keep her safe
until I've married her
because no one knows how to make a longterm commitment
these days
the constant give and take
within the zone of union and consensus
here, let me show you
give me your hand
ok, now pull, good, push, good
resist! resist!
give and take give and take exactly

TINA
this is isometric exercise

ANGIE
it can add years to your life

TINA
because age is not about how many years you have been alive
but how many years you have left!

ARGAN
Here. Come. Don't be timid, Harriet.
Down on the floor.
Here we go.

TINA
Stretch. Stretch.

ARGAN
That's the ticket.

ANGIE
Feel the years adding on to your life!

[The advisors join in with this exercise
helping Argan and Harriet
to do it correctly.

Some wallpaper yoga music.

And this voiceover:

VOICEOVER [quietly, soothingly]
And for your diet
don't forget seaweed
nori, digitata, kelp, bladderwrack
because the body should only take in foods
that come from wet places
and why is that?
because human beings
used to live in the ocean
and you think:
we don't live there any more.
but really, in fact,
we just took the ocean with us when we came on land.
The womb is an ocean really,
babies begin in an ocean,
and human blood has the same concentration of salt
as sea water.
And no matter where we are
on top of a mountain
or in the middle of a desert,
when we cry or sweat,
we cry or sweat sea water.
And so we need to replenish
all those vitamins and minerals
that come from the sea.
This is why we recommend seaweed
and not just
as some people think
for body wraps
for your firming and toning seaweed facial
but as we like to say
what is good for the outside of your body
is good for the inside, too
because
we are all sea creatures
and we cannot thrive
unless we embrace our oceanic selves.
3. Daughters enter

SUSANA
what's all this bullshit about a bride
locked in her room upstairs?

JULIE
although we do think marriage is good

SUSANA
we don't think marriage is good
marriage is not good

JULIE
I think it's good

SUSANA
you don't know what you think, Julie, you are how old now?
you don’t have any idea what you're talking about
but even if marriage were a good idea in some general abstract way
it's not good for our father!
who should, by now, be concentrating
on becoming a mature person
thinking ahead
of grandchildren and dying

ARGAN
dying?

SUSANA
acquiring a sense of dignity to face your declining powers with grace

JULIE
I think our father has a sense of grace

SUSANA
What are you saying?
Are you saying I don't have a sense of grace?
ARGAN
Girls.

SUSANA
Is that what you're saying?

JULIE
I'm saying it may be you have no sense of grace or tact or courtesy or even just niceness, frankly, Susana because you are not nice to me and you never have been

SUSANA
This is what you say to me after you have stolen my boyfriend

ARGAN
Girls....

JULIE
Stolen?

SUSANA
Exactly.

JULIE
You dumped him, Susana, you dumped him and frankly I don't know why because he is a nice guy he always was a nice guy I always thought you were lucky and when you dumped him well I don't know I had always thought he was an amazing human being and he just seemed so disconsolate
SUSANA
Right.
So then you just grabbed him on the rebound.

JULIE
I felt sorry for him
and then it turned out
he liked me!

[by now all the advisors
are in the lotus position
meditating

and Argan and Harriet have taken chairs
and are reading magazines till all this subsides]

SUSANA
He liked you!
He liked you!
Do you know what a man means when he says he likes you?

JULIE
Yes, I think I do.

SUSANA
He means he wants to get into your pants
that's all.

JULIE
Maybe that's what he means
when he says it to you!

SUSANA
When he says it to anyone.
Because men
you know: men
they will say anything
to mix it up for a while in your lingerie
they don't even care about you
they'd be just as happy
rolling around the aisles of Victoria's Secret
rubbing up against the satin and the lace
and playing with themselves
for all they care about you!

JULIE
I'm sorry this has been your experience, Susana.

SUSANA
And it's going to be yours, too
now that you've stopped wearing blue jeans
and playing softball with the guys

JULIE
I never played softball with the guys.

SUSANA
You did.

JULIE
I didn't.

SUSANA
You did.

JULIE
You don't know what I did or didn't do.
You never knew what I ever did.
You don't know me.
You don't know me even a little bit
don't pretend you know anything about me.
Because you never cared about me.
I worshipped you and worshipped you
I tried to do everything all the time just the way you did
whenever you said, oh, Julie, could you get me a drink of water
could you get me this, could you get me that
you would be lying in your bed
like six inches away from your lipstick or your compact
and I would be sitting at my desk all the way across the room
and you would say
oh, Julie,
could you get my lipstick for me
I'm just too exhausted to move
and I would get up and get it and hand it to you
and you never said thank you
never
never once
you never thanked me for anything
and now you think you can just rank on me like this?
No
No, you can't
you can't, no
don't do it
don't do it any more
Just stop it.

SUSANA
Look how things have turned out in life for me!
My sister rips off my boyfriend.
My father has a bride locked in the bedroom upstairs!
Whatever happened to families that cared for one another?
What?
Your family's not enough for you?
your two daughters who are devoted to you
happy, frankly, to sacrifice their own lives
if it comes to that
and look after you in your dotage
we don't care if you're sitting in your wheelchair
with your mouth hanging open
spittle running down your chin
because we love you
and we will care for you till the end!

[Susana takes one magazine at a time
from a stack next to Argan
and flings them up into the air
five, ten, twenty of them
and then throws herself on the ground
flinging herself around and around and around
on the ground
like a break dancer
doing all ground work
all shoulder spins and arm flailing
until she subsides,
and then she says:

SUSANA
you think you can buy anything?
is that what you've learned in your life?
you think you can just buy yourself a new wife?
no, you can't
you can't buy
a person

ARGAN
of course you can. why not?
babies are bought all the time
chinese babies korean babies
babies from south america
why not their mothers?
what are you saying, it would be better to rent them?

SUSANA
no

ARGAN
and yet it seems nonetheless that that artist you admire so much from mexico
whatshisname? is that where he's from mexico?

SUSANA
who?

ARGAN
the one who rented some men to sit in empty refrigerator boxes
turned upside down in an art gallery?
SUSANA
oh

ARGAN
and bought the finger of the dead Mexican boy from his mother
so that she would have money for the boy’s funeral?
cut off his finger and put it on the wall in a gallery in Soho
just to show he could do it if he had the money
and the mother would have to sell her dead son’s finger
what was that all about?

SUSANA
that was conceptual art

ARGAN
and so? what was the concept?

SUSANA
well, what do you suppose it meant?

ARGAN
what?

SUSANA
it meant that it was wrong!

ARGAN
what was wrong?

SUSANA
to rent people and make them sit in boxes
or cut off a boy’s finger
just because the artist had the money
and the boy’s family needed the money
it was wrong

ARGAN
then why did he do it?
ARGAN
this is insane. this is an insane person this artist
Would I ever do such a thing? No!
What are you saying?
you don't believe in love
however it might come to you?
what is left then? hermits in caves?
sitting on top of a pole all your life like St. Simon whathisname
in the ancient Roman Empire
railing against the evils of the world??
this is not the Roman Empire!
this is not the British Empire!
this is not even the Portuguese Empire!
this is the post imperial post modern late capitalist interdependent ergonomic organic global world!
and, in any case, the fact is
I am not buying a bride
I am paying a transaction fee!

SUSANA
what is that?
who says this to you?
how do you learn to talk this way?
are you dealing in the sex slave trade?

JULIE
Dad!

[Argan's advisors all look at one another
and now
one by one
they leave—
as everyone watches them in silence]

SUSANA
Is that it?
You're in the business of buying and selling Ukrainians and Eastern Europeans into Mexico and New Jersey?

