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Dramatis Personae

ALCESTE, in love with Celimene

PHILINTE, Alceste's friend

ORONTE, in love with Celimene

CELIMENE, Alceste's beloved

ELIANTE, Celimene's cousin

ARSINOE, a friend of Celimene's

ACASTE, Marquis

CLITANDRE, Marquis

BASQUE, Celimene's servant

A GUARD, of the Tribunal of the Marshals

DU BOIS, Alceste's valet

The Scene Throughout

The home of Celemine, in Paris.

About the Play

The Misanthrope stands as Molière's deepest psychological study. We cannot help but love and respect the hero, Alceste, even as we see him engaging in self-destructive behavior. As the title suggests, Alceste hates mankind, and yet that hatred is likely borne out of mankind's failure to give him the respect and honor he is due as this society's most intelligent character. Although people universally acknowledge Alceste's intelligence and wit, Alceste's flaw lies in his insistence on turning that wit against his fellow man, in demonstration of his own superiority. Even worse, Alceste has fallen helplessly in love with society's biggest coquette. As much as he needs to feel special and important, Alceste has chosen the one woman who will continually undermine his self-esteem with outside affairs.

The Misanthrope is virtually plotless. And the modern reader may miss its crucial-but-elusive plot points. The major components of

the plot are tucked away in arcane French legal practice which isn't self-evident to a modern reader.¹ Also, of course, Alceste and his self-inflicted psychological torment are simply so much more fascinating to follow.

The Misanthrope is built around two separate "trials," both driven largely from Alceste's inability to keep his mouth shut. One of these occurs entirely offstage, and we only hear rumors and reports of the vague details. This trial has apparently dragged on for some time, and is tied up in the "official" courts. Alceste is evidently the only man who will stand up against a slimy, unprincipled rogue. Seemingly *everyone* knows how corrupt this man is, and whatever Alceste has done is something that they secretly wished they might do, themselves. The man's actions are so outrageous that people are embarrassed at just how unabashed he is: extorting funds, cheating his neighbors and claiming credit for himself at every turn. Bringing peoples' attention to it seems to be rather redundant, and rather than risking confrontation, the rest of society has taken to looking the other way.

Molière never informs us of the nature of this lawsuit just what this lawsuit is about. To Alceste, his own rightness, opposed to this man's obvious wickedness should be enough to win the case. It was quite customary, in those days, for the petitioner to visit with the judge, outside of the legal setting, to persuade him of the legal merits of his particular case. This would, of course, be a situation rife with opportunity for corruption. For Alceste, doing anything of the sort would suggest that the merits of the case were not wholly and obviously in his own favor. He wants to see justice served, but only justice in its most austere and self-righteous guise. And while he may complain at great length, we find that there is probably nothing that Alceste loves more than that very right to complain. This is a dangerous desire for a man who has fallen in love, and it is Alceste's struggle with his desire for Celestine set against his desire to prove his own rightness that occupies the bulk of the play.

¹ It is easy to forget that Molière, himself, studied the law for a time, and the nuances of the French courts are not an imaginative invention of his, but rather reflect actual legal practice of Seventeenth Century France.

The incubation of Alceste's second trial is witnessed in the first act. A flatterer, Oronte, approaches Alceste, supposedly for his candid critique of a sonnet he has written. Though he struggles to resist criticism of Oronte's poetry, and layers his response with implications that the poetry isn't really any good, eventually Oronte presses him into acknowledging this out loud. Infuriated, Oronte leaves, and rumor of their confrontation quickly spreads.

The rumor finds its way to a tribunal of Marshalls, who summon Alceste for a reprimand. This tribunal was an extra-legal process independent of the courts. It was not intended to punish or imprison, but rather a stop-gap measure, in which the Marshalls would insert themselves into a growing conflict in order to prevent the dispute from escalating into a duel. Apparently enough lives had been lost to merit a system whereby cooler heads could prevail.

We only hear about the tribunal from Alceste's friend, Philinte, who reports the convoluted manner in which Alceste is eventually brought to apologize, as he says, essentially, "I'm sorry that I don't like your verse any more than I do," which is, of course, no apology at all.

The original trial, however, is still on, and the unnamed rogue spreads a rumor about Alceste, suggesting that he is the author of a book that has been circulating underground, a book that is, by all reports, offensive and disgusting. ("To even speak the title is a crime.") The opponent's case is further supported by the fact that Oronte has independently lent his own credentials to this story.

Alceste's position is sufficiently undermined to tip the scales against him in his court case, which leaves him all the more outraged, cynical, and at odds with humanity. He cannot think of any better response than fleeing civilization and, in the process, wants nothing but the accompaniment of his lover, Celimene.

Parallel to the plot of the trials of Alceste's trials, has been his oft-interrupted "romance" with Celimene. She is the worst possible match for a man who needs, more than anything, to feel apart and above his fellow man. Perhaps the fact that Celimene is loved by so many men gives Alceste the thrill of the conquest in his attempt to win her away from them. Or else, perhaps she only serves to feed

his underlying self-righteous anger, giving himself something to complain about, endlessly.

Alceste's reasons are a complex combination of all of these, and his desires are borne out in the field of romance as well as politics. Alceste seems to be his own worst enemy, repeatedly working against his own interests if only to claim the moral high ground, or to assure himself of his own rightfulness. It was an intriguing psychological work which anticipated the very field of psychology, as Molière developed his characters with unflinching insight and depth.

In Production

While the setting and the social milieu of *The Misanthrope* may lead one to anticipate a traditional “drawing room comedy” or a “comedy of manners,” Molière's instincts toward slapstick and commedia breathe through the pores of this play's action, and the conflict may well echo with the broad and exaggerated tones of some of his wilder farces.

This tone might best be seen in the interplay between Alceste and Celimene. Alceste's strongest, boldest declamations force him to turn on the head of a pin, as it were, reversing himself, and countering his own bold charges. At one moment, he vows to abandon his former love for Eliante and, moments later, with no actual reassurance from Celimene, he begs her to take him back.

While much of the play centers around gossip and reckless chatter, beneath and behind the talk lies passion, desire and intense emotional hunger into which these characters have been thrown. Minimizing this, or glossing it over with the veneer of too much courtly behavior, or weighting it with maudlin self-absorption, diminishes the play. Watch for the roller coaster that Molière has thrown these characters onto, and let the inclines and the drops be sharp and steep.

Meanwhile, as always, my “advice to the players” is to *lead with the language*, making sure each ornate phrasing can be understood. I have long argued that the greatest failing of modern performers lies in their inability to be seen and be heard, and a brief interview with any regular theatre-goer will affirm this. Ask them what their big-

gest issue is with the modern theatre and they will tell you that they “can’t understand what the actors are saying.”

To the actor’s benefit, a robust articulation of the consonants will effectively underline the ongoing conflict, as the objectives that sing inside the vowels get cut off by the obstacles that the consonants represent. This alone may stir an emotional response, simply in the process of speaking. (And picking up one’s cues, especially in the rapid-fire trade of lines that share the same metered line, will push the action forward with ever greater emotional excitement.)

With the fear of being unable to understand lifted from their shoulders, the audience can sit back and appreciate playful twists of characterization, comic movement, and clever directorial legerdemain.

