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# The Mail Order Bride

by CHARLES L. MEE

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."

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## 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

whatchamacallit 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.

Deep breaths. Deep breaths.

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

narcisissm 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?

SUSANA

to show that he shouldn't have!

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 feminiists 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.

[he reads from the Manual]

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 godknowswhatall 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 fiancée 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:  
never 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

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 fiancée 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 fiancée June.

VLADIMIR

Your fiancée?

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.

[everyone 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*.

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