ARGAN
What?

SUSANA
Cambodian girls, girls from Thailand taken to brothels smuggled on boats kept locked up in suburban houses unable even to go to Wal Mart

ARGAN
certainly not! good god! this is a person who put herself on the market as it were as your feminists will tell you women do every day in other ways

SUSANA
feminists?

ARGAN
this is how she did it not as someone who was kidnapped or kept in a dungeon but as a free person able to decide for herself what she wanted to do with her body and her whatever just as any woman does to make her way in the world put them out on the marketplace to be a doctor or a lawyer if this is what she chooses! and feminists believe she should have this right without some patriarchal system trying to dictate to her how she should live her life
because how is it in the world today?
you can buy a person's labor
or, if you don't want to hire a Mexican in California
then you can send your factory to Mexico
and hire your Mexicans there
and this is even better
because then you can keep your clean air in California
and send your dirty air to Mexico
let the Mexicans breathe the factory air
let the Mexicans ruin their health
let the Mexicans shorten their lives
so you can, as it were,
import their health to America and have it for yourself
import their longevity
live bits of their lives tacked on to the very end of your own
and here I am
all I am saying is
instead of buying a person's health and longevity
why not buy a person outright and bring them here
where it is healthy
where they can live longer, happier lives
would this not be a gift to them?
some people might even say this is
akin to love
this is indistinguishable from love itself
giving freely to another human being health and happiness
and a long life

SUSANA
how did you ever come to imagine
you are a reasonable human being?

HARRIET
someone should have told you, Argan,
when you were a little boy
just once,
to shut up
ARGAN
you think I am an inconsiderate knucklehead
but the truth is I am a very considerate person
do you know I am learning her language
so I can speak to her in her own language?
I have learned already how to say
How are you: Kumusta ka?
I know how to say
Thank you: Salamat po.
I can say
I love you: Mahal kita.

[we see the bride enter and stand waiting]

I like you: Gusto kita.
You look pretty: Maganda ikaw.
I hope you will write me: Sana masulatan mo ako.

SUSANA
what is this?

ARGAN
this is chinese

SUSANA
no, this is not chinese

ARGAN
of course it is, do you know chinese?

SUSANA
no, I don't know chinese, and I don't know this
but one thing I do know, this is not chinese

4. The bride enters

the bride enters, saying, sweetly:
JUNE
This is Tagalog

SUSANA
what?

[a sudden calm overcomes the stage;
all is peace and loveliness;
everyone speaks less frantically;
there might be the occasional sound
of harp strings plucked]

JUNE
This is Tagalog

ARGAN
what is that?

JUNE
the language of the philippines

HARRIET
ah, so you are filipino?

JUNE
oh, no, I am from Los Angeles

SUSANA
Los Angeles?

JULIE
you're not from china?

JUNE
oh, no
ARGAN
I wanted a Chinese bride, but my marriage broker
couldn't find one just now
and I was able to get a good deal on this lovely young woman

JUNE
my mother is Japanese

ARGAN
which is very close to Chinese

JULIE
but you speak Tagalog?

JUNE
we had neighbors in Los Angeles

SUSANA
and you are selling yourself to this man?

JUNE
oh, no
selling myself to this man?
no, no, no,
I was the age to get married
a little old to get married if you want to know the truth
all my friends are already married
and they were saying to me
what is this? the clock is ticking
and you are going to be too old to have a child
my mother wept before bed every night
never saying anything to me
but hoping I would hear her sobbing in her bedroom
and so I had a friend who knew someone
who arranged introductions
with prospective grooms
a little risky of course,
but in this age of internet dating and so forth
this is all
so we are having a little visit
nothing more
and then we will see what will happen

SUSANA
Is this true?

ARGAN
There’s been an exchange of written communication.

JUNE
Very preliminary.

HARRIET
Perhaps they don’t have quite the same understanding.

SUSANA
Already they don’t have the same understanding
and they aren’t even married yet?

ARGAN
Still, you see what a lovely person she is
so soft spoken
so thoughtful
so modest
so graceful in her manner.

HARRIET
how did you get out of your room?

JUNE
was i meant to stay in my room?

HARRIET
was it locked?
JUNE
oh, yes, it became locked somehow
but these new magnetic locks, you know,
they just dissolve if you hold a cell phone to them and dial 811

JULIE
they do?

JUNE
I’ve finished all your nightshirts

SUSANA
nightshirts? she's doing your nightshirts?

HARRIET
You wear nightshirts?

SUSANA [to the bride]
you’ve had a protected childhood?

ARGAN
it could be she is just a very sweet person
there are sweet people in the world, you know

SUSANA
no, no there are not

ARGAN
here is the proof
just because you live in New York
you think everyone is a conniving, cynical, hardened, ruthless person
who gets out of bed every morning saying
now, who can I stab in the back today?
but this is not true of everyone from everywhere

JUNE
And also, not all people from new york are bad
I met someone from new york
when I was coming here on the plane from L.A. 
and I thought he was a wonderful person 
considerate, thoughtful, helpful 
sensitive 
a real gentleman, as they used to say, 
and, at the same time, 
a young man, very much of his own time, 
cool 
I would say 
cool 
and I liked him quite a bit.

[silence]

ARGAN
so you see, some people they come from the country 
they don't know about new yorkers 
they grow up around trees and sheep and dogs 
and they are good, sweet people 
the way people used to be 
when there were sheep and dogs

Now, then, June, 
is your name June?

JUNE
Yes.

ARGAN
I'm going to give you this little Marriage Manual 
for you to read 
I think it has pretty much all you need to know 
for getting started. 
Here, you see, 
right on the first page 
is the list of things you can expect 
are expected of you 
when you get married. 
Look here.
Number 1.
Have dinner ready:
Plan ahead, even the night before,
to have a delicious meal—on time.
This is a way of letting him know
that you have been thinking about him
and are concerned about his needs.

Number 2.
 Prepare yourself.
 Take 15 minutes to rest so you will be refreshed when he arrives.
 Touch up your makeup
 put a ribbon in your hair
 and be fresh looking.
 Be a little zestful and a little more interesting.

You get the idea.

[he hands the book to her]

SUSANA
What?
Am I hallucinating now?
Can this be true?

HARRIET
Let me see that.
Is this a real book, Argan?

ARGAN
Of course it is.

HARRIET [reading]
Number 3.
Minimize the noise.
At the time of his arrival
eliminate all noise of washer, dryer, dishwasher or vacuum.
Be happy to see him.
Greet him with a warm smile
and be glad to see him.

Where did you find it?
With a rare book dealer?

JULIE
Dad.

ARGAN
It's a book, that's all.
I didn't make it up.
There are lots of books these days
that give people good advice
for stress control, learning optimism,
getting to yes, how to meditate on the 72 names for god
And yes, furthermore, it is true
it was my plan to keep her locked up in her room
until we were married
so she wouldn't catch the New York disease

SUSANA
the new york disease what is that?

ARGAN
all these hot young guys
with their muscle building and flirting
and champagne restaurants with caviar
all their delicacies
imported from impoverished third world countries
so that a woman can't help herself
pretty soon she is wanting one affair after another
flirting here, doing godknowswhat all there
and the fashions a woman is expected to wear
these dresses with their swooping necklines
just fastened with a what?
a little snap or button
at the cleavage
and then a sort of teardrop
of naked flesh all the way to the belly button
gathered at the hips
and then flaring out
all frills around the thighs
slit up the front almost to the
almost to the
almost to the middle of the thigh
or the
how can you say?
white it might be wedding dress
that is no more than a band of gauze
around the breasts
all sheer from here up
and sheer again from here down
below the navel
with another sort of sarong wrap
a little hip wrap
of frothy nothing
and this sort of little
cascade of flimsy white material
coming down between the naked legs
and then a big train of filmy whiteness
to the floor
as though it were a traditional wedding dress after all
or it might be some silk or satin dress
like ice cream
so smooth
so slippery
a sort of pinkish orange
with little silk ribbons at the
clavicle!
a little flower on the bodice
as though it were just an innocent
nothing
as though it meant nothing at all
that the hemline is absolutely six inches above the knee
or eight
or ten
or I don't know
this is what women are wearing!

