

La Tontine

Le Sage

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La Tontine

One Act by Le Sage

Translated and Adapted by

Frank J. Morlock

C 1986

CHARACTERS

English:

Original French:

Dr. Peacock

M. Trousse-Galant

Flem

M. Bolus

Worthy

Eraste

Harriet

Marianne

Jeremy

Crispin

Dudley

Ambrose

Trippet

Frosine

St. Slaughter *

Sergeant

Soldiers

* This character and the soldiers may be omitted in production.

Five men, two women

Scene: Dr. Peacock's house.

Flem

Truly, Dr. Peacock, you're a clever man. I've been a pharmacist for twenty-five years and never met a doctor who practiced medicine like you.

Peacock

Indeed, no other doctor of my acquaintance has penetrated nature as deeply as I have. But I don't like to praise myself; I can't stand flattery. I want you to come home with me to discuss an important matter. Now, has any one asked for me while I was away? TRIPPET, hey, TRIPPET!

Trippet (entering)

How you do scream! Well, sir, what can I do for you?

Peacock
Has Lady Bellaston asked for me?

Trippet
No, sir.

Peacock
So much the better. It's a sign her medication is working. How about Judge Glanville--has he called?

Trippet
Yes, sir.

Peacock
Good. It's to tell me that the purge I gave him yesterday has cured him of his pleurisy.

Trippet
The poor man died during the night. His son came to tell you. He was in a fury and cursed you and Mr. Flem. I took your part and he cussed me out, too. Happily, I can deal with that. I listened to him very calmly.

Peacock
What right has he to complain? I gave him the best treatment. I bled him more than twenty times and purged him frequently. He ought to be cured according to the books.

Trippet
And died according to bell and candle.

Peacock
Get out of here, impudence. Leave criticizing doctors to the surgeons.

(Exit Trippet.)

Flem
Between you and me, Dr. Peacock, I don't have a high opinion of that purge.

Peacock
It worked effectively most of the time--excepting the Judge.

Flem
Also, excepting your wife who you buried last year.

Peacock
Right.

Flem
That merits some concern.

Peacock
Not at all. A good doctor pursues his calling without any regard to a bad result. Otherwise, teaching in medical school might be called into question and where would we be then?

Flem

That's another matter.

Peacock
I never deviate from established practice.

Flem
You do wisely.

Peacock
Well now, let's talk of the business I brought you here for. You know I've always regarded you as my best friend.

Flem
You are right to do so. I have been a friend of your family for many years. It was I who furnished the drugs during your father's last illness.

Peacock
I thank you for it. Ever since I've written my prescriptions only for you.

Flem
Oh! For that, yes.

Peacock
Moreover, I've had you get rid of inexpensive, useless drugs. And whenever I write a prescription, I never forget to write it for five or six grains more than the patient needs.

Flem
And I always put in seven or eight grains less than you prescribe. That way I save the life of the patient and your reputation.

Peacock
Consider the way we work together. I prescribe imaginary medicines found only in your apothecary shop. I praise their healthfulness, their propriety, and your skill in blending drugs.

Flem
And for my part, I never miss a chance to praise you. I speak of your miraculous cures--which, in truth, I've seen very few of.

Peacock
Thus, we help one another.

Flem
And, I tell all the patients who come to me about you, praise you to the skies, and belittle or disparage all other doctors without exception.

Peacock
We do everything that a doctor and a pharmacist can do for each other. We work in perfect harmony. And, to further our friendship, I am going to tell you about a little investment I have made. I've taken out a ten thousand pound Tontine on him.

Flem
Flem
You? (puzzled) Why?

Peacock (superciliously)
You know what a Tontine is, of course?

Flem
Certainly, a Tontine is--a Tontine is--(helplessly) What the devil is a Tontine?

Peacock (smugly triumphant)
It's a last man out club. The survivor gets all the money from all the policies.