When in doubt about the intended inflection of a passage, it is almost always valuable to scan the line for its iambic rhythm. Often, this will make the nature of certain choices evident. I have made some personal choices about the inflection of particular words, and especially, the inflection of names, which are evident in the light of the demands of iambic pentameter, as well as particular rhyming words with which some names are paired. In this play, especially, the pronunciation of the word “Madame” may alter, even within a single sentence. I have tried to give further clarification by italicizing *Madame*, when pronounced as “muhDAM,” and by deleting the final “e” (Madam) when pronounced as “MADum.” (You might also watch out for the word Paris, which sometimes morphs into “pairEE.”

None of this is to suggest that we hammer home the rhythm of the meter with relentless, unflinching, repeating stress or, worse, a sing-song rhyme stopping each line dead at its end, so much as to suggest that one reading of a line will “feel” better than another. In signing on for the game of a play that is written in verse, the audience will listen to hear just how we play by that game’s rules, and gain satisfaction in seeing those rules employed and transcended, even as they are surprised and delighted by unforeseen word choices.

Have fun!

Timothy Mooney

Acknowledgments

This adaptation of *The Misanthrope* was first presented at the University of Colorado-Denver, in November 1999, under the direction of Laura Cuetara.

The first professional presentation was at the Stage Two Theatre Company of Highwood, Illinois, under the direction of Deb Pekin, in a limited run August 10–September 2, 2000. The cast and staff was as follows:

ALCESTE.....	Timothy Mooney
PHILINTE	Sean Hagerdorn
ORONTE	James Williams
CELMENE	Lisa Beacom
ELIANTE.....	Jenny Beacraft
ARSINOE	Barbara Figgins
ACASTE	Jason Kaplan
CLITANDRE.....	Dru Kuperman
BASQUE.....	Chris Brouton
A GUARD	James Williams
DU BOIS	Chris Brouton
Stage Manager	Wendy Kaplan
Costumes	Liz Rinaldi
Lighting Design.....	Dave Busscher
Program and Poster Art	David C. Jensen

THE MISANTHROPE

adapted by Timothy Mooney

BASED ON THE PLAY BY MOLIÈRE

ACT I

Scene 1

(PHILINTE, ALCESTE.)

PHILINTE.

Well, now what irks you?

ALCESTE.

Leave me be, I pray.

PHILINTE.

No, tell, what stirs your wrath in such a way?

ALCESTE.

I told you, I do not want you to stay!

PHILINTE.

I will not go until I've had my say.

ALCESTE.

Talk all you want; I will not listen though.

PHILINTE.

Will you not tell me what upsets you so?
I really must insist, as your good friend...

ALCESTE.

Your friend? Oh don't include me in that trend!
Until today, I've been a friend to you,
But after what I've been a witness to
I have to bring an end to our relations;
For phony friend I haven't any patience!

PHILINTE.

What did I do that earns this evil placement?

ALCESTE.

Good God, sir, you should die of self-abasement!
It is a violation of great trust,
At which good men would feel a great disgust!
You greet a man with firm and fond embrace;
You wish him every benefit and grace;
You offer vows and promise your support
(A love that's due a confidante, in short)
But when I ask about him, to your shame,
You barely can recall the fellow's name!
Your love dries up when he is out of sight.
And you admit, you two are "not so tight."
Good God, Sir! I must say I think it vile
To hide such secrets in a dual smile.
And 'ere with such duplicity I reckoned,
I would go hang myself this very second!

PHILINTE.

I'm thinking that such awful consequence
Is rather out of line with my offense.
I hope that you will not be too upset,
If I don't go and hang myself quite yet.

ALCESTE.

Such crude and tasteless jokes that you have cracked!

PHILINTE.

Exactly how would you like me to act?

ALCESTE.

Men ought to be sincere in what they do,
And never say a word that isn't true.

PHILINTE.

But when one's fellow man gives one affection
One cannot simply break off the connection.
One must return fraternity, good will,
With what good feeling that we might instill.

ALCESTE.

Oh no, I can't endure this fawning stance!
It's nothing but an artificial dance

In which these actors go through great contortions
To satisfy political extortions.
These toadies who hug everyone they know,
Would fool a friend while flattering a foe!
They will compete to pay the greatest deference,
And 'twixt the fool and wise man show no preference!
Where is the satisfaction in the feeling
That someone finds you clever or appealing,
Or sings your praises with a heady shout,
When he'll do just the same for any lout?
Where is the honor in the overt passes
Of one whose love takes in the teeming masses?
An ardor which is lavish and not muted
Makes me suspect it has been prostituted!
Esteem means one lies closer to the heart;
When all are lauded, none are set apart!
And as you lay it on so thick and deep,
Your friendship, I must say, comes all too cheap.
I do not cling a man to me as brother,
Who can't distinguish one man from another.
I'd rather be set on a separate shelf.
The friend of Man is no friend for myself.

PHILINTE.

But certainly you give consideration
To keeping up some social obligation?

ALCESTE.

Oh, fie! We must decry those so debased,
Who show themselves so variously faced!
Let inmost thought of man be known and heard,
To boldly be expressed in every word;
Let man be freed by honest, open phrases,
Not shackled by obligatory praises.

PHILINTE.

But think of the discomfort you would cause
If truth alone came flapping out your jaws.
At times a man must choose to find it best
To keep his cards much closer to his chest.
What great disorder we would quickly find,

If all said everything that sprang to mind!
 So you would, when with one whom you deplore,
 Make pains to so apprise him on that score?

ALCESTE.

Oh, yes.

PHILINTE.

So, you would say, however crassly,
 To Emilie, her age looks rather ghastly,
 When she makes up her face like Jezebel?

ALCESTE.

Of course.

PHILINTE.

And then Dorilas you would tell,
 That he's a bore, and everyone too well knows
 About his bloodline and his rubbing elbows.

ALCESTE.

For certain.

PHILINTE.

You are kidding.

ALCESTE.

Not at all;

I task each oaf who irritates my gall.
 No matter whom, I say how they fall short,
 Regardless if in town or in the court.
 I fall into a melancholic brood
 When I see something ignorant or crude.
 When all I see is flattery farfetched,
 Injustice or self-interest thinly stretched...
 In short, when they act more like horse's feces,
 I want to break away from my own species!

PHILINTE.

You must admit you're way over the top!
 I have to laugh at these decrees you drop!
 It's like those brothers in that play I saw:
The School for Husbands! One would hem and haw—

All know of those back doors that he's slipped past,
 Extorting funds; he's cheated and harassed...
 His fortune has ascended with a rush
 Which makes true merit gasp and virtue blush.
 And as his rank has grown, so does it linger,
 His backers can be counted on one finger!
 The world knows him a knave who cheats and tricks...
 And all agree! There, no one contradicts!
 Regardless, though, of all their provocation,
 They greet the cad with honored veneration!
 If there's some glory or reward or credit...
 The honest vie in vain; that oaf will get it!
 I tell you I am chilled when I should glance
 The evil with which people gladly dance!
 I'm so disgusted, I've drawn up a plan
 To run off to a spot not known to man!

PHILINTE.