JUNE
Oh!
I had no idea.

[to the other women]

How lovely!

You know
I'd like to see some of the guys in new york
how they are
what they wear
how their muscles are
what they say when they talk
do they ever touch your shoulder
or your
sometimes I've heard
a guy will reach around and put his hand on your butt
and that they wear these swimming suits
that hardly I mean practically like thongs
some of them have cars
and drive you to the Hamptons
—this is what they say in Los Angeles—
and go to cocktail parties with celebrities
like Alec Baldwin
or
Mort Zuckerman
and lie out on the beach
with nothing on
all afternoon
and have some guy put oil on my back
put oil on my back
and on my legs
all down the backs of my legs
the backs of my thighs
my calves
my feet even
and then turn over
and have him rub the oil
all up my front
all over me
just
all over me.
Because sometimes this is how it is
when you meet a guy.

HARRIET
Congratulations, Argan,
excellent job of shielding her
from the temptations of New York.

5. Horner

Cleante and Horner enter

SUSANA
Cleante, what are you doing here?

CLEANTE
I am in the catering business now, Susana
I am here to cater your father's wedding.

SUSANA
To what?

CLEANTE
And this is my friend Jack Horner.
He's a dress designer,
and he will do the bride's dress.

HARRIET
Catering? What's to cater
after you've put the granola into the wooden bowls?
ARGAN
This is a vegan household, Harriet.

JULIE
There's nothing wrong with granola.

SUSANA
So
you just show up
you just walk in the door
as though it were another day like any other day
but I live here, too, Cleante

CLEANTE
I know that, Susana.

SUSANA
So what do you think that means to me?

CLEANTE
Well, I don't know.

SUSANA
That means you don't dump me
and then just walk back in the door
as though you belonged here!

CLEANTE
Susana,
I tried and tried and tried with you.
I did everything you told me to.
I got that haircut you said I should
I stopped saying those things that irritated you
like: mack daddy
or: badonkadonk
or: blow snot rockets
or get a swerve on
or talk to Ralph on the big white telephone
I tried to give you things that you would like
and not just flowers
because, I know, everyone does that
and flowers are just fucking boring to you
but little things that showed I remembered
and I care
like chocolates
and notes and cards
with thoughtful remarks in them
mentioning things that were important to you
like your birthday
and I proposed to you and proposed to you and proposed to you
and you dumped me and dumped me and dumped me
so it turns out
now
what is this all about?
only now
you find me desirable
after I've fallen in love
and become engaged to your younger sister

SUSANA
engaged to my what?

ARGAN
did I know this?

JULIE
I told you, dad.

HARRIET
are you the only one who can be engaged?

ARGAN
no, of course not, but I don't remember hearing of this
and I think, frankly, Julie,
you might be a little too young to be engaged

JULIE
You might be a little too old, dad.
ARGAN
I am a CERTIFIED GROWNUP, Julie.

[silence]

SUSANA
I don't accept that you are engaged to Julie.
How did you know
if you had asked me one more time
that I would have refused you again?

CLEANTE
Are you saying you would have accepted?

SUSANA
I am saying
you don't know!

CLEANTE
My god!

HARRIET
Are you thinking now you might give him one more chance?

JULIE
What?

CLEANTE
Thank you
but it's too late now.
What Susana and I had: it's over.
I'm in love with Julie now.

HARRIET
Love:
it comes and goes like a summer shower.

ARGAN
Right.
JULIE [speaking this directly to Horner]
And there is no right or wrong.
Just one day
you see someone
and you think
he is like a mountain covered with snow
a snow capped peak
with ski trails all marked with diamonds
they are so dangerous
and beautiful
and take your breath away
the sharp air, so clear
and you are coming down the mountainside
like a giant slalom
around the little flags
and you think
oh my god
there is a line here on the mountainside
a perfect line
if you are afraid
you will pull back
and then you will be slower than everyone else
and you will lose
but if you are careless
and you press your luck
you will go over the line
and you will wipe out
because just on the other side of that line is chaos
and disaster
but right on that line
on that invisible line
is the perfect path down the mountainside
and if you stay on that
you will win

[silence]

SUSANA
What was that about?
JULIE
I don't know.

HARRIET
Sometimes I think
people just love love itself
they fall in love with that
and then
it's a sort of wild, free-floating thing
that might become attached to anyone who comes along.

JULIE
That's so true.
And so confusing.
And you think
you shouldn't do this
but you can't help yourself
and then you think

[to Horner again]

well
if that's the way it is
if this is how you are
then you shouldn't be deceiving anyone
and pretending you are a kind of person
that you aren't.
You have to admit
you are just a natural person
with a lot of enthusiasm
and if you see someone suddenly
that you love
well, then,
that's just how it is.
I love you, Jack.

HORNER
Oh.
CLEANTE
Oh.

[turning momentarily to Cleante]

Probably I owe you an apology, Cleante,

[back to Horner]

but on the other hand
maybe I don't
because my emotions are so
the way they are
I don't know if the love I feel
is a true love
or lasting.
I only know: it's how I feel.

CLEANTE
Oh, well, no, I mean,
you know,
you have to follow your heart.

HORNER
I have to admit,
I've fallen in love, too.
And it's not something I expected either.
Sometimes you go for a walk in the woods
with your dog
and it's a beautiful day
and you are thinking
oh, look at that sunlight
coming down through the tall trees
through the leaves
casting its shadow on the roots of the trees
and on the grass and on the moss
and that wildflower growing there
and more and more and more flowers
scattered through the woods
and meanwhile your dog is running out ahead of you
here and there
following his nose
thinking ah! here's the scent of a rabbit
here's a fox

a person walked this way a day or two ago
you think you are taking a walk in the woods with your dog
but it turns out
you are taking two entirely different walks
you are going from place to place
led by what you see
and your dog is running on ahead
led by his nose
two entirely different universes
side by side in the same space
and this is how it is
when you see someone sometimes
you think
here is a person
who lives in an entirely different universe
and I love her

[he speaks directly to the bride]

I don't know if you remember me
but I met you yesterday
on the airplane from Los Angeles to New York
and we talked
I listened to you
and I thought
this is a walk in the sunlight in the woods
a whole different universe
and I love you.

EVERYONE ELSE
Ah....but....you see....excuse me....
HARRIET
Mr. Horner
this young woman is the bride.

HORNER
I'm sorry?

HARRIET
This young woman is the fiancee of my brother. These are the two people who are to be married.

ARGAN
This, young man, is my intended wife.

HORNER
Ah!
Oh!

[to the bride again]
I'm sorry.
What I meant to say, is
I would have told you yesterday that I loved you
and wanted to marry you
if only it hadn't been for the terrible accident
that left me

[speaking from now on in a falsetto]
a castrato.

ARGAN
Castrato?

JUNE
When did this happen?
HORNER
I don't like to think about it.
It was not long ago.

HARRIET
Is this the truth?

HORNER
I am afraid it is.

ARGAN
What a story!
No one ever heard of such a thing.