Flem
That's clever. So if you die--

Peacock (slightly exasperated)
The policy's not on my life--but on that of a peasant of sixty who you wouldn't take to be forty. He's the father of one of my servants. He's in unusually good shape.

Flem
Well?

Peacock
I've taken out this policy on him and he's agreed to make me a beneficiary in return for free medical care.

Flem
That's a clever idea.

Peacock
A fellow like that, in my hands, will become immortal.

Flem
Sooner than later.

Peacock
Suppose that he only lives, say one hundred years.

Flem
All right, one hundred years.

Peacock
Isn't it certain, that in fifteen or twenty years, he'll be the only person in his group?

Flem
In all likelihood.

Peacock
Five years later, he'll be the only one. Therefore, I'll receive all the money for twenty years.

Flem
The reasoning is clear. You've put your money to good use.

Peacock
I'm delighted you approve my project. And you are a beneficiary, too. Because, I mean to marry you to my daughter.

Flem

Sir, that's an honor that--

Peacock

No compliments. And, for the dowry, I'm going to give you half the immense revenue from this insurance policy which you cannot fail to collect. And no, I'm going to show you our gold mine. You'll have to agree he's an excellent specimen.

(Exit Peacock into his house.)

Flem

What a man Doctor Peacock is! Some people think he's a little crazy; but what's just happened would go a long way to disabuse them.

(Peacock returns from the house leading Dudley, a sturdy old peasant.)

Peacock

Have a look at this young fellah! Ever see a better built body?

Flem

Never.

Peacock

What do you say to those eyes?

Flem

Really bright.

Peacock

How do you find his skin tone?

Flem

Beautiful.

Peacock (to Dudley)

Open your mouth. (to Flem) Look at those teeth. Perfect condition.

Flem

He hasn't even got a cavity.

Peacock (to Dudley)

Let's hear your voice.

Dudley

Hem! Hem! Hem!

Peacock

Like thunder! Constitution of an ox.

Flem

Amazing.

Peacock

And his legs--stout and firm.

Flem

He's got all the signs of long life.

Peacock
Look at that chest.

Flem
Broad and strong. You've made quite a bargain, Doctor.

Peacock
We're going to get rich, Mr. Flem.

Flem
This peasant is a kind of Peruvian gold mine.

Peacock.
Answer my questions, Dudley. When you went to bed last night, did it take you a long time to get to sleep?

Dudley
Soon as my head hits the pillow--poof--I was asleep.

Flem
Sleeps easily.

Dudley
And I wake up at dawn.

Peacock
And wakes with a ravenous appetite that I have difficulty to control.

Dudley (laughing)
Oh, as to that, Doctor, you keep me well regulated.

Peacock
How he roars! This roaring is no good for him. It comes from too many vessels in contact with the diaphragm. To remedy this defect we ought to give him a purge.

Dudley (crying)
Another purge! Woe is me.

Peacock
Preceded by a tonic composed of softening laxatives to prevent dry stools. Go quickly, Mr. Flem, and prepare some suppositories and bring them back here.

Flem
Back in a flash.

(Exit Flem.)

Peacock
As soon as you possibly can. This business is serious and requires diligence.

Dudley
Can't you leave me without tormenting me, Doctor? For the last three days, ever since I put myself in your hands, you've already purged me twice. I want to have lunch and enjoy it.

Peacock

Blood isn't necessary to preserve life. I know what I'm doing. I am more interested in keeping you alive than you yourself. Listen, my friend, as soon as I have bled you, I'll cook up a delicious lunch.

Dudley

Ah, that would be nice.

Peacock

I want to give you something appetizing. What do you like to eat?

Dudley

Mutton chops.

Peacock

Bah! What bad spirit put such a detestable thought in your head? It's too fatty and it clogs your bowels.

Dudley

I seem to have heard that apothecaries like jelloes.

Peacock

True. But, between you and me, they only sell them. They actually prefer stuffed dates.

Dudley

Really--well, how about a nice roast beef?

Peacock

Nothing is more indigestible.