Enough, for now, of all this bitter business,
 And let's give thought to some form of forgiveness
 Instead of those on whom your choler's bent,
 You might make room for thoughts more tolerant!
 The world we live in needs some tact and charm;
 An angry virtue does the greater harm.
 I cannot prove it, but to me it seems
 A prudent course to shy from such extremes.
 The virtue parents taught in days gone by
 In modern days does not all ways apply.
 We can't condemn man for each tiny sin;
 We have to live here in the world we're in.
 I think no enterprise gives greater mirth
 Than man who tries to rearrange the earth!
 Oh, I, too, see each day such silly things
 Which strike me as but arrows, darts and slings,
 And yet, no matter how dumb or outrageous,
 I do not choose to borrow from your pages.
 I take men as they are; no more, no less.
 And where some chance to curse, I choose to bless.

ALCESTE.

But sir, these beatific attitudes...

Does nothing interrupt your platitudes?

Suppose a friend should violate your trust

And take what's yours...would you not be nonplussed?

Or slanders you? Yes! Denigrates your name?

Do you suppose your smile would stay the same?

PHILINTE.

Of course not, but these faults at which you rage are

But simply part of what is human nature.

I don't find it upsetting or unnerving

To see a man deceitful or self-serving,

No more than if I saw a vulture waiting

A monkey play a prank, or rabbits mating.

ALCESTE.

Should I be robbed? Or torn to bits? Or flouted?

Without objection...? Say no more about it!

Your reasoning's completely out of joint.

PHILINTE.

Yes, saying less might better win your point.

If you negotiated and were patient

You might well win your pending litigation.

ALCESTE.

I won't give in to politics and guile.

PHILINTE.

Then who will represent you at the trial?

ALCESTE.

The justice of my case speaks in this grudge.

PHILINTE.

But will you not go visit with the judge?

ALCESTE.

Oh, no. My side is plain for all to see.

PHILINTE.

Some intrigue, though, might undermine your plea.

ALCESTE.

Well I refuse to stoop to sling such muck.
I'm either right or wrong.

PHILINTE.

Ha, ha. Good luck.

ALCESTE.

I will not move.

PHILINTE.

He might manipulate
To get the judge...

ALCESTE.

I won't equivocate.

PHILINTE.

But then you'll lose.

ALCESTE.

I'll never sink
To politic, to beg, to cheat, to slink.

PHILINTE.

But...

ALCESTE.

Should that be the route that I must choose,
I shall be overjoyed and proud to lose!

PHILINTE.

Now, really...

ALCESTE.

No, in fact, I mean to trace,
Exactly how degraded, what disgrace,
How dark a man might paint his soul with blotches,
To wrong me here while all the world watches!

PHILINTE.

Oh, what a man!

ALCESTE.

However much it cost—
Just for the irony—I'd have it lost!

PHILINTE.

Alceste, you have to know that people laughed
When you've said things like that. They think you daft.

ALCESTE.

So much the worse for them.

PHILINTE.

But tell me now
Are you so stubborn in this angry vow
Do you not ease this blow with velvet glove,
When you apply it to the one you love?
I'm so surprised to see these days that you,
Who see the world in such a darkened view,
With so much there to criticize and censure,
Might go so far on such a loving venture.
And even more amazing's the selection
Of she upon whom you've bestowed affection.
Our honest Eliante seems quite entranced,
Arsinoe, the prude has more than glanced...
And yet, it's Celimene for whom you fret,
Who seems, at best, a flighty, bold coquette.
Her playful charm and popularity
Seem not to go with your austerity.
With traits which you so fervently despise,
How does she measure up within your eyes?
Are you so blind with love that you don't know?
Or do you just pretend it isn't so?

ALCESTE.

Toward this widow I don't sympathize
So much that I have blinders on my eyes.
I still see all her weaknesses and faults
I separate the truthful from the false.
And yet as numerous as these might be,
She has a way of winning over me.
I do not hesitate to give a voice,
Note every errant action, word or choice,
I find I cannot stem my adoration;
I only hope to give the inspiration,
To drive her vices out through my affection.

PHILINTE.

Well that would be a welcome new direction.
You think she loves you then?

ALCESTE.

Oh, yes, I know it.
I would not love her if she didn't show it.

PHILINTE.

Well if you are so firm in your belief,
Why do your rivals fill you with such grief?

ALCESTE.

A smitten heart does not want any neighbors
It's time she issued them their walking papers.
I've come today to make that dictum clear.

PHILINTE.

If I were you, and had your options here
Her cousin, Eliante would be my pick.
Her heart is true and fast, not sly and slick;
And seems to hold you in a high regard.
You might find life with her a bit less hard.

ALCESTE.

That's true. My reason tells me I'm a fool.
But over love one's reason doesn't rule.

PHILINTE.

I see this situation with some dread...

ACT I

Scene 2

(ORONTE, ALCESTE, PHILINTE.)

ORONTE.

Our Eliante is out, the servant said,
And Celimene has likewise stepped away,
But when I heard that you were here today,
I had to come to say, Sir, without bias,
That my regard for you is of the highest,

And it would gratify me to no end,
If I might count you as a cherished friend.
This great esteem is purely towards your merit
And would be gratified if you might share it.
There's privilege, there, Sir, should you choose to use it
I'm sure that you would not wish to refuse it.

(ALCESTE seems disinterested, and unaware that he is being spoken to.)

It is, to you, Sir, my words were directed.
You seem to be completely unaffected.

ALCESTE.

To me, Sir?

ORONTE.

You, yes you. Do they offend you?

ALCESTE.

Oh, no. I never knew I might befriend you!
This honor comes to me as some surprise...

ORONTE.

It shouldn't. Your great worth no man denies.
I cannot be the first here on that score;
The world must beat a path to your front door!

ALCESTE.

Sir...

ORONTE.

There shines light no brighter in our nation,
Than your great merit, by my estimation.

ALCESTE.

Sir...

ORONTE.

No, Sir, none here match your noted worth,
Here, in this state; perhaps upon this earth!

ALCESTE.

Sir...

ORONTE.

If I lie, may Heaven take me now!
And, just to prove the truth beneath my vow,
Allow me take you, Sir, in my embrace,
To show the heart in which you hold a place.
Your hand, Sir. Let me clasp it here to show
My friendship.

ALCESTE.

Sir...

ORONTE.

What's this? You would say no?

ALCESTE.

The honor with which you endear me, thusly,
Is one which I would take quite seriously.
I do so value friendship, there's a danger
Bestowing it on one somewhat a stranger.
Such friendship would be of much lesser worth,
When thinly spread to everyone on earth.
Such bonds depend on more overt selection,
And thus, before declaring such connection,
Let's let our new acquaintance take some root,
To see if friendship might give off a shoot.
We might repent it if we tried to force
A friendship through an unfamiliar course.

ORONTE.

Good God, man! I agree right to the letter!
And all this makes me love you even better!
We'll let our friendship grow a tender flower,
And meanwhile, should it be within my power,
To tender any preference or some boon,
You'll find that my good will is opportune.
You know, the King treats me with some due deference,
And should you find some matter needing preference,
I might obtain some special dispensation
Or else, perhaps outside consideration.
To wit, I am your servant, and as such,
Since of your wit, I've heard so very much,

I have this sonnet, which I penned this week,
And I would dearly treasure your critique.
I'm thinking of procuring publication.