[Horner sings a castrato love song to June.
Like maybe even this Boy George song?]

HORNER [sings]
Oh you slide so good
But just take your time
Drink the blood of fools
I've got to make you mine
Speak in devils tongue
Fake the spoken word
Play with silence now
Well that's what I've heard

I've felt this love I felt this pain
I felt this heartache too

Something strange called love is happening to me
Something strange called love is happening to me

Oh you slide so good
With your bones so fair
You've got the universe
Reclining in your hair
Say my love is good
Say we're not too old
I call you jaguar
If I may be so bold

I've felt this love I felt this pain
I felt this heartache too
I came so close but no one knows
The love I felt for you

Something strange called love is happening to me
Something strange called love is happening to me

ARGAN
I beg your pardon.
I'm so sorry.
I didn't mean to doubt you.
I'm terribly sorry for your misfortune.

6. June confesses her love for him

JUNE
It doesn't matter to me
whether he is a castrato or not
he is so pure, so sweet
how could anyone keep themselves
from loving him
for love knows no limitation
is not bound by convention
our hearts go out
and we are glad
who would we most like to embrace
if not someone so dear
so honest, so beautiful
so tender
someone who speaks to us
so directly from his heart
without fear or hesitation
who gives himself to us so bravely
without knowing whether he will be scorned or not
and I think
I would walk into any woods with you.

7. Argan settles it

ARGAN
That settles it
we will get a justice of the peace immediately
the marriage will take place tonight

JUNE
Oh, Argan, thank you!

ARGAN
You are entirely welcome.
And you, young man,
because of the condition you find yourself in
you may help the bride with her dress.

JUNE
Oh,
but I oughtn’t to see the groom before the wedding.

ARGAN
Nonsense, my dear!
You may see me all you like!

JUNE
No, I meant Jack.

ARGAN
June, dear,
I see that being out of your bedroom
has made you hopelessly confused.
I understand:
for a moment you became enchanted with this young castrato,
as who would not be
he is such a harmless young fellow!
But you won't be wanting to marry a castrato!
Whoever heard of such a thing!
You remember.
We are planning to be married.
We have a license.

JUNE
We do?

ARGAN
Darling,
I understand you are nervous
and now things no doubt
seem to be moving very quickly
and perhaps this simply isn't the way things are done in Los Angeles
but you will see
as soon as we are married
things will calm down right away
all this excitement will be gone.

Now you need to get dressed.
And I will get dressed, too.

Cleante, prepare the wedding banquet.

Come, Harriet! Come, girls!
Let the banquet be prepared!

[Argan sweeps out
as Harriet says to him as he goes:]

HARRIET
I'll help you, dear.

JULIE
I will, too.

[they all leave]
8. Horner dresses the bride

HORNER
What's your name?

JUNE
June.

HORNER
I love you, June,
as I've never loved anyone before.
I thought
when I saw you on the airplane
the way you drank your cup of tea
I'd never seen such sweetness
such delicacy
and more than that
such balance
when the airplane hit that air pocket
and everyone bounced around
and the way you talked to me
I could listen to you forever
I could wrap myself up inside your voice
so gentle
and so strong, too,
and resilience
that's what I hear in your voice
a sense of who you are
and yet a respect for the person you are talking to
the truth is:
you are my model human being.

JUNE
And you
now I know why I haven't been married
because I've been looking for you
all these years
I knew I was right
even though I had no idea
I would be happy just to sit with you
in an airplane for the rest of my life
my shoulder pressed against yours
and to hear you laugh
because more than anything
I love it when you laugh
because nothing is more important
than the things that make a person laugh or smile
because your sense of humor
that's something you can't help
you can pretend you know something about novels
or you can pretend to be considerate
but a sense of humor is something you can't fake
what gets to you
what strikes you in a certain way
it's just spontaneously how you are
when you're not thinking
and I saw you
all the way from Los Angeles to New York
smiling and smiling
and I knew
I had to have you.

HORNER
Why didn't you say so?

JUNE
I'm a shy person.

Why didn't you?

HORNER
Because you said
you were coming to New York to get married.

JUNE
Oh. Right.
HORNER
And now
what shall we do?
I knew a guy once who married his sister by mistake.

JUNE
You did?

HORNER
Because his sister was marrying a guy from India
and they got married in India
and my friend's job at the wedding
was to carry the leis
because in India
the way they get married is
they don't exchange rings
but they put flower leis around each other's necks
and so the time came in the ceremony
for my friend to hand the leis to the bride and groom
but he got confused
and he put the lei around his sister's neck
so
officially
they were married.
So, I'm thinking,
we could do that.

JUNE
You mean
you could be the ring bearer
but instead of giving the ring to the groom
you could put it on my finger

HORNER
Right.

JUNE
And kiss me.
HORNER
Right.

[a moment’s silence;
then:
he kisses her]

JUNE
Oh.

HORNER
Oh.
You meant
at the wedding.

JUNE
Right. But that’s OK
you could kiss me now.

HORNER
Right.

[nothing happens;
then he kisses her again]

HORNER
OK.
Probably you should get on your wedding dress now.

JUNE
Right.

HORNER
Oh. Right. Right.
Here’s your dress.

[he holds up a sheet discretely
so she can change behind it]
HORNER
Do you like it?

JUNE
I love it.
I've always dreamed of a wedding dress
since I was three
and then all those years
I thought I'd never get married
I thought marriage was wrong and bad
women didn't want to get married
and neither did I
because of all the things
you know
everyone has been saying
all these years I've been growing up
so that I thought
I'd forgotten all about a wedding dress
but now
all of a sudden
when I put it on
I remember
I've been thinking of this dress since I was three

[she steps out from behind the sheet;
he drops the sheet on the floor]

JUNE
Do you want to have children?

HORNER
With you?
Oh yes.

JUNE
You mean it?

HORNER
That's what I want
to have children with you. That's exactly what I want.

JUNE
But, is it true?

HORNER
What?

JUNE
That you are that you have that you don't have that you are a castrato?

HORNER [back to his normal voice]
Of course not. I said that so that we could be together.

JUNE
Right. Good.

[silence as they take one another in]

HORNER
OK. Now I'm going to leave for a moment because

JUNE
because you need a break

HORNER
Right. You know I just need to go and sit someplace
and just
collect myself
before our wedding.

JUNE
Right. Good.
So do I.

HORNER
Things happen so suddenly.
You think you think ahead
and you are prepared for anything.
But then it turns out:
you aren't at all.

JUNE
No.

[he kisses her lightly
and then, after a moment,
he kisses her again
and then
he leaves]

9. June arias

[June reads from the Marriage Manual.]

JUNE
Number 4.
Make the evening his:
ever complain if he doesn’t take you out to dinner
or to other places of entertainment.
Try to understand his world of strain and pressure;
his need to be at home and to relax.

Number 5.
Remember, too:
a wife doesn't need to dress in all the latest fashions
whatever suits your husband's taste
that's the only fashion tip you'll need.

Oh.
It's true.
There were some papers that I signed.
And now I don't know what to do.

And
is it not that I've really fallen in love with Jack
but that it's just as Argan says
I've got the New York disease?