Dudley

Give me pork, then.

Peacock

Too likely to have trichinosis. Dirty.

Dudley

Too dirty, too sweet, too hard, too fatty. What the devil do you want me to eat?

Peacock

An ounce of fresh cheese?

Dudley

Fresh cheese?

Peacock

With two or three glasses of laxatives.

Dudley

I am dead and buried

(Enter Trippet.)

Trippet

Sir, there's a man down there who insists on speaking to you.

Peacock (going out)

Let's see what he wants of us.

(Exit Peacock.)

Dudley
Ah!

Trippet
You sigh! What caused you to sigh like that, my poor Dudley?

Dudley
They're going to bleed me again and give me an enema.

Trippet
What's wrong with you?

Dudley
They say I have extended diaphragm muscles, and I don't know how many other maladies. Yet, I don't feel a bit sick.

Trippet
That's terrible, my friend, that's terrible. Not to know what's wrong.

Dudley
Since I've been in this house, I've lost more blood than I did in twenty years as a soldier.

Trippet
I believe it.

Dudley
Doctor Peacock intends to make me the last survivor of my group--but if this keeps up, I won't last another month.

Trippet
That's a chance you take.

Dudley
Let's speak openly. Even if I survive the bleeding, I won't survive the diet. I'll starve.

Trippet
He practices austerity in his own eating habits.

Dudley
Aie! How can I resist him. He thinks I'm weak and prescribes for my maladies. He watches my food. He forbids me wine. Damn his medicine and science. It would be better not to interfere with nature.

Trippet
To forbid wine to a man of your type is the same as forbidding women to a man of a different sort.

Dudley
Trippet, my dear Trippet, are you capable of pity?

Trippet
Without a doubt. What can I do for you?

Dudley

You run the house. If you would give me a bottle of wine, I will owe you my life.

Trippet

Heaven preserve me from doing such a thing. If the doctor has forbidden you wine then that proves it isn't good for you.

Dudley (kneeling)

I beg you, on my knees.

Trippet

Useless prayer.

Dudley

At least give me a pork chop.

Trippet

Not a slice!

Dudley

Ah, if only I were young again. You'd give me the keys to the wine cellar.

Trippet

I wouldn't bet on that.

Peacock (entering and seeing Dudley on his knees to Trippet)

Ah, Dudley! How passionate you are! My God! That's no way to prepare for an enema. Come along, return to your room and try to calm yourself while waiting for the return of Mr. Flem. (Dudley leaves) That's funny, really.

Trippet

Do you have any idea what he wanted from me?

Peacock

It's not really difficult to figure out. Dirty old gallows-bird.

Trippet

He was trying to cajole me with his sweet talk and passionate gestures--but I'm not that kind of woman.

Peacock

Good, Trippet. Don't give in to human weakness.

Trippet

I'd let him croak before he could have any.

Peacock

Now wait a minute--if he shows any signs of croaking! You must satisfy him, Trippet! Ahem! I intend that he live a long life.

Trippet

We are talking at cross-purposes.

Peacock

Oh, that! Trippet, they've come to get me to see a patient--a feverish cantor who refuses to drink a purge--but before I leave, it will be

easier if I talk to my daughter. Tell her to come see me. (Exit Trippet) I suppose I could find a better husband for Harriet than this Flem. For example, a bureaucrat or a down-and-out gentleman. But I prefer to pay off my own debts, not someone else's. Instead of which, I will exploit my daughter for all she is worth.

Harriet (entering)
What do you want, Daddy?

Peacock
Something you will like. I've decided to marry you. I've chosen a man for you who is extremely knowledgeable and will give you complete satisfaction.

Harriet
Oh, heaven.

Trippet (entering)
Ah!

Peacock
He's totally a skilled practitioner.

Harriet
How unhappy I am!

Peacock
Great fortitude.

Trippet
Now we're headed in different directions.

Peacock
Listen! What's all this about, if you please? I haven't even told you his name--only of his worthiness, and you are making faces, both of you.

