

## **THE IMAGINARY INVALID** **(Molière; 1673)**

Argan, a hypochondriac, is going over the monthly statement of his apothecary, reciting with great satisfaction the list of remedies, but not forgetting his bourgeois sense of economy. With some difficulty he summons his maid Toinette, who refuses to take his complaints, or his doctors, seriously. When Argan abruptly leaves the room for pressing natural reasons (most of the remedies prescribed are laxatives or enemas), his daughter Angélique seizes the opportunity to speak to Toinette about Cléante, a young man with whom Angélique has fallen in love, and who has promised to ask for her hand in marriage. When Argan returns, he announces that he is arranging a marriage for his daughter. Overjoyed at first, she is soon dismayed when she realises that her future husband is not to be Cléante, but Thomas Diafoirus, who will qualify as a doctor in three days' time, and whose father is also a doctor. Toinette boldly protests his choice, but Argan insists that he must have a son-in-law who will be of use to him. No help will come to Angélique from her stepmother Béline, who has married Argan only for his money. While feigning concern over her husband's ill health, she employs an unscrupulous notary who persuades Argan to draw up a will in her favour. Toinette, who is almost a mother to Angélique, promises to give her all the help she can.

Cléante succeeds in gaining access to the house by claiming to be a replacement for Angélique's music teacher. Angélique hides her surprise with difficulty, but the arrival of the Diafoiruses, who come to conclude arrangements for the marriage, give her an opportunity to recover. The elder Diafoirus is pompous and smug; Thomas, whose absurd medical training has rendered stupid, is able only to recite speeches he has learned by heart. The supposed music lesson proceeds, allowing Angélique and Cléante to speak of their love until Argan becomes suspicious and dismisses the "music teacher". When Béline enters, she treats the Diafoiruses coldly and, thinking of her financial interests, she suggests that, rather than marry her off, Argan should put his daughter in a convent.

Before the doctors take their leave, Argan asks for their medical advice and they spout out a bizarre mixture of learned words and superstitions.

### — Intermission —

Béline comes to warn Argan that Angélique is talking with a young man in her room. Argan questions his young daughter, Louison, who reveals the truth about the spurious music teacher.

Argan's brother arrives and attempts in vain to suggest a more reasonable marriage for Angélique. He also tries to convince Argan that he is sound of health and that his doctors have been taking advantage of his credulity. He persuades Argan to send away Monsieur Fleurant, the apothecary, who has come to administer an enema prescribed by Argan's doctor, Monsieur Pugon. The latter, thus defied, arrives in a high rage, casts a curse on the terrified Argan and abandons the poor man to his fate. Toinette chooses the moment to disguise herself as an itinerant doctor who comes to offer his services, but she does not succeed in making Argan change his mind about medicine. Then she has a better idea. She persuades Argan to pretend that he is dead; Béralde will thus be able to see how much Béline loves Argan. The result is as expected: Béline's duplicity is exposed. When the same scenario is used for Angélique, Argan is able to judge how much his daughter loves him. She may now marry Cléante, provided the latter becomes a doctor. But Béralde has another suggestion: Argan can easily become a doctor himself. He need only go through a simple ceremony. When he puts on the robe and the bonnet, he will be as learned as the Purgons and the Diafoiruses.