Suddenly
all I can think is that I want to go out at night
to dinner and the theatre
to start with Sashimi
the way they say it's done at Nobu
with fresh ginger and scallions
soy sauce and yuzu juice
or we could just drop in to Cafe Noir
and have the Paté de Campagne Vieille Façon
with a Salade aux Betterave
and then Les Moules Frites
or the Tagine de Poulet aux Olives Verts
we could have a Chassagne Montrachet, Chateau de Chassagne Montrachet dix neuf quartre vingt huit
and for dessert just a simple Crème Brûlée

and then I'd like to see a play on Broadway
a straight play
something elegant and chic
but edgy
just a little dangerous
with some comedy
some comedy and tragedy mixed together
because
these days
the boundaries separating things seem so
yesterday
and there should be music and dancing
not a musical, no
a straight play
but with music
singing
and some language
so luscious
you could loll in it like a milk bath
or a drift through all the constellations
Orion and Cassiopoeia
I’d like to hear the music of the spheres
and be taken to a human place
I’ve never been before
or if I have
to be taken there
in some way
I never thought I’d get there
but find I’d come back home again.
This to me
would be an evening out
with a drink in the Oak Bar
the way it used to be in the movies
looking out the windows at the park
and some drink
bright red or green
and then a ride around Central Park in the dark
in a Lincoln Town Car.
I’d smoke a cigarette—
and look through the trees
across the Sheep's Meadow
and in the distance
above the tree tops
see the lights of New York City.

Oh, god. Oh, god.

[Harriet enters.]
HARRIET
June, what is it, dear?

JUNE
Oh, Harriet,
I'm afraid it's true
I've caught the New York disease.
All I want now is my freedom
and an unlimited expense account.

10. Lesbian makeover

HARRIET
What you need, really,
a girl protected by her mother all these years
and then handed directly to a husband
you need first to see
you are an independent woman
who can control your own life

JUNE
That's true.

HARRIET
I'm going to help you
because
like everyone else who meets you
I've come to like you.

JUNE
Thank you, Harriet.
I like you, too.

[Harriet puts her fingers in her mouth
and whistles.
Tina and Angie enter,
one with a suitcase,
looking purposeful.]
HARRIET
We’re going to give you a makeover.

ANGIE
The only question is:
what do you want?
We do butch
we do femme.
We do diesel dyke
lipstick lesbian
we do motorbike
bi, bicurious
tomboy, punk
industrial goth
authentic Lesbian Avenger
Betty Crockdyke
we can do your horseloving woman
we can do your lotus lesbian
what do you have in mind?

JUNE
Oh, but...
you see, I think I might be straight.

TINA
Straight.
We can do straight.

HARRIET
But independent.

TINA
But independent.
No problem.
We do that.

ANGIE
What about the dress.
TINA  
You want to keep the dress?

JUNE  
I don't know.

TINA  
She can keep the dress.

ANGIE  
You can keep the dress.  
We can fix it.

[she opens the suitcase]

TINA  
I think we have just the thing for you.  
Combat boots.  
You can wear them with the dress.

ANGIE  
Everyone’s doing it these days.

TINA  
Well, everyone used to do it.

ANGIE  
You can still do it.  
I look at you,  
I think:  
you could pull off anything.

TINA  
Anything, it's true.

ANGIE  
Put these on.
And then I have,
let me see

[holding up a camouflage jacket]

What do you think?

TINA
Too Stonebutch.

ANGIE
Stonebutch.
Right.
Stonebutch.

[holding up something else]

How is this?

TINA
Oh my god! Jennyfemme!

ANGIE
Jennyfemme. Unh-hunh.
Right. Ah. OK.

[holding up a Betsey Johnson jacket]

How is this?

TINA
Good. Good. I like that.

ANGIE
I thought you would.
That’s the kind of girl you are.

TINA
That’s the kind of girl you are.
ANGIE [to June]
And you,
you're going to be that kind of girl, too.

TINA
Excellent.

ANGIE
Alright, now.
Check me on this.
But I think my instincts are right on this.

[with a flourish, she pulls out some nun-chucks from the suitcase]

TINA
Nun-chucks!!!!

ANGIE
Nun-chucks!!!!

HARRIET
Nun-chucks!!!!

JUNE
I like these.

[she takes them
and with complete expertise
swings them around her head,
moves into a martial arts posture
and exclaims:

JUNE
Ha!

[and as she goes through several more moves]
Ha!
Ha!
Ha!

[or, if the actress is more comfortable with it, she can do swords]

TINA
Oh, god.
I'm wet.
Are you wet?

ANGIE
I'm wet.

HARRIET [checking herself]
Oh, I...
oh, god.

[Angie takes a board out of the suitcase and holds it up in front of her.]

ANGIE
Here.
Try this.

[with a single kick
June breaks the board in half]

JUNE
Ha!

[Tina and Harriet and Angie all take bricks and boards and other things out of the suitcase and set them up for June and she breaks them all:
another board:

Ha!

another board:

Ha!

bricks:

Ha!

something else:

Ha!

something else:

Ha!

[The four women now all break into a loud, tough, black urban ghetto female girl group rap song—
not this,
this is just a place holder—
but maybe something like Mos Def's:

Yeh
We be blazin' (c'mon, uh)
So amazin' (yeh, everybody c'mon)
Everybody get down
Everybody get down (yo, all the people in the house)
We be blazin' (c'mon yeh)
So amazin' (yeah, c'mon)
Everybody get down
Everybody get down
Yo, 1, 2, (c'mon) 1, 2
We be blazin' (c'mon, yo)
So amazin' (c'mon get dowwwn)
Everybody get down
Everybody get down (yeh, everybody yo)
We be blazin’ (light it up, light it up)
So amazin’ (yeah, i’m feelin that, c’mon)
Everybody get down
Everybody get down (yeh)
Yo do that shit
We be blazin’ (yeah)
So amazin’ (c’mon get dowwwn, uh)
Everybody get down
Everybody get down (yo, yo do that shit)
We be blazin’ (c’mon, yo)
So amazin’ (yeh)
Everybody get down
Everybody get down

11. Everyone loves the bride

Attracted by the commotion,
Susana, Julie, Cleante and Horner all return.

HORNER
oh! June!
look at you now
you Amazon! I love you!

CLEANTE
Oh, June!
I never thought I’d see...
god!
Oh, Julie, I’m sorry
I didn’t mean....

JULIE
It’s OK
because
my god
who could blame you
because I look at her
and I think I almost love her, too.

SUSANA
I do love her.
I do love her.
June, I love you.
Oh, Cleante, I'm sorry
now I see I've just jerked you around all this time
because all the time
what I really wanted was
a woman!
Or, if not a woman,
then this woman
this woman
because my god
oh
June, maybe you would marry me
because I could take such good care of you
I know exactly what a woman wants
and just how to give it to you.

HARRIET
Or,
it could be
you would prefer an older woman
because
not to be too forward
nonetheless
I love you, too.
You just make me
hot
and you make me want to cry
and I want to laugh
I'd like to lie down
I feel so soft and dreamy in the head
I could just get into a warm bath with you
and soap your back
and soap your front
and soap your everything
and soap you and soap you and soap you
I just wish more than anything
you would let me soap you

ANGIE
I think it's clear now
everybody wants you
and I've got to say
I'm not surprised.

[Everyone sings
as they do yoga
and pushups
and stretches
or maybe just aerobic dancing.

This is not the real song,
just a placeholder:]

Feel when I dance with you
We move like the sea
You, you’re all I want to know
I Feel Free
I Feel Free
I Feel Free

I can walk down the street there’s no one there
though the pavements are one huge crowd
I can drive down the road my eyes don’t see
though my mind wants to cry out loud
Ah ah ah ah

solo
I Feel Free
I Feel Free
I Feel Free
I Feel Free
I can walk down the street there's no one there
though the pavements are on hure crowd
I can drive down the road my eyes don't see
tough my mind wants to cry out loud
mind wants to cry out loud

Dance floor is like the sea
Ceiling is the sky
You're the sun and as you shine on me
I Feel Free
I Feel Free
I Feel Free
I Feel Free

Oh uh uh oh

[in the middle of the song
Argan enters
thinks they are celebrating his wedding
and joins with them,
singing and dancing.]