Trippet
It's not his worth that displeases--it's his incompatible qualities.

Peacock
What? What incompatible qualities?

Trippet
Eh! Yes, sir. Those qualities are certainly found in an old dotard. You are painting a wretched portrait of a handsome young man.

Peacock
But, I don't propose to marry my daughter to some old fuddy-duddy. It's Mr. Flem.

Harriet (surprised)
Mr. Flem!

Trippet (same tone)
Mr. Flem!

Peacock
Yes, Mr. Flem. He's only fifty. Not old enough to be too virtuous.

Trippet

A virtuous man is not for Miss Harriet, and I am going to prove it. In order to know the worth of a virtuous husband, is it not necessary for the wife to be dispirited herself? First, give her a young man of twenty, and not only will she be fine, she'll have a reasonable husband.

Peacock

Nice reasoning. A smart daughter ought not to examine her future husband too closely. She ought to consider it a pleasure to find one agreeable to her father. Understand, Harriet? Now, on my return, I expect to find you disposed to receive the hand of Mr. Flem. (exit)

Harriet

Did you hear, Trippet? Is there a misfortune equal to mine? Isn't it enough to lose hope of being with Worthy? Now, I must reconcile myself to becoming the wife of this detestable Mr. Flem.

Trippet

Flem is difficult to swallow--assuredly.

Harriet

Worthy, dear Worthy, what will your despair be when you hear this news?

Trippet

Alas! I believe I can already see how unhappy he will be. What a lively sadness moistens his eye. What tears mix with yours. Oh, I loathe the old apothecary.

Harriet

Trippet, your joking is unseasonable.

Trippet

I'm not joking. I don't know any more than you what the future will hold. But my point of view is different. You see despair and I see cause for hope. I read the future in a way that is more agreeable than you do.

Harriet

You are deceiving yourself. I am already unhappy enough to be married to Mr. Flem. Without doubt, I will gag of it. But I will fulfill my destiny. The more I have to suffer, the more my character will grow.

Trippet

I know very well that character thrives on hardship--but sometimes hardship corrupts a pure heart.

Harriet

I hear a noise. Someone is coming.

Trippet

Eh, Miss, it's Mr. Worthy.

Jeremy (entering with Worthy)

It's he, himself, Trippet, and your loveable Jeremy.

Trippet

You come just in time, gentlemen. Help us avoid the storm that threatens us. Dr. Peacock has promised his daughter to Mr. Flem.

Jeremy

To that flat-nosed pharmacist with thick glasses who works in his shop?

Trippet

Exactly.

Worthy

Is it true?

Trippet

So true that the marriage may take place at any time.

Worthy

Oh, Harriet! How can you let them drag you to the altar without making the least effort in my behalf?

Harriet

What do you expect me to do, Mr. Worthy?

Jeremy

Ladies, you have only to follow us to our inn. Our horses are all saddled. We will disappear with you both.

Trippet

Good idea. We'll disappear. All's fair in love and war.

Worthy

Jeremy, I beg you. Think up some plan to prevent this detestable marriage.

Jeremy

That's what I'm dreaming up. Use your imagination, too, Trippet. You're good at this sort of thing.

Trippet

All right. Let's stir up our imagination.

Jeremy

Well. What have you come up with?

Trippet

Wait a while.

Jeremy

Dammit, I can't wait forever. I've already decided on the best plan.

Trippet

Let's hear it.

Jeremy

Simply to make Flem and Doctor Peacock quarrel. Won't that do it?

Trippet

Without a doubt.

Worthy
Sounds good to me.

Jeremy
Right, eh? See how easily I solve the most difficult puzzles.

Trippet
But, you haven't said how we'll do it.

Jeremy
Right. How to do it? Listen, hasn't some rich person recently died at their hands?

Trippet
The Judge. Judge Glanville.

Jeremy
That's our luck! All we have to do is to tell the Doctor that Flem says it was the Doctor's prescription that killed the patient. At the same time, we tell Mr. Flem that the Doctor is blaming everything on the way the prescription was compounded.

