

The Rivals

Act I, Scene i

A street in Bath

[THOMAS, a] *coachman crosses the stage. Enter
FAG, looking after him*

FAG

[Calls] What! Thomas! [Aside] Sure 'tis he! [Calls] What!
Thomas! Thomas!

THOMAS

Hey! Od's life! Mr Fag! Give us your hand, my old
fellow-servant.

FAG

Excuse my glove, Thomas. I'm devilish glad to see you, 5
my lad. Why, my prince of charioteers, you look as
hearty – but who the deuce thought of seeing you in Bath?

THOMAS

Sure, Master, Madam Julia, Harry, Mrs Kate, and the
postillion be all come!

FAG

Indeed! 10

THOMAS

Ay, Master thought another fit of the gout was coming
to make him a visit, so he'd a mind to gi't the slip, and –
whip – we were all off at an hour's warning.

0 s.d. *A street* This conversation takes place on the street where Mrs Malaprop and Lydia Languish are staying (l. 97). Confusingly, the address of the two ladies is identified as 'the Grove' in the edition of 75, and as North Parade in the Larpent manuscript; in 76 the address is not identified.

3 *Od's life* 'God's life' – a mild expletive

5 Thomas asks for a hand, Fag pointedly draws attention to his gloves. Throughout the scene Thomas's honest simplicity will be contrasted with the affectations Fag has acquired in Bath.

7 *deuce* devil

9 *postillion* rider of one of the front horses of a carriage or post-chaise

11 *Ay* Yes

gout popularly thought to be alleviated by spa water – hence the trip to Bath

FAG

Ay, ay! Hasty in everything, or it would not be Sir Anthony Absolute! 15

THOMAS

But tell us, Mr Fag, how does young Master? Od, Sir Anthony will stare to see the Captain here!

FAG

I do not serve Captain Absolute now.

THOMAS

Why sure!

FAG

At present I am employed by Ensign Beverley. 20

THOMAS

I doubt, Mr Fag, you ha'n't changed for the better.

FAG

I have not changed, Thomas.

THOMAS

No! Why, didn't you say you had left young Master?

FAG

No. Well, honest Thomas, I must puzzle you no farther. Briefly then: Captain Absolute and Ensign Beverley are one and the same person. 25

THOMAS

The devil they are!

FAG

So it is indeed, Thomas; and the *Ensign* half of my master being on guard at present, the *Captain* has nothing to do with me. 30

THOMAS

So, so! What, this is some freak, I warrant! Do tell us, Mr Fag, the meaning o't. You know I ha' trusted you.

FAG

You'll be secret, Thomas?

THOMAS

As a coach-horse.

20 *Ensign* most junior rank of commissioned officer in the infantry

21 *I doubt . . . better* 'I fear you have not changed for the better'

31 *freak* whim

32 *trusted you* confided in you

34 *coach-horse* Thomas's language is full of coaching imagery. See also ll. 55, 62, 84-5.

FAG

Why – then the cause of all this is L,O,V,E. Love, 35
 Thomas, who – as you may get read to you – has been
 a masquerader ever since the days of Jupiter.

THOMAS

Ay, ay, I guessed there was a lady in the case. But pray,
 why does your master pass only for ensign? Now if he
 had shammed general indeed – 40

FAG

Ah, Thomas, there lies the mystery o'the matter.
 Hark'ee, Thomas. My master is in love with a lady of a
 very singular taste; a lady who likes him better as a
 half-pay ensign than if she knew he was son and heir to
 Sir Anthony Absolute, a baronet of three thousand a 45
 year!

THOMAS

That is an odd taste indeed! But has she got the stuff, Mr
 Fag? Is she rich, hey?

FAG

Rich! Why, I believe she owns half the stocks! Zounds,
 Thomas, she could pay the national debt as easily as I 50
 could my washerwoman! She has a lapdog that eats out
 of gold, she feeds her parrot with small pearls, and all
 her thread-papers are made of banknotes!

36 *as you may get read to you* Fag implies Thomas cannot read.

37 *Jupiter* king of gods according to Roman mythology, who took on a variety of disguises in order to seduce women. In the Larpent manuscript 'Jupiter' is rendered 'Juniper' and the source for the story 'Ovid's Meat-for-Horses' [Ovid's *Metamorphosis*] revealing Fag's ignorance. In revisions, Sheridan seems to have tried to confine Malapropisms to Mrs Malaprop.

42 *Hark'ee* 'Hark ye': listen

43 *singular* peculiar, odd

44 *half-pay ensign* i.e. poor: ensigns not in active service were given half the usual salary as a retainer.

45 *of 76* (with 75)

45–6 *baronet of three thousand a year* 'Baronet' is the lowest title that can be inherited; Sir Anthony is financially comfortable but is not wealthy.

49 *stocks* money lent to the government for interest – a way of funding the national debt
Zounds a corruption of 'God's wounds' – a mild expletive

50 *easily* 76 (easy 75)

53 *thread-papers* strips of paper folded in creases around which different skeins of thread were wound

THOMAS

Bravo! Faith! Od! I warrant she has a set of thousands at least. But does she draw kindly with the Captain? 55

FAG

As fond as pigeons.

THOMAS

May one hear her name?

FAG

Miss Lydia Languish. But there is an old tough aunt in the way – though, by the bye, she has never seen my master, for he got acquainted with Miss while on a visit in Gloucestershire. 60

THOMAS

Well, I wish they were once harnessed together in matrimony. But pray, Mr Fag, what kind of a place is this Bath? I ha' heard a deal of it. Here's a mort o'merry-making, hey? 65

FAG

Pretty well, Thomas, pretty well: 'tis a good lounge. In the morning we go to the Pump Room, though neither my master nor I drink the waters. After breakfast we saunter on the Parades or play a game at billiards. At night we dance, but – damn the place – I'm tired of it! Their regular hours stupefy me: not a fiddle nor a card 70

54 *a set* a team of (usually six) horses

55 *draw kindly with* get on well with. The metaphor refers to horses pulling together in harness.

56 *pigeons* turtle doves, traditional symbols of affection

64 *mort* great quantity (dialect). Thomas speaks in a country brogue.

66 *lounge* place for lounging

lounge. 76. (75 continues: Though at present we are, like other great assemblies, divided into parties, High-roomians and Low-roomians. However, for my part, I have resolved to stand neuter, and so I told Bob Brush at our last committee. THOMAS But what do the folks do here? FAG O! There are little amusements enough)

67 *Pump Room* the room in which the spa waters were dispensed and, therefore, also, the place where visitors generally assembled

69 *Parades* The fashionable North and South Parades of eighteenth-century Bath were wide paved streets parallel to one another.

71–2 *Their regular hours* . . . after eleven Balls and other public assemblies were supposed to end by 11 p.m. as stated in regulations laid down by Richard 'Beau' Nash, Master of Ceremonies at Bath from 1705 to 1761, and maintained by his successor Captain William Wade, who further refined the rules in 1771: 'The balls will begin as soon as possible after six o'clock, and finish precisely at eleven, even in the middle of a dance', *New Bath Guide*, 1777, 26.