ALCESTE.

Oh, sir, you don't want my consideration
Upon your composition.

ORONTE.

Why?

ALCESTE.

I tend

To such sincerity that I offend.

ORONTE.

To get advice that's not sincere is futile;
I beg you, please: give me your thoughts. Be brutal.
I wouldn't want my feelings to be spared.

ALCESTE.

All right, then. My opinion will be aired.

ORONTE.

"A Sonnet..." It's a sonnet. "Hope..." It's to
A lady I once hoped I might pursue.
"Hope..." It's just a tender little ditty;
A little sentimental; kind of pretty.

ALCESTE.

We'll soon see.

ORONTE.

"Hope..." I would quite like to know
If you think this is how it ought to go.
Particularly, if you like the phrasing.

ALCESTE.

We'll see. We'll see.

ORONTE.

Oh! something quite amazing:
'Twas but a quarter-hour to complete it!

ALCESTE.

It's not the time that matters, sir. Please read it.

ORONTE.

*'Tis true that hope should comfort us,
Distracting from life's shocks and jolts.
But Phyllis, it stirs greater fuss
If from its blocks it never bolts.*

PHILINTE.

Oh, that, right there's a clever little twist!

ALCESTE. *(Aside:)*

What's that?! Did you hear something that I missed?

ORONTE.

*There was a smile you shared with me,
And chased off all my idle doubt.
That rug slid in so carelessly
While you prepared to pull it out.*

PHILINTE.

Oh, that's a verse for readership that thinks!

ALCESTE. *(Aside to PHILINTE:)*

What are you saying? You know well it stinks!

ORONTE.

*Should hope clutch me forever though
Suspended in this status quo,
'Tis only death keeps honest score
It takes me from the dreadful snare
As Phyllis offers but despair
When hope confounds forevermore.*

PHILINTE.

You capture so complete the heart that's breaking!

ALCESTE.

Do you think that we can't tell that you're faking?
I've never heard such Godless, awful lies!

PHILINTE.

Excuse me, please. I have to dry my eyes.

ALCESTE. (*Aside:*)
Good Lord!

ORONTE.
You flatter somewhat, I suppose.

PHILINTE.
Oh, no, I don't!

ALCESTE. (*Aside:*)
He's hit it on the nose!

ORONTE. (*To ALCESTE:*)
But you, Sir, promised me your expertise;
I want to know what you think of my piece.

ALCESTE.
Such questions, Sir, are not an idle jest.
We all would like to hear that we're the best.
There was a man once, whom I cannot name,
Who tasked me on a topic quite the same,
I told him that a gentleman must not
Give in to jotting down each little thought.
And while such hobbies make fine recreation,
One should resist the pull of publication.
For as a reputation each pursues,
We find we inadvertently amuse.

ORONTE.
It seems you're saying, Sir, somewhat backhanded,
My composition—

ALCESTE.
Don't misunderstand it!
I simply said that there is little worse
Than stigma from a limp or lifeless verse.
Although a man has every high regard,
The literary audience is hard.

ORONTE.
And so, my sonnet; you think that it's bad?

ALCESTE.
I simply said that, following this fad,

Great many men, not much distinct from you,
Have come to great regret and bitter rue.

ORONTE.

And I'm like them? You think I cannot write?

ALCESTE.

I don't say that. I said to *him*, "You might
Consider if so urgently you're pressed
To publish where your name may be assessed.
The writers of bad books have the defenses
Of lacking funds to pay their large expenses.
But you, sir, have the means here to resist,
Temptation to turn out your torpid grist.
You must hold out against all fond persuasion
From making public private inspiration.
A reputation is a worthy thing,
Which one should not give up for such a fling.
Don't change the honor you've so far assured
For image of one dizzy and absurd."
That's what I tried to tell this other friend.

ORONTE.

I think I see what you now recommend.
But, of my sonnet, tell me, if you might...

ALCESTE.

Your sonnet should be filed far from sight.
The style you imitate is rather coarse,
And you've not yet improved upon the source.
Like here, "*There was a smile you shared with me,*"
And then "*That rug slid in so carelessly.*"
Or this, "*Distracting from life's shocks and jolts*"
And this, "*If from its blocks it never bolts*"
Or here, "*'Tis only death keeps honest score,*
When hope confounds forevermore."
These mannerisms, currently the mode,
Create a sort of artificial code,
Which borrows phrasings that some feeble hack lent;
But nature never spoke with such an accent.
In these loose days, that is to be expected.

Our fathers, though more crude, were less affected.
 In all our modern stuff, I have not prized,
 One verse above this piece I've memorized:

*If I was given, by the King,
 Great Paris to be mine
 Excepting but one single thing,
 This loving heart of thine,
 I would address the man, "My Lord,
 I won't accept this gift you give;
 We will not reach a fair accord
 'Tis for my love, I live;
 'Tis for my love, I live."*

The rhyme is bare, the rhythm roughly halts,
 But see you how it shows the feeble faults
 Of all the stuff that is preferred today
 So filled with words, with nothing, though, to say?

*If I was given, by the King,
 Great Paris to be mine
 Excepting but one single thing,
 This loving heart of thine,
 I would address the man, "My Lord,
 I won't accept this gift you give;
 We will not reach a fair accord
 'Tis for my love, I live;
 'Tis for my love, I live."*

Now there's an echo that comes from the soul
 (To PHILINTE:) Go on and laugh. Though you may find it droll,
 I hold that this one verse itself outweighs,
 The trash that these days earns such eager praise.

ORONTE.

It seems to me my verse is yet all right.

ALCESTE.

And I can think of reasons why you might;
 But let my reason, reason as it will,
 To think your composition rather ill.

ORONTE.

There's others have pronounced my poem great!

ALCESTE.

I lack their talent to equivocate.

ORONTE.

I guess you think your wit is rather ample.

ALCESTE.

I'd need much more to praise your little sample.

ORONTE.

I guess, without your praise, I might yet live.

ALCESTE.

That's good, because it's something I can't give.

ORONTE.

Let's see you try composing on this theme,
You're not so talented as you would seem.

ALCESTE.

Oh, my work may well be just as appalling
But I'd not cart it 'round when I came calling!

ORONTE.

You're arrogant, and acting rather proudly.

ALCESTE.

Your flatterers will praise you much more loudly.

ORONTE.

Look, little man, your tone is rather low.

ALCESTE.

My tone, big man, I think is *apropos!*

PHILINTE. (*Stepping between the two:*)

Enough! Good gentlemen, I pray you, cease!

ORONTE.

My fault. I yield to your great expertise.
I am your servant, and shall so behave.

ALCESTE.

And I am your most conscientious slave.

ACT I

Scene 3

(PHILINTE, ALCESTE.)

PHILINTE.

Well, now you see how speeches so sincere
Can even start to threaten your career!
Oronte was simply looking for support...

ALCESTE.

Don't speak to me.

PHILINTE.

What?

ALCESTE.

Let's cut all this short.

PHILINTE.

Oh, now...

ALCESTE.

Go now, please.