12. The bride rebels

ARGAN
So, the wedding festivities have begun!

JUNE
The festivities, yes, Argan,
but not the festivities of our wedding
rather the festivities of the end of our engagement.

ARGAN
No.

JUNE
Yes.
It could be that you are a decent man, Argan
but really then
why don't YOU have dinner ready
before your spouse comes home for the evening
why don't YOU gather up the school books
and wash the children's faces.
I'm going out to dinner, Argan,
and then I'm going to the theatre
and after the theatre I'm going dancing
and then I'm going to some
transgendered strip show
in the Village
because I am a woman
who likes to kick some ass
I am a woman who
likes to play volleyball
and ride a motorcycle
do a little kickboxing
and break some windows
I am a woman who
likes to pull a guy's hair
and spank a guy if he has it coming
What the fuck was I thinking
when I said it was Ok for that guy to
arrange an introduction.

I'm not going to marry you, Argan.
I'm never going to marry you.
Good luck to you, Argan,
because why should I blame you?
I blame myself
but that's fucking final.

[she turns
and breaks a board
then stomps out of the room,
followed by everyone]

13. Vladimir

ARGAN [clutching his chest]
Oh, no.
god.
I'm going down.
I'm failing fast.
This could be a major medical event!

[Vladimir arrives.]

VLADIMIR
Argan!

ARGAN
Vladimir!

VLADIMIR
What's being the trouble?
You look like hell.

ARGAN
I seem to be having a coronary infarct.

VLADIMIR
Don't be crazy! You can't do that now.
You are going to be married.

ARGAN
I don't think so!
My fiancee has just called off the wedding.
VLADIMIR
Hell you say!
She can't do that.
There’s a prenuptial agreement.
Have you read the prenup?

ARGAN
Of course not!

VLADIMIR
If you had
you would realize this is a done deal.

ARGAN
And yet it seems: it’s not.

VLADIMIR
Argan, Argan,
how long have we known each other?

ARGAN
Two weeks?

VLADIMIR
Don't say like that.
More like lifetime
the way you pour your heart out to me
the woman you ask me to find for you.
And I find her, didn't I?

ARGAN
Yes.

VLADIMIR
So we are together in this,
it's not?

ARGAN
Yes!!!!
VLADIMIR
I know you, Argan,
down to your boney little marrow
and I think you know who I am, too
I am the guy
who knows how to make a deal.
Anyone can date the girl
anyone can give the girl the diamond ring
but when you come to the closing
then you can tell who is the genuine deal maker
because
let's get real
in my time
I have closed deals on
daffodils
on kidneys
on lungs and blood and some body parts of some kind
on weapons of all sorts
plutonium reprocessing components
small countries
governments
brothels in Cambodia
and Mexico
where you can buy a girl in Tijuana for $10,000
bring her across the border into California
and that same girl is worth $30,000
what are you talking?
you do the math
pretty soon you have big business
I don’t mean to tootle my own horns
but this is who you are dealing with.
Because, what can I say?
I am the new Russian capitalist.

It may be that when I was a little child
I was a snivelling weasly nobody
living under the godless thumb of tyrants
but now I am here in America
and I don’t think some recent immigrant from
Los Angeles
is going to be taking something away from me.
Because
what?
I don't live under the godless thumb all these years
without saying to myself
one day, one day, Vladimir
you are going to be no holds barred
somebody want something from you
it could be you have to shoot them.

ARGAN
No, no!
No, no.
That is to say, I understand everything that you say.
And of course
it seems right to me
but still: shooting someone—
possibly this goes too far.

To me, I have to say,
I think in my time
I have learned a woman responds less to threats and force
than she does to a sort of brainless romantic line of chatter
especially I think
I mean
we are talking about a woman from Los Angeles.

VLADIMIR
Ah.

ARGAN
And a woman with an Asian heritage.

VLADIMIR
Ah-ha.

[June enters.]
JUNE
Argan, I'm glad to find you here.

ARGAN
Yes.

JUNE
Because I want to speak with you candidly.

ARGAN
Of course.

JUNE
We should settle things between us honestly.

ARGAN
Of course. Of course.

but first

[he looks over at Vladimir]

I wanted to say something to you.

[Vladimir shrugs]

I wanted to say
may your heart all year round be
like a rosebush in bloom.

JUNE
Thank you, Argan.

[Argan to Vladimir:

ARGAN
Perhaps we should be alone?
VLADIMIR
Of course...of course....

[he leaves]

ARGAN
June,
may you breathe the sweetness of lilies of the valley
through the bedroom window of your life
every night.

JUNE [after a moment's hesitation]
Thank you, Argan.

ARGAN
I wish you would permit me to be the Sweet William
on the linen sheets of your dreams.

JUNE
Oh, Argan....

ARGAN
Because, June,
the truth is
I've come to love you
I've come to love you truly with all my heart

JUNE
Argan, wait.
Let me speak.
I've come to see you are a person
I don't know
it may even be that you are a good person
—an idiosyncratic person—
but a good person nonetheless
and I have to tell you
even though it has been hard for me to believe
that I could fall in love at first sight....
ARGAN
Oh!

JUNE
still that is what's happened

ARGAN
Oh!

JUNE
But, Argan,
not with you.

ARGAN
Oh...

JUNE
With Jack Horner.

ARGAN
Oh...

JUNE
And I need to marry him.

ARGAN
Oh.
I see.
And yet:
What does he have that I don't have?

JUNE
Oh, Argan,
I don't want to be a shallow person
but he is so beautiful

ARGAN
Beautiful?
JUNE
Do you see his chin and his nose and his head
and I can't help myself
I just want to touch him and touch him
plus he has genius hair

ARGAN
What is that?

JUNE
You know, the kind of long hair
that geniuses have

ARGAN
I can grow my hair.

JUNE
But not like him
because he is young and he smiles
when he doesn't mean to
and looks confused
because he doesn't know what's going on
because he is just discovering what life is all about
and when I see that
that moment of discovery
and all of a sudden I see what he sees
then I see things as though for the first time, too,
it's like having a baby
and the world seems so amazing
not as though
oh, right,
there it is again,
I'd forgotten there were trees and dirt
and there they are again
but rather oh my god: trees!
dirt! dirt! oh my god!
and you realize again and again
how extraordinary it is to be alive
and you feel you ARE alive
like you've never been alive before
and what else is love if it isn't this?
to be so thrilled by everything that comes along
you don't just walk through your day
and never even notice you are a person on the earth
but you marvel at it all the time
you are excited and grateful
and you think
this feels good to me
this is what I want

ARGAN
Still,
in time
these transient thrills can fade
and then it's not nothing to have a mature person
by your side
a steadfast person
not a momentary thrill
but a lasting happiness
in touch with the very deepest sense of life
a rich, rich and ample love
that fills your life with pleasure
because, with me,
I am not of an age that I am still discovering who I am
this right now is who I have become already
it is who I am
and you can count on me forever

JUNE
Still, knowing I can count on you,
to some people,
this might seem a little too perhaps
predictable

ARGAN
One might rather say reliable and trustworthy
JUNE
Another person might think
sheltered.

ARGAN
Protected.

JUNE
Walled off.

ARGAN
Secure.