Worthy
I like that idea.

Trippet
Won't work.

Harriet
Why not?

Trippet
I tell you, it won't work. Mr. Flem and Dr. Peacock are too hand-in-glove. For twenty years they've been killing people--some of the nicest people in this city--and they never quarrel over it. And you think they're going to quarrel over a mere magistrate. Why, they've done in lords and ladies.

Jeremy
I've got another idea. This one is matchless. Is it true that Doctor Peacock has an insurance policy on some peasant?

Trippet
Nothing is more true.

Jeremy
So much the better. This gives me the plan, which I believe, must infallibly succeed. I would like to speak to this peasant.

Trippet (pointing)
There's the door to his room. You can go in. He's alone.

Jeremy
Leave it to me. That's all I need to know.

(Exit Jeremy.)

Harriet
What do you suppose he's up to?

Worthy
I don't know, but Jeremy is a world-class trickster.

Trippet
I've got an idea of my own. See if we don't slow this marriage down.

Harriet (hugging Trippet)
You bring me back to life.

Worthy (hugging Trippet)
Me, too.

Trippet
I see it.

Harriet
You don't know how much I'll owe you if you save me from this odious husband.

Trippet
Time will tell if you mean that.

Worthy
Me, too!

Trippet
Poor children. It would be a terrible shame to separate you. You only want to be together.

Worthy
Here comes Jeremy.

Jeremy (returning, and still speaking to Dudley)
Yes, you have only to do as I told you and you will be delivered from the Doctor's tyranny. Until we meet again. Adieu.

Trippet
What? You've already talked to Dudley?

Jeremy
I only had two words to say to him. I've warned him. If he plays his role and all goes well, Miss Harriet will today change her name to Worthy. And, as for you, Trippet, I permit you to think of possessing me.

Trippet
How do you intend to work these miracles?

Jeremy
I'm going to disguise myself as a Colonel. Worthy will be my Major. And, as Dr. Peacock doesn't know us because we've always been careful never to come here except when he's visiting patients--ah, what a trick I will play on him. I intend to consult him on a pretended illness. (low to Trippet) Well, Trippet, you're good at this sort of thing. What do you say to it?

Trippet
I approve of it. That's all I have to say about it.

Worthy
But, tell us everything.

Jeremy
I will instruct you as we go. Let's leave now. Time is precious. I'm going to prepare everything. (to Harriet) No goodbyes, beautiful lady. (to Trippet) See you soon, you little flirt. You, Major, follow me.

(Exit Jeremy and Worthy.)

Harriet
Do you think it will work?

Trippet
Indubitably.

Harriet
Don't let me languish any more. Listen to me.

Trippet

Hush! Our lovers were right to leave. Here comes Mr. Flem. Follow my lead and pretend to be delighted to marry him.

Harriet
What a bore!

Trippet
Don't complain. He can easily be fooled.

(Enter Flem.)

Trippet
Ah, ah! Mr. Flem, we've heard news of you. You want to marry my mistress?

Flem
It's the Doctor who's taken it into his head that I shall marry. As for myself, I never thought of Miss Harriet because of the difference in our ages.

Trippet
What difference! You're joking, Mr. Flem. Do you know, you look as young as a man of twenty-five.

Flem
Well, as to that matter, I'm still juicy. Got a lot of sap left in me.

Trippet
You're cute. You have regular features, good color, noble bearing, graceful manners, and as for your figure, let Miss Harriet speak. (to Harriet) What to you say?

Harriet
Well put together.

Trippet
His hypodermic syringe is just ravishing.

Harriet
It suits him better than a sword.

Trippet
And the most gallant cummerbund doesn't look better than his work apron.

Harriet
Behold a tasty, well-turned-out dish of a man.