PHILINTE.

If...

ALCESTE.

I say, withdraw.

PHILINTE.

But what...

ALCESTE.

I cannot hear you.

PHILINTE.

But...

ALCESTE.

La, la!

PHILINTE.

This is absurd.

ALCESTE.

I'm going. You stay here.

PHILINTE. (*Following after him:*)

You're joking. You'll soon find you want me near.

End of Act I

ACT II

Scene 1

(ALCESTE, CELIMENE.)

ALCESTE.

Madame, shall my thoughts be quite plainly stated?
The things you do leave me most agitated.
Disturb me so, I know one of these days,
That you and I must go our separate ways.
I cannot hide from you what you should know,
And 'ere too long I'll be constrained to go.
I haven't got the stomach to delude,
To pose pretending some complacent mood.

CELIMENE.

It seems you only wanted to escort me
So that you might denounce me and exhort me.

ALCESTE.

I do not seek a fight, but I renounce
How you receive each guest that they announce!
If you could spurn each oft-approaching suitor,
Then we might find this argument much mooter.

CELIMENE.

Have I control for what these men are feeling?
Is it my fault that they find me appealing?
If I should be the flame, and they the moth,
Must I then take a stick and chase them off?

ALCESTE.

A stick, *Madame*, is not what you now need,
But rather disposition to recede.
I can't complain of charms which I adore
So much as how you move them to explore.
Your melting manner, your enlisting eyes,
Encourage each to vie to win your prize.
The hope you stir of dividend sublime,
Keeps all these suitors 'round you all the time.
Were they less fondly smiled upon by you,
The troupe might find some better things to do.

But please, *Madame*, perhaps you might explain
Why this Clitandre wins such fond acclaim?
Is his great virtue valued here so high
That he should think to win your roving eye?
Is it the nail which he grows overlong
On little finger that so strikes your gong?
Or is it that blonde wig he wears, instead,
Which so inclines you to incline your head?
Upon his waistcoat there's a fancy stitching;
Is that the thing which you find so bewitching?
Or is it that this paragon so reaches
Into your heart through buttons, bows or...breeches?
Or does his giggle, or that shrill falsetto
Carve up your heart as though with a stiletto?

CELIMENE.

There is no reason for your jealous eye,
And I believe you know the reason why!
You know I face a certain legal action,
And I must have his influence in my faction.

ALCESTE.

Then lose your lawsuit, Madam, in a hurry.
And for his foppish favor do not curry.

CELIMENE.

It seems you're jealous of the universe!

ALCESTE.

Of course! Since you won't tell it to disperse!

CELIMENE.

The very fact I'm free with all of these
Should be enough to put your heart at ease.
Your mind might have some cause to be at doubt
Were there a single one I'd singled out.

ALCESTE.

If I'm to be at peace with all my brothers
Just how's my treatment different from those others?

CELIMENE.

Is not the fact I love you quite enough?

ALCESTE.

Oh, you could turn my turbulence to bliss
If only—come, let's table all of this.
Let's speak with lesser rancor than we've been...

ACT II

Scene 2

(ALCESTE, CELIMENE, BASQUE.)

CELIMENE.

What is it?

BASQUE.

It's Acaste.

CELIMENE.

Ah, show him in.

ACT II

Scene 3

(ALCESTE, CELIMENE.)

ALCESTE.

What, shall we never have a moment's peace?
Do all your social hours never cease?
You don't imagine that you might just once,
Not open up your door to every dunce?

CELIMENE.

You'd like me to antagonize him so?

ALCESTE.

Why keep from him the truth which we both know?

CELIMENE.

Acaste would be upset, and quite let down,
If he should know we think him such a clown.

ALCESTE.

But if he's such a clown, why tolerate him?

CELIMENE.

Oh, no! I do not dare to gall or bait him!
I can't discount his influence at court
A poisoned word from him could sell me short.
His kind's no good when it comes to a favor,
But if their good opinion starts to waver—
If there's a case, or somewhere you've applied,
You don't want them upon the other side.

ALCESTE.

And rather than take but the slightest chance,
You would admit each caller wearing pants!
And all the circumstances which you've thought—

ACT II

Scene 4

(ALCESTE, CELIMENE, BASQUE.)

BASQUE.

Madame, Monsieur Clitandre's here.

ALCESTE.

Why not!

CELIMENE.

Where are you going?

ALCESTE.

Somewhere else!

CELIMENE.

Oh, stay!

ALCESTE.

Oh, no!

CELIMENE.

Don't go.

ALCESTE.

I must.

CELIMENE.

Oh, please.

ALCESTE.

Good day.

Don't hold me back. I am evacuating.
You know I find these things excruciating.

CELIMENE.

You must stay here, my dear.

ALCESTE.

I tell you no.

CELIMENE.

All right then. I give you my leave to go.

ACT II

Scene 5

(ELIANTE, PHILINTE, ACASTE, CLITANDRE, ALCESTE,
CELIMENE, BASQUE.)

ELIANTE.

The two marquis have come to pay a call.
Are they announced?

CELIMENE.

Oh yes. *(To BASQUE:)* Bring chairs for all.
Oh, you're still here?

ALCESTE.

Yes, I choose not to go,
Until you tell us all who is your beau.

CELIMENE.

Oh, hush.

ALCESTE.

No, choose. Who is it you prefer?

CELIMENE.

You're mad.

ALCESTE.

You'll not so easily defer.

CELIMENE.

Bah!

ALCESTE.

Make your mind up.

CELIMENE.

No, you are just teasing.

ALCESTE.

No, no. You choose. Who is it you'd be pleasing?

CLITANDRE.

Oh, my! I've come from court, where our Cleonte
Has made himself the sport of such a taunt!
Is there no friend to intercede and bring
Him to know how to act before the King?

CELIMENE.

It's fascinating to see just how he'd botch,
And one can't help just standing there to watch.
Just when you think his flop has been complete
He finds a way to top his former feat.

ACASTE.

Now speaking of a silly, foolish boor
I've just encountered one you can't endure;
For one full hour, in the sun, Damon
Talked at me as though I were but a stone!

CELIMENE.

For hours at a time he'll bend your ear,
And never quite make one impression clear.
Should he come to some point he'd be perplexed,
And wouldn't know what ought to happen next!

ELIANTE. (*To PHILINTE:*)

It seems, again, we're well off to the races,
And all our friends will be put in their places.

CLITANDRE.

Timante, now there's a character.

CELIMENE.

Oh, yes!

He keeps his business tightly to his vest,
And shrouds himself in mysteries of sorts
As though he stored some secret in his shorts.
He ponders every word for subtle hints,
And endlessly, his eyebrows rise and wince.
These things he murmurs in his darkened tone
Are always thoroughly already known!
There's none to match him for his secret ways,
He even whispers saying his "good days."

ACASTE.

And what about Geralde?

CELIMENE.

That silly oaf!

'Tis only with the nobles that he'll loaf.
To him, it's but the titled who are worthy
And all of us must be completely scurvy.
He's so obsessed, his talk takes but one course,
It's nothing but the hunt, the hound, the horse.
He speaks without a single appellation,
And to address "*Monsieur's*" beneath his station.

CLITANDRE.