JUNE
Without the exhilaration
that comes with risk.
Because what is love itself
if it isn’t a leap into the unknown.
And if you don’t want to take that leap
it seems to me
maybe you don’t want life itself.

ARGAN
It could be
two young people on their own
they will find their life is a great struggle.

JUNE [enthusiastically]
Yes.

ARGAN
A test that so many of us fail
more than any normal person can endure.

JUNE [in love with life]
Yes.
ARGAN
Even living from day to day
not knowing how they will pay the rent
too exhausted from their work and worry
to think clearly
to figure out how to get through the day
without taking out their frustration and their anger
on the one they love

JUNE
How could a sane person choose such a life?
But a sane person might say to you:
what more do I want than to be engaged in life itself
not dabbling in it
not an amateur in life.
Rather to feel
I want more than anything
to feel life
as the life or death situation that it is
to feel its dangers and its pleasures so intensely
that I haven't just lived some easy piece of it
but I've lived the whole thing
and I've become an expert
on how it is to be alive
before I die
and never know anything of it again.

ARGAN
And yet
it could be that I would be a person
who could learn to let you live freely
to explore the world just as you wish
always knowing
you have a home to come back to
where there will be someone completely devoted to you
to see to it that you are always loved
cherished
so that you would never be
damaged
by the world.

JUNE
Thank you, Argan
for your generous, sweet intention.
What I hope for more than anything just now
is a walk on the high wire
without a safety net.

ARGAN
I see.
Well,
it is, I suppose,
just the difference between what is wanted
in the early or the later years of life.
And you can't force people to be happy with you
against their will.

JUNE
No.
The truth is:
if you have come to love someone
all you wish for them
is their happiness.
You wish to see them prosper.
You wish to see them

[picking up on his rhetoric]

like daffodils in the sunlight
radiant
fluttering with excitement in the breeze
dancing in the air
like the evening primrose set free
like Baby's Breath
like Rose Angels
or bluebonnets in ecstasy
this moment we all long for that lasts, finally, it seems, less than a moment and yet is all the pleasure we can hope for in our lives it’s all you wish for another person. And so if that is what they have found you need to let them go. That’s it. You need to let them go.

ARGAN
Of course.... Of course....

JUNE
Thank you, Argan.

[she turns and leaves;
he slumps into a chair;

Vladimir returns]

14. Vladimir decides to sell the bride again

VLADIMIR
So, you seduce her with your poetry?

ARGAN
I’ve lost her now forever.

VLADIMIR
No.

ARGAN
Yes.
VLADIMIR
I don't stand for this.

ARGAN
My heart's not in it any more, Vladimir.
The wedding's off.
All I want now
is her happiness.

VLADIMIR
Her happiness!
I don't mean to say the world revolves around my own needs
but the fact is
the prenuptial agreement....

ARGAN
I don't care about the agreement.

VLADIMIR
Whether you care or not, Argan,
the agreement provides certain payments for me.

ARGAN
And I will settle those with you.

VLADIMIR
And, you know,
there was to be a bonus
so that if this young woman went through with marriage
I am entitled to something extra.

[Argan stands.]

ARGAN
That, I'm sorry to say,
will never happen.

[Argan leaves.]
VLADIMIR
I see.
This is going to be knock down drag out.

Horner enters.]

HORNER
Vladimir.

VLADIMIR
Ah, Mr. Horner.

HORNER
I understand you have drawn up some sort of agreement
for the wedding of Argan and my fiancee June.

VLADIMIR
Your fiancee?

HORNER
Yes.
And I've come to say
this agreement is no longer acceptable.

VLADIMIR
Well, you see,
there's some trouble there.
Because this is a binding legal document
notarized and sworn to.
Of course,
I am quite prepared to sell the young woman
to another husband
if you would care to enter the bidding.

HORNER
Enter the bidding?
VLADIMIR
I am a person like you
who is just struggling to pay the rent.

HORNER
I will never take part in an auction
for a human being
let alone my wife.

[he leaves]

VLADIMIR
So.
The knock down drag out, it begins.

dear returns a millisecond later
with Horner
everyone
a huge jabbering crowd
all talking at the same time
so we hear no one

ARGAN
What’s this I hear?
You’ve suggested to this young man
that he buy my wife?

VLADIMIR
Your wife?

ARGAN
My almost wife.

JUNE
You would put me up for auction?

HARRIET
Who is this man?
SUSANA
What gall
to come into our home
and suggest he will buy us and sell us.

JULIE
Do you think you can sell a person twice?

ARGAN [soothingly]
Vladimir,
I took you for an honest man
a man who had done business on seven continents.

VLADIMIR
Please. Please.

[he laughs]

Do you not think
I don’t know that the whole world of business
depends on the honesty of the marketplace?
Do you think the system could survive a moment
if people begin to cook the books?
I don’t think so.
Do we all want to end up living in Mexico city
where the house of every wealthy person
has a high wall around its yard
and armed guards with submachine guns
standing at the end of the driveway?
I don’t think so.
I am going to place my integrity alongside the integrity of any man
and see whose is the biggest.

ARGAN
Nonetheless, Vladimir,
I see that my behavior all this time
has been almost despicable.
VLADIMIR
No.

ARGAN
Yes.
But now, I am a brand new man.
And I am going to give you the opportunity
to be the same.
I will pay you nothing for what you have done.
And you may leave the house at once.

VLADIMIR
Leave the house?

ARGAN
Yes.

VLADIMIR
Leave the house, you say?

ARGAN
Exactly what I say.

VLADIMIR
And, yet, I don't see how I can be expected
to leave my own house
and leave it full of strangers.

ARGAN
I beg your pardon?

VLADIMIR
Because you see
this is my house now
and everything that's in it is mine as well.

ARGAN
I hardly think so.
VLADIMIR
Argan, my dear good friend,
did you not read the prenuptial agreement?

ARGAN
certainly not

VLADIMIR
according to my bonus clause
if I find a wife for you
I am entitled to your house and all your property

ARGAN
My what?

JUNE
you were going to do that for me?

ARGAN
I was?

VLADIMIR
That's the deal.

ARGAN
but it turns out you didn't find a wife for me

VLADIMIR
On the contrary, I found a wife
whether you marry her or not
that's your business, not mine
you should read closely the pre-nup

ARGAN
you mean: whether my wife marries me or not
my house is gone?
VLADIMIR
in future—this is just a suggestion—
you should read closely the things you sign

ARGAN
I don’t understand a thing I’ve done.

HARRIET
Argan, look what you’ve put into motion.
Now you see what happens
when you take the first false step
it leads to this.
It seems that you’ve lost everything.
Now you are in the abyss.

15. Saved

Fed enters.

FED
I beg your pardon.
Is this where I would find a Mr. Vladimir Godunov?

VLADIMIR
I am he.

FED
Ah, good. Then I have this warrant for your arrest.

VLADIMIR
This is some mistake.

FED
Yes, you have made a mistake.

ARGAN
what is this?
FED
Mr. Argan Bonafide.

ARGAN
Yes.

FED
You are a man with good friends
need I say more?
the contributions you have made over the years
and so forth and so on
the highest levels of the Oval Office
indeed the very system itself
the quinessential need for
uprightness and probity
the wise invisible guiding hand of the government
and so, as you can well imagine—
a man who deals in brides
also dealing in plutonium reprocessing components
you can rest assured
whatever agreements he may have had with you
may be considered
null and void.

ARGAN
Null and void
such sweet words.

HARRIET
I can agree with that.

FED
Vladimir, you can come with me.