Flem
It's delightful to me to hear such words from your mouth, dear lady. They distill an amorous syrup in my soul. Yes, my dear, I already sense the birth in my heart of a feeling for you that I had for my late wife. Haven't I told you, doll, how we lived together, my wife and I?

Harriet
Never, I assure you.

Flem
Ours will be just such a perfect union.

Trippet
Tell us about it, if you please, sir. I'm just crazy to hear about happy marriages. They're so unheard of.

Flem
Madame Flem had a lively affection for me.

Trippet
Undoubtedly you deserved it.

Flem
On my side, I had a particular care for her health. I didn't wait till she was sick to give her a remedy. Every day, by way of precaution, I made her take some medicine.

Trippet
Charming little man.

Flem
When she was the least bit sick, I redoubled my efforts. Alas, the poor woman didn't live long.

Trippet
I believe him.

Flem
She had a very delicate constitution. But, if she died, it was not for want of medication. Not for want of remedies.

Trippet
Rather the remedies were wanting.

Flem
To give her a breath of life, I didn't spare a single drug in my apothecary.

Trippet
Oh, miss--what a husband.

Harriet
He's worthy of all the feeling I have for him.

Flem
You flatter me, my angel.

Harriet
No, sir. I swear, I'm not flattering you at all.

Flem
For you, sweetheart, I promise to take the same care and the same attention, I lavished on my first wife.

Harriet (low to Trippet)
What an engaging prospect.

Flem
Every morning and night I will give you some little delight.

Trippet
That's bound to please her.

Flem
Goodbye, beautiful star. I have to leave you to find Dudley. How impatient I am to have you joined to me. When I even think of it, I am happy.

Trippet
You love the pleasures of imagination.

Flem
Yes, but I like physical ones better.

(Exit Flem into Dudley's room.)

Trippet
Old fool.

Harriet
What a man, Trippet. I hate him more than I love Mr. Worthy.

Trippet
You hate him so much already?

Harriet
Rather than marry him, I am capable of going to the last extremities.

Trippet
Stay of that mind. It may be helpful if we can't manage things in an honest way.

Harriet
Shut up, you fool, my father is coming.

Trippet

Let us continue to dissemble.

Peacock (entering)

Well! Trippet, in what frame of mind is your mistress?

Trippet

In a mood to obey you. Oh, indeed, we've had a change of mind since you left. We paid attention to your wise advice. Do you know, sir, that we've learned to love old men?

Peacock

Are you serious?

Trippet

Ask Mr. Flem in what manner we received him. Presently, we have eyes only for your old friend.

Peacock

I don't know if you're speaking seriously, but the fact of the matter is, an older man is better.

Trippet

A thousand times better. I wish someone would give me the choice between an old man and a young musketeer. It wouldn't take me long to make up my mind, let me tell you.

Peacock

In fact, an old boy tends to be very indulgent towards a young wife.

Trippet

Oh, yes. In place of a young man who is indulgent only towards his friends. An old husband leaves us his wealth by dying and a young one doesn't die until he's gobbled up our dowry.

Peacock

Sometimes that girl is pretty smart. Now, Harriet, I'm delighted you no longer dislike Mr. Flem--

Harriet (under her breath)

Ah, I prefer death.

Peacock

What did she say under her breath about dying?

Trippet

She says she'd rather die than lose him. She's crazy about him.

Peacock

Well, that's a passion that's arrived rather suddenly.

Trippet

And a proper one, too.

Peacock

But, it's a sort of madness, Trippet.

Trippet

Assuredly. Now, if you were to forbid her to love him, she would love him even more.

Peacock
Who are these people coming here?

(Enter Jeremy and Worthy.)

Trippet
They seem to be some kind of soldiers.

Jeremy (disguised as a colonel)
I am looking for Dr. Peacock. They say he looks rather large and bloated. Necessarily, it must be you.

Peacock
I am Dr. Peacock.

Jeremy
Ah, sir, let me embrace you. In the fashionable world you are often spoken of. They say you are a clever doctor and your prescriptions are written in elegant Latin.