Some say that he's admired by Belise.

CELIMENE.

So much for him, to catch Belise disease!
Each time she calls I have to grope and search
To find a topic where she doesn't lurch!
But her retorts are all so tense and terse,
That conversations droop and die of thirst!
At last resort, you talk about the weather,
But even that won't break her of her tether.
No storm, no rain, no snow, nor no monsoon
Can get the girl to sing a different tune.
However painfully the talk might lag
Well through the day her visits will yet drag,
No matter how you yawn and stretch your necks it...

Is futile to attempt to cue her exit.

ACASTE.

And ofAdraste?

CELIMENE.

His ego's so inflated
That at the slightest snub he's agitated.
And since he is not really liked at court,
He spends his time with temper ever short.
There's none receives a benefit or grace,
Without the redness rising in his face.

CLITANDRE.

And young Cleon? What say on his behest?
He entertains the brightest and the best.

CELIMENE.

His cook sees to it everyone's well fed;
They come not to see him but see his spread.

ELIANTE.

His fine repasts can hardly be denied.

CELIMENE.

But must he serve himself up on the side?
The stupid things he says are such a treat,
They spoil the taste of chicken, fish or meat.

PHILINTE.

There's some have praised his uncle to no end.
What say you of Damis?

CELIMENE.

Oh, he's a friend.

PHILINTE.

A decent, clever sort, I have to say.

CELIMENE.

And yet, he works too hard to be that way.
Between his heart and head's a little schism
As he should struggle to each witticism.
And as he wants his taste to have dominion,
There's naught from him that earns a good opinion.

Be it a play or all the latest books,
He thinks he must respond with haughty looks.
It's only by condemning things that he
Can demonstrate flaws only he can see.
And if he takes to task each man of letters
He thinks that elevates him with his betters.
He even sneers at all our fond discourse
As though, of wickedness, we were the source!
He folds his arms and looks as though he'd rather
Be anywhere but near our foolish blather.

ACASTE.

Delightful! Oh, you sketch with such conviction!

CLITANDRE.

There's none I know can make such apt depiction!

ALCESTE.

Oh yes, my friends, you brave and noble few,
Make sure you scorn them all with one dim view.
And while here in the shadows you disgrace him,
Let him come into view and you'll embrace him.
There are no insults, cavils, hems or hedges
When you express to him your highest pledges.

CLITANDRE.

Why, sir, do you fling this great wrath at us?
It is *Madame* to whom you owe this fuss.

ALCESTE.

Oh, no! She doesn't match your guilt by half!
She simply plays to your applause and laugh.
The more you feed her with this attitude,
The more her talk takes greater latitude.
If you did not award her bad behavior
She might no longer stoop to earn such favor.
It's flatterers like you who pay the price
To nourish wicked gossiping and vice.

PHILINTE.

Why so upset? The girl only derides
Those ones whom you, yourself, have so decried.

CELIMENE.

Of course, he has to take the other side
He has to be the only one who's snide.
He cannot take the road where there's less friction;
He has a bent toward total contradiction.
However he discovers the wind blows,
He'll see to it he's totally opposed!
If he should go along with every joker
Someone might get the thought he's mediocre!
He is so fond of opposition's laws,
He'd turn against his dearest heartfelt cause
And tilt against it, never halt or waver,
Should he find there's another man in favor.

ALCESTE.

The laughs, Madam, give to you this round.
Proceed, they're eating up each little sound.

PHILINTE.

You must admit, though, that her point's quite apt.
You seem to have a fear of getting trapped
In league with anyone! If praise or blame,
You pit your wits against it quite the same.

ALCESTE.

Well that's because all men are always wrong,
And one should never join in with the throng.
I always find them ready with the flame
Of speedy praise or overweening blame.

CELIMENE.

But...

ALCESTE.

No, *Madame*, I have a great distaste
For how these actions make you more abased.
And I see all these others at great fault,
When in your degradation they exalt.

CLITANDRE.

What you say of me may be true or not,
But I can see no fault that she has got.

ACASTE.

I see the lady's charm, and all her grace,
But as for faults, she hasn't any trace.

ALCESTE.

I see them, but instead of being blind,
I freely let the girl know of my mind.
My love for her is of such strong conviction
I must confront her every dereliction.
I'd not withhold a needed nourishment,
While darker side got such encouragement.
Were I her, I would banish all who flatter,
To soil my character with such ill chatter.

CELIMENE.

In short, sir, if we all marched to your drum,
The end of all endearments would soon come.
And love would find its finest declaration
In words of most excessive provocation.

ELIANTE.

From what I've seen, love's judgment's less severe,
And love that's true finds more to cheer than spear.
A lover sees his love through rosy glasses
And sees in her the paragon of lasses.
Each little flaw expresses her perfection,
Becoming virtue with a new inflection.
The pallid lover is a "shining lily,"
The swarthy one's a "rugged little filly."
The bony girl has "a slender grace,"
And fat one has "a most majestic waist."
The slattern who's...hygienically impaired?
For "chutzpah" will her praises thus be aired.
The giant is "a goddess," to be sure;
While midget's "paradise in miniature."
The "bearing of a princess" get the haughty,
While dull one's "kind," and wicked one is "naughty,"
The chatterbox is "lively and expressive,"
While mute one shows "reserve that is impressive."
In this way lovers find how to be proud
However their true love might be endowed.

ALCESTE.

And yet, I say...

CELIMENE.

I think this theme's tapped out.

What do you say we take a walk about?

What? You aren't going now?

CLITANDRE and ACASTE.

No, not at all.

ALCESTE.

The thought of their departure brings a pall.

Stay on! I think that I'll be staying, too.

In fact I won't depart 'till after you.

ACASTE.

Unless *Madame* would like to calm her nerves

I'm free to stay as long as she prefers.

CLITANDRE.

I am expected at the King's *couchee*,

Until then, I am at her leave to stay.

CELIMENE. (*To ALCESTE.*)

You're joking, sure.

ALCESTE.

Oh, no. I mean to try,

If you prefer that they should go, or I.

ACT II

Scene 6

(ALCESTE, CELIMENE, ELIANTE, ACASTE, PHILINTE,
CLITANDRE, BASQUE.)

BASQUE.

Excuse me, sir, but there's a fellow here

Who has some private business for your ear.

ALCESTE.

There is no business might deliver me.

PHILINTE.

They fear the two of them might fight
About some verse Alceste found rather trite.
The Marshals think they need to intervene.

ALCESTE.

I won't back down! I said just what I mean!

PHILINTE.

There is your summons; we had best not wait.

ALCESTE.

What do they think that they might arbitrate?
With my opinion now a public record,
Will he in open court have all his dreck heard,
Condemning me to praise it to the skies?
I won't! It's bad!

PHILINTE.

Yet, you might sympathize...

ALCESTE.

No, no. The verse and versifier stink!

PHILINTE.

Calm down, and take a moment now to think.
Let's go.

ALCESTE.

I'll go, but not upon my knees;
No word I've said—

PHILINTE.

We have to go now, please.

ALCESTE.

Unless the King gives me express command,
My verdict on his verse will have to stand!
The words are crap, and for this vile offense
He should be hanged at government's expense.