VLADIMIR
So this time you've caught me
but don't think for a minute
I am not learning my lesson
how things are done
and when I get out of jail
I will be doing them again.
I will be doing them again and again
but then
I will have learned my lesson
and I will be doing them
airtight.

[Fed and Vladimir leave.]

HARRIET
So, June and Mr. Horner
it looks as though your wedding can go ahead

ARGAN
and, since we have planned for one in any case
the catering is all done

HARRIET
and, as it happens,
I am an ordained Episcopal priest,
so we can have your wedding in the next room right now.

JUNE
Jack!

[she kisses Horner]

HARRIET
Congratulations, dear.

JUNE
Thank you.
And thank you all for
I'm not sure what
and yet it feels good to me.
It seemed when I arrived at first,
I had made the biggest mistake of my life,
but finally it turns out I did the best thing after all.
Thank you, Argan.
It turns out, in the end,
we can see that you are
good and kind.

JULIE
And Cleante and I
we have come to see
with June and with Jack
just what true love is

CLEANTE
Through them we have learned steadfastness

JULIE
Faithfulness

CLEANTE
true devotion

JULIE
real care.

CLEANTE
And so we would like to take the occasion
to announce our RE-engagement.

HARRIET
Oh, Julie, how wonderful.
Congratulations to you both.
Susana?

SUSANA
Yes. Congratulations.

EVERYONE [variously]
Congratulations...best wishes...all the best...I wish for happiness for you both...how
lovely, I always thought...I knew it that's all I'll say I knew it....
HARRIET
So if everyone will all come to the next room
Argan and I will join you in a minute for a little ceremony
and a celebration

EVERYONE [as they exit, variously]
What fun...how wonderful...I always knew it was going to end like this...I said to
Harriet, I said, you know Harriet I have a feeling about this...what a perfect day...and
frankly I could use a drink...and a little something to eat...a little something to eat,
yes...

ARGAN
So, Harriet,
what's left for the two of us now but old age and death

HARRIET
No, Argan, not at all
what's left now is maturity
and the pleasure of everyday life
the sunlight in the morning, the trees
the lovely sky in the late afternoon
In spring the dawn.
In summer the nights.
In autumn the evenings
In winter the early mornings
the burning firewood
piles of white ashes
the ground white with frost
the things of life we won't be having for much longer

ARGAN
ah, but there you are
just having them now
breaks my heart
because to have them now
at my age
is only to remind myself
moment after moment
every moment of every day:
they won’t last forever.

HARRIET
Yes, that’s true
that in the end
the thing we love the most, this life itself,
we all will lose.
There’s nothing to be done about that.

But, in the meanwhile, come, Argan,
it might even be you would take some pleasure
in being the one to give away the bride.
You and I are in that special time of our lives now
when we can bask vicariously in the pleasures of the young
and not have to suffer the disillusion
the bitterness and the anger
that will soon overtake them.
Come.

[she leaves]

ARGAN
Dear Susana,
I’m sorry things haven’t worked out for you.

SUSANA
You were way too careless, dad.
And I too careful.

ARGAN
Still, I will care for you, sweetness
until the time comes
you decide to move on
and make your life with another person.
You know
I haven't even opened my packages of
Watermelon seeds
and Wild Cherry Bark

And, as you know,
I have my workout tapes
my morning mantras
and my evening ragas.

These are things we can share
you and I.
Because, I love you, Susana.

SUSANA
Thanks, Dad.

[Tina enters.]

TINA
Everyone is hoping you two will join us for the wedding.

ARGAN
Ah, yes, of course....

TINA
You know,
from the very first
I could see that you are a really good and
vulnerable person

[who is Tina talking to?
Susana assumes it is she,
so does Argan,
who gives his daughter a significant look]

And
I have to tell you
right away
I was drawn to you.
I thought:
oh, no,
this is wrong.

[she laughs]

I mean, who wouldn’t think so?

[Argan and Susana laugh, too, happily]

And I was confused
because
well, for myself,
I had never been attracted to anyone like you.

[Susana and Argan express surprise]

I mean:
of course I could see
though some people somehow find you
difficult

[another reaction]

I always thought
well
you’re just coming at it from a different angle
you’re a sort of quirky person
and I found that irresistible
and then, as time went on
I saw that you had a mind and heart
that could navigate the most difficult
and intricate of things
and so I thought:
you are someone
I’d like to spend my life with
SUSANA
Oh!

TINA
And so
I’m wondering if you’d marry me
or maybe not maybe not
maybe not at once
but maybe you’d like some time
because this is awfully sudden
and unconventional!
so if you’d just not say no
if you’d just give me a definite maybe
or just say nothing
but agree to spend some time with me
and see

[Argan and Susana look at one another;
Susana nods to him, encouraging him to go ahead.]

ARGAN
Yes.

TINA
You see
even your father thinks you should.

SUSANA
Thinks I should what?

TINA
Give me a chance.

SUSANA
Give you a chance?

TINA
Yes.
SUSANA
You were speaking to me?

TINA [laughs]
Of course!
What do you think?

[Argan and Susana look at one another again.
A moment.
Then he nods to her.]

SUSANA
Yes.
Oh.
Give you a chance.
Oh my god
yes
give you a chance
yes.

TINA
Good.
Come on.
We’ll dance at this wedding
and then we’ll see about our own.

[she takes Susana’s arm and they leave together

from just offstage:
triumphant wedding music

Argan is left alone;
he slumps into a chair.

In a moment,
Angie returns.}

ANGIE
Argan?
ARGAN
Yes?

ANGIE
Are you coming to the wedding?

ARGAN
Yes. Oh, yes.
Here I come.

ANGIE
You know,
from the very first
I could see that you are a really good and
vulnerable person

ARGAN
What?

ANGIE
And
I have to tell you
right away
I was drawn to you.
I thought:
oh, no,
this is wrong.

[she laughs]

I mean, who wouldn’t think so?

ARGAN
I beg your pardon?

ANGIE
And I was confused
because
well, for myself,
I had never been attracted to anyone like you.

ARGAN
To me.

ANGIE
I mean:
of course I could see
though some people somehow seem to find you
difficult

ARGAN
Yes.

ANGIE
I always thought
well
you're just coming at it from a different angle
you're a sort of quirky person
and I found that irresistible
and then, as time went on
I saw that you had a mind and heart
that could navigate the most difficult
and intricate of things
and so I thought:
you are someone
I'd like to spend my life with

ARGAN
Oh!

ANGIE
And so
I'm wondering if you'd marry me
or maybe not maybe not
maybe not at once
but maybe you'd like some time
because this is awfully sudden
and unconventional!
so if you'd just not say no
if you'd just give me a definite maybe
or just say nothing
but agree to spend some time with me
and see

ARGAN
Oh, you know,
if I've learned anything at all
I think I've learned at last
I'm much too old for you.

ANGIE
Oh, Argan, please!
How can you say such a thing?
I think you would criticize me if I were a sexist
if I were a racist

[he looks around
as though there is an echo coming from somewhere]

if I were a jingoist
if I were a polemicist
but you think it's OK for you to be an agist?
no, no
I don't think so. I don't accept that.
Come with me.
We'll dance at this wedding
and then we'll see about our own.

ARGAN
Right. Good. Yes.
Thank you.
Yes.
Thank you.
Yes.

[She takes his hand and leads him out.]
He looks back around at the audience just before he exits.]

The End.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT:
*The Mail Order Bride* was inspired by the plays of Moliere, and by Aristophanes, who inspired Moliere. And Jack Horner comes directly from Wycherley's *The Country Wife*.

Charles Mee’s work has been made possible by the support of Richard B. Fisher and Jeanne Donovan Fisher.