Peacock
Sir!

Jeremy
Ah, ha! Who are these lovely ladies?

Peacock
This is my daughter and this is her maid.

Jeremy
To show you how much honor I feel for you and everything that belongs to you, I insist on embracing them, too.

Harriet
Just a minute, Mr. Officer.

Trippet
Do you take us to be barmaids?

Peacock (low)
These fellows are very impertinent.

Jeremy
Have you more than one daughter?

Peacock
No, sir.

Jeremy
So much the worse. When they are made like these they can be easily married off.

Peacock
Well, God willing, I'm just about to marry her to an apothecary friend of mine.

Jeremy
Very good idea. Your patients certainly won't have to wait for enemas

and purges.

Peacock
They will lack nothing.

Jeremy
The more I look at your daughter, the more I find she looks like you.

Peacock
You're joking!

Jeremy
Word of a soldier! She's you in miniature. Your eyes are the same except for the coloring. Her little nose becomes large like yours: oval face, square face; really the resemblances are astonishing in certain families.

Peacock
Come, sir, if you will. What are you getting at?

Jeremy
That maid of yours is making eyes at me. Apparently, I was made to be the sport of a wench. They always tease me.

Peacock
Sir, for God's sake, tell me who you are.

Jeremy
I am a colonel and you see me here with my major. I come to consult you about an illness.

Harriet
Goodbye, Mr. Colonel.

Jeremy
Why are you running off, pretty ladies?

Trippet
We don't want to hear the conversation of an officer who consults a doctor.

(Exit Trippet and Harriet.)

Jeremy
I want to tell you, sir--no boasting--I'm well thought of by the combat troops.

Peacock
I'm sure of it, and I congratulate you, sir.

Jeremy
When there's something particularly tough to do, they always call for me. Ask my major.

Worthy
It's true.

Peacock
I believe it.

Jeremy

So, you see, I have all the honor and reputation I could wish. Unfortunately, my body isn't made of iron.

Peacock

I see.

Jeremy

I came down with asthma in Germany while I was pursuing the enemy.

Peacock

The cause of your illness is worthy of--

Jeremy

Here's how it happened to me. I reconnoitred an enemy scouting party. I attacked them; they resisted. I redoubled my efforts. They regrouped. Then, they fled. I followed them, but then I was obliged to give up the pursuit. I couldn't get my breath. They said I have swollen glands. So, since then, I've been asthmatic.

Peacock (aside)

He's consulting me for his own amusement--but I will mock him in his turn. (aloud) You wish a remedy that will soothe you?

Jeremy

Exactly!

Peacock

I have an infallible remedy. But, I have a scruple about curing you.

Jeremy

What's that?

Peacock

I think you should keep your asthma and seek a disability pension.

Jeremy

I like your idea.

(Enter Dudley from the house and Flem after him.)

Dudley

Murder! Help! Help! Fire!

Peacock

Why all this noise?

Jeremy

What do I see? There's a face I've seen before. Yes, my word, it really is! It's Rosebud. Major, don't you recognize him?

Worthy

It's Rosebud all right. The deserter.

Dudley

Oh, yes, sir, it's me. I beg for pardon.

Jeremy

Coward! Fortune has delivered you to justice.

Dudley
Oh, Colonel, have pity on me.

Jeremy
Say, what! God! Why did you disappear without leave?

Dudley
The Captain was always beating me and there was nothing I could do!

Jeremy
For God's sake, abandon the battlefield because you were beaten? To avenge yourself on your captain, couldn't you wait till after the battle? Major, call Sergeant Slaughter and some soldiers to take this deserter to the guardhouse.

(Exit Worthy to the street.)

Peacock
You never told me, you bastard, that you were a deserter.

Dudley
I never dared to tell you, sir.

Peacock
What a mess this wretch has got me in.

(Worthy returns with several soldiers.)

Sergeant Slaughter
What is it, sir?

Jeremy
Arrest that man.

Peacock
Sir, I beg you to pardon him.