(To CLITANDRE and ACASTE, who are laughing:)
Good God, Sirs! Am I so amusing here?

CELIMENE.

Please go see to it that you're in the clear.

ALCESTE.

I'll step aside, for now, to end this fuss
But I'll be back. We had more to discuss.

End of Act II

ACT III

Scene 1

(CLITANDRE, ACASTE.)

CLITANDRE.

My good Marquis, how satisfied you seem!
Such confidence! And in your eye, a gleam!
But tell me, please, and don't exaggerate it:
Have you a reason to be stimulated?

ACASTE.

Good God, man! When I think of my existence
Such joy just overwhelms me with persistence.
I'm young, I'm rich, and with quite little strain,
I trace my bloodline to a noble vein.
And with the rank that comes with name and state,
At court I see a most auspicious fate.
My courage, also, has been lately shown
In skirmishes that have been widely known.
There was that matter of a little duel
In which my air was seen as calm and cool.
My wit is famous, and my taste is such,
That I can judge things without thinking much.
For instance, watching theatre, my hobby,
I set the tone on stage and in the lobby.
The play's success rests on my cheer, or hiss
(Should I determine something is amiss).
I have a strong physique, a handsome face,
A narrow waist and all my teeth in place.
As for my dress, the city forms a passion
For every item I say fits the fashion.
To visit with them all the lords implore me,
And all the lasses say how they adore me.
And thus, in both my person, and my faction,
I've rationale for such self-satisfaction.

CLITANDRE.

But sir, if all the ladies are so eager,
Why scour here where prospects are so meager?

ACASTE.

Oh, meager, do you say? I'm not the kind
Who chases ladies quite completely blind.
Some men may dote on women who don't show
The slightest hint of how their love may go;
They grovel at their feet and there, for years,
They press their case with sighs and hopeless tears.
And hope that by a show of brash fidelity
The lass might one day frolic to his melody.
And yet, it makes no sense for one like me
To sacrifice myself to hopeless plea.
However fair, however high her birth,
I'm certain I'm of equitable worth.
And if, to want her, I should condescend,
Some gratitude the girl will have to spend.
I might express my interest here a little
If she might simply meet me in the middle.

CLITANDRE.

And so, the mistress shared with you some word...?

ACASTE.

I've several reasons that I'm quite assured.

CLITANDRE.

The sad conclusion you have reached is blind.
Delusions drive you right out of your mind.

ACASTE.

Of course, I am deluded...blind. I see.

CLITANDRE.

What other reason for this reckless plea?

ACASTE.

Delusion.

CLITANDRE.

Have you found her less aloof?

ACASTE.

I'm simply blind.

CLITANDRE.

But tell me, what's your proof?

ACASTE.

Out of my mind.

CLITANDRE.

Well has she ever spoken
Of further plans, or given any token?

ACASTE.

Oh, no, she hates me.

CLITANDRE.

No, please tell me, do.

ACASTE.

I make her nauseous.

CLITANDRE.

Oh! Enough from you!
What sign have you of love or some affection?

ACASTE.

No sign at all. I'm sure you're her selection.
In fact, I am so fully out of hope,
I'll hang myself soon as I find some rope.

CLITANDRE.

All right, Marquis. Let's call a truce, I pray.
And let's agree on one thing here, today.
If either of us can provide the proof,
That Celimene prefers himself, in truth,
The one whose hopes the lovely lady foils,
Will leave the winner to enjoy the spoils.

ACASTE.

Now that's an offer with a strong appeal!
All right, Marquis, you have yourself a deal.
But hush.

ACT III**Scene 2**

(CELIMENE, ACASTE, CLITANDRE.)

CELIMENE.

Still here?

CLITANDRE.

Our love keeps us from going.

CELIMENE.

Outside I heard a carriage that was slowing.
Who's coming?

CLITANDRE.

I don't know.

ACT III**Scene 3**

(BASQUE, CELIMENE, ACASTE, CLITANDRE.)

BASQUE.

Arsinoe

Is here, *Madame*.

CELIMENE.

What might she want today?

BASQUE.

Our Eliante is with her now, downstairs.

CELIMENE.

What interest has she now in our affairs?

ACASTE.

They say she's quite a pious prude, you know,
But I suspect...

CELIMENE.

Oh, yes, it's all a show.

Down underneath she's worldly as they come,
And if she had a man, I think she'd hum

Another tune. She cannot help but wonder
Why others win in such affairs she'd blunder.
As such, her anger bubbles to the surface
And she pretends she means but to preserve us.
Since no one offers her advances lude,
She hides behind the stiff veneer of prude.
And so she shames such women of allure,
Who have the graces never known by her.
And late at night she prays she might be blessed
With such a suitor as our dear Alceste.
His visits here give her the sad impression,
That I have taken her most prized possession.
And everywhere I go, her tales precede
Suggesting reasons why I so succeed.
In short, she is a vicious, petty bitty,
With no redeeming substance, more's the pity,
I...

ACT III

Scene 4

(ARSINOE, CELIMENE, CLITANDRE, ACASTE.)

CELIMENE. *(Continued:)*

Madam! Such a joy to see your face!
To what do I owe this most pleasing grace?

ARSINOE.

There's something that I think you ought to hear.

CELIMENE.

How kind of you! You're simply such a dear!

(CLITANDRE and ACASTE exit laughing.)

ARSINOE.

It's just as well those two continued on.

CELIMENE.

Won't you sit down?

ARSINOE.

Oh, no, I must be gone.

Madame, the best friend's one who gives support
In matters of the weightiest import.

And we both know there's no subordination
To matters which might touch our reputation.

As such, I've hurried here upon a mission
To tell of talk which threatens your position.

I had a talk last night with just a few
Upstanding folk when topic turned to you.

And though, you know, I instantly defended,
I fear your actions were not well commended.

The looseness of your ways and the parade
Of men who visit you weren't well portrayed.

Your coquetry, I fear's, notorious,

And they spoke in a tone censorious!

I was astounded at this sharp attack,

And in your fair defense I did not lack.

I spoke of your good spirit and I mentioned,
You only have the finest of intentions.

And yet some things I couldn't quite gainsay,
With issues that I can't explain away.

And ultimately, I made the confession

That your behavior gives the wrong impression.

And that your actions may well be the source
Of gossip and conjecture rather coarse.

And that you wouldn't be so oft mistook

If you took greater care for how things look.

It's not that I'm suggesting you're to blame

For deeds the like of which we mustn't name!

But people's minds do tend that way to go,

And we must guard 'gainst vice's slightest show.

I know you know my purity of purpose,

Intending only to do you great service,

I share these thoughts to help my dearest friend,

And have in mind no other hoped-for end.

CELIMENE.

Oh, Madam, I could not miss your intent

And I instinctively knew what you meant.

