

## Summary of *Les Femmes savantes* ("The Learned Ladies")

**ACT I:** Armande is trying to convince her younger sister Henriette, not to marry. Henriette should instead dedicate herself to intellectual pursuits, as does their mother, Philaminte. But for Henriette, happiness is a home with children. She has chosen Clitandre, her sister's former admirer, to be her husband. Armande is incensed. In any case, she is certain Clitandre cannot love Henriette: did he not court Armande assiduously, though in vain, for two years? As he enters, Henriette asks him to state where his affection now lies. He replies Henriette is the one he loves and he will endeavour to make her his wife, despite Philaminte's opposition. In the conversation that ensues between him and Henriette, Clitandre tells her how he abhors pedants, male and female, and especially Philaminte's hero, Trissotin. When Bélise, Henriette's aunt, enters, Clitandre tries to enlist her support for his marriage to Henriette. The foolish woman, who thinks herself a femme fatale, imagines that Clitandre is in love with her.

**ACT II:** Clitandre has asked Ariste to speak to Chrysale, Henriette's father and Ariste's brother. Chrysale is only too willing to have Clitandre as his son-in-law. When Bélise insists that she is the one Clitandre loves, the brothers pay no attention to her prattle. The problem is Philaminte. Chrysale is brave enough in his wife's absence, but when she appears, he shakes with fear and invariably bows to her wishes. When she dismisses her maid Martine for having disregarded grammatical rules, Chrysale barely protests. Nor does he contradict her when she tells him Henriette is to marry Trissotin.

**ACT III:** The women (Philaminte, Armande, Bélise) go into raptures when Trissotin treats them to some ridiculous new verse he has written. Vadius, a friend of Trissotin, arrives on the scene. The two first praise each other in hyperbolic terms, but when Vadius unwittingly denigrates Trissotin's poetry, the men almost come to blows. When Chrysale enters with Ariste and Clitandre, he vows (in Philaminte's absence, of course) that Clitandre will be Henriette's husband.

### — Intermission —

**ACT IV:** In Philaminte's presence, Armande and Clitandre speak frankly. She accuses him of being unfaithful. Clitandre says he cannot be content with the platonic relationship she demands. Rather than lose him, Armande now says she is willing to marry him, but it is too late: Clitandre will keep his word to Henriette. Philaminte reminds him that she has other plans for her younger daughter. When Trissotin enters, Clitandre begins to mock pedants, but is interrupted by the arrival of Vadius' servant. He brings a note accusing Trissotin of plagiarism and informing Philaminte that the would-be poet wants only to get his hands on the family's money. To spite those who oppose her plans, Philaminte decides that the marriage will take place that very evening.

**ACT V:** In vain Henriette tries to reason with Trissotin. Chrysale again vows that she will marry Clitandre. To show his determination, he has brought back Martine who will give him moral and vocal support. When Philaminte enters with the notary who is to draw up the marriage contract, there is some confusion as there are two grooms for one bride. Suddenly, Ariste arrives with letters bearing bad news: Philaminte and Chrysale have lost all their money. Trissotin immediately leaves the scene: he has no desire to marry a girl against her will. Philaminte has finally seen through her hero, but Henriette now refuses to marry Clitandre because he is penniless. All ends well, however, as the letters were a hoax dreamed up by Ariste to reveal the true nature of Trissotin. As for Armande, she will have to find consolation in philosophy.