Flem
We both ask you.

Jeremy (folding his arms)
It upsets me, gentlemen, not to be able to do as you wish. But, when it comes to punishing infractions of military rules, I am inexorable.

Peacock
I will cure your asthma.

Jeremy
I should look to my pension.

Flem
I'll furnish you all the medicine you need for your old age.

Jeremy (after a struggle)
No. No. (to soldiers) Hurry up, take this clown without more discussion. You will see that this poor devil will die as quickly in my hands as in yours.

(Enter Trippet and Harriet.)

Trippet

What noise is this I hear? What brouhaha are you making here?

Dudley

Intercede for me, Trippet. They want to hang me as a deserter.

Trippet

Why, gentlemen, if you want to kill him, why not leave him in the hands of Dr. Peacock?

Harriet

Grant him his life, Mr. Colonel.

Jeremy

No mercy.

Harriet

Be a human being.

Trippet

We beg you.

Jeremy

Don't pester me any more. Guards! Seize him!

Peacock (aside)

It's easy to see what the outcome will be with these people. (aloud)
Listen, Mr. Colonel, so as not to waste time talking, I am going to count out a hundred gold pieces--or more.

Jeremy

I am incorruptible.

Trippet

What, sir, can you resist the sound of money and the prayers of a beautiful lady?

Jeremy

How can I resist? I am not a judge. Do you take me for a judge?

Trippet

Dr. Peacock has a ten thousand pound insurance policy on the life of this man.

Peacock

That's right. Would you consider going shares on him?

Jeremy

I don't know what to do.

Trippet

If you wish to kill him, let us die with him.

Jeremy

Well, then--let him run the gauntlet.

Trippet
Listen, Mr. Colonel, I've got an idea how to fix everything.

Jeremy
How? What way?

Trippet
Marry my mistress.

Jeremy
What, me! For God's sake, my dear friend, if you don't have a better idea than that, Rosebud is going to hang.

Worthy
Oh, it's too much. Colonel. You've got to give it up. Free him.

Jeremy
That's easy for you to say. But, if you were in my place--the rank of Colonel would cause you to speak differently.

Worthy
No--word of honor.

Jeremy
All right! You marry her and I consent at that price to spare the deserter.

Trippet
Come no, Mr. Major, consider how charming she is.

Worthy
I have little taste for marriage--but to please the Colonel--I'll do it. But, only if the doctor gives me a large dowry. It is not right to marry a woman who brings nothing.

Jeremy
He's right, Doctor. It's necessary to make it worth his while. Make over all your wealth to him.

Peacock
Your humble servant. I prefer you to hang Mr. Rosebud. I'll be off much cheaper.

Trippet
Mr. Major, you seem generous. Accept my mistress on the same terms she was to be married to Mr. Flem. That's to say, for one-half the interest on the ten thousand pounds that the Doctor has put on the head of Dudley.

Peacock
That, I can live with.

Worthy
To accommodate you, sir, I would like to consent.

Flem
And, I won't object. I free you of your promise, Doctor.

(Exit Flem.)

Dudley

But, who will care for me? The father-in-law or the son-in-law?

Peacock

I will. I will treat you as I always have.

Dudley

That being the case, I prefer to run the gauntlet.

Worthy

No, Rosebud, no. I will care for you. I will care for his health.

Jeremy

I've suddenly taken it into my head to get married, too. With this flirt.

Peacock

What, Colonel? You wish to marry the maid after having refused the mistress?

Jeremy

I will ennoble her. There, Trippet. From wench, I make you a lady of quality.

Trippet

It won't be the first such metamorphosis.

CURTAIN

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE:

A few lines of dialogue have been added to the play explaining what a tontine is. Tontines were named for an Italian Banker named Tonti who discovered the scheme. Strange as it may seem this play got Le Sage in a great deal of trouble because the government was employing the Tontine as a means of raising revenue and this play was regarded as a subversive attack on the revenue system of the monarchy.

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