This information gives such inspiration,
I am reminded of your reputation!
And think that I might repay you your due,
By telling of what people say of you!
I'll follow the example that you've set
Reporting of the good folk I have met:
I stopped the other day at a soiree,
And there, some people tasting the buffet
Had launched a conversation that regarded
Where pious folk from piety had parted.
Alas! I fear the prudery you savor
Was not regarded with all that much favor.
The pious face you manage to contort,
The way you talk of virtue and distort
One's honor with suspicion, scorn and scandal—
At snooping out a sin, none hold a candle—
The self-esteem you seem to hold so dear,
While mankind earns your crocodile tear;
Most notably, the twisted way you measure
The nature of one's inoffensive pleasure.
All this, *Madame*, to say with simple candor
Was treated as no more than reckless slander.
"Why does," they asked, "she keep this pious show
When everything she does belies it so?
She says her prayers as much as would a nun
But cheats her maids of wages they have won.
She shows her piety all through the parish,
And yet she paints her face all thick and garish.
On naked statues she would place her ban,
And yet she wouldn't mind a naked man!"
Of course, I told them they were being vicious
And that your nature wasn't that malicious.
But still, I couldn't shake their new conviction,
And they suggested I make interdiction,
To tell you to leave off their moral health,
And rather worry more about yourself!
They said one's own soul should be much more clear
Before one says how others should appear.
A better plan to let the minister

Decide who's good and who is sinister.
 I know you know my purity of purpose,
 Intending only to do you great service,
 I share these thoughts to help my dearest friend,
 And have in mind no other hoped-for end.

ARSINOE.

I see a thank you's too much to expect,
 Though I hoped for, at least, a slight respect.
 And since, *Madame*, you have brought out your claws,
 My ministrations must have given pause.

CELIMENE.

Oh, no, *Madame*, in fact, if we could grab it,
 This opportunity should be a habit.
 It's so hard to get an objective view
 To know what people think of what we do
 And so, if you are willing, let's pursue
 Arrangements for repeated rendezvous,
 Where we might tell each other, *entrez nous*
 What you've heard said of me, and I, of you.

ARSINOE.

I'm sure it's only I whom they condemn;
 No evil word is said of you by them.

CELIMENE.

I think, *Madame*, we're quick to censure sin
 According to what season we are in.
 When one is fast approaching her September,
 It may be better to put out love's ember
 When charms no longer stoke the proper mood,
 It may be time to play the role of prude.
 Perhaps when my attractions pass their spring,
 My tone will take on just your angry ring,
 I think I'll wait, though, 'til that moment nears;
 No woman is a prude at twenty years.

ARSINOE.

The way you flaunt your age with such a brag;
 A listener would think me some old hag!
 The fact is that we're not so separated

My many suitors have at all abated.
I am, *Madame*, completely thrown aback,
What drives you so to make this rash attack?

CELIMENE.

And I, myself, would like to know just why,
Each place you go you give me this black eye.
Am I to blame for your sad lack of touch,
And that men don't quite want you now as much?
If men should see me, pay me their respects,
With such an ardor due the weaker sex,
And utter vows that you would rather hear,
What might I do to mollify your fear?
If you want lovers, all right then, that's fine,
If you can, help yourself to some of mine!

ARSINOE.

Oh, now, do you suspect that I might covet
Your suite of suitors? That I'm not above it?
Or that the world is not quite well appraised
Of what you do to keep their ... hopes all raised?
Or that the reason they come here and flirt's to
Better view such paragon of virtue!
Is it your merit that these men adore?
Or do they benefit from their *amour*?
The world is not so quickly taken in.
There's many women Heaven made to win
The hearts of man, who don't attract a pack
Of sniffing dogs, the way your lovers act.
From this, there's but one thesis to deduce;
Which is these men come for a love that's loose!
So you might soften yet your brazen stance
About the conquests bought in this dark dance.
I would suggest your vanity be checked,
To treat the world with somewhat more respect.
If we were all that jealous of your train,
We might adjust our ways with little strain,
And if it were we weren't so very moral
We might well win that same degrading laurel!

CELIMENE.

Now, there's a strategy! Do as you will,
And we'll soon see if you can find your fill,
And once you do—

ARSINOE.

Madame, that's quite enough!
We cross the line with all this sordid stuff.
My coach has not arrived yet to retrieve me,
Or else, I would have long been gone, believe me!

CELIMENE.

Oh, stay as long as you prefer; feel free.
Do not rush off so fast because of me.
And if it's I who threatens your remaining
I'll leave you with a guest more entertaining.
This timely man comes now just to say "hi."
And you'll find him more interesting than I.

ACT III

Scene 5

(ALCESTE, CELIMENE, ARSINOE.)

CELIMENE.

Alceste, there is a note that I must scribble,
To satisfy a friend's annoying quibble.
I'm sure your charms bring such a favored bliss
That she'll not find my hostessing amiss.

ACT III

Scene 6

(ALCESTE, ARSINOE.)

ARSINOE.

I'm glad she gives me this chance to approach
You while we wait upon my coming coach.
No kinder hostess' duty could she scheme,

Than matching me with one of such esteem.
A woman holds her heart dear, but would wear it,
Upon her sleeve for man of noble merit.
And it's your charm and character, Alceste
Which tells me such regard must be expressed.
I'm only sad to see they sell you short
In paying proper tribute at the court.
They much malign you sir. It hits me hard
That you have yet to win your due regard.

ALCESTE.

What reason have I, Madam, to feel slighted?
What have I done that might get them excited?
What service have I rendered to the crown
That they should look to add to my renown?

ARSINOE.

Not everyone who's plucked for recognition
Has executed some profound commission.
Of your worth, Sir, the world is well aware,
And I'm appalled that they don't start to share—

ALCESTE.

My worth, I think, is hardly worth such mention,
The court has other things for its attention.
I don't think they ought upset their agenda,
To seek out virtues for some slight addenda.

ARSINOE.

They hardly need, I think, to seek you out.
Your praise, of late, has been heard all about!
Why, lately I've heard talk in your support
By persons of significant import!

ALCESTE.

Such praise, these days, is but a passing gas,
Which lumps us all together in a mass.
When everyone's accorded such attention,
Such recognition's hardly worth a mention.
I'd not call it significant, exactly,
When it's afforded every little lackey.

ARSINOE.

I only wish it were that you might feel
There was some slot at court that might appeal.
If of such thoughts I might have chance to learn,
You might find that the wheels start to turn.
There are some friendships I could utilize
To see to it your star would quickly rise.

ALCESTE.

You must know, Madam, that my inclination
Is ill-disposed to such consideration.
God made me not of stuff for a career
Within the Court's affected atmosphere.
And I would be the cause of such distress,
I doubt that I would find there much success.
My greatest talent lies in my sincerity
While flatterers are nothing of a rarity.
And anyone so candid or so blunt,
For courtier's career should never hunt.
I realize outside the court we lose
The weight which we might like to lend our views,
Yet I prefer this life that's much more vital
When it owes no dominion to a title.
When reading bad verse, we need not excuse it,
While singing praises of some Monsieur who's-it.
Nor must we cringe with anguish or with shame,
When not appeasing Madam what's-her-name.

ARSINOE.

Oh, very well, I'll not press for such glory,
And yet, I'm troubled for your other quarry.
And if you might permit me speak at will,
I'd see you choose a lover with more skill.
It's sad to see you in the spell again,
Of such a specimen as Celimene.

ALCESTE.

Is it not, Madam, indiscretion grossest,
To forge such implications of our hostess?

ARSINOE.

It's hard to see your stature soiled, see,
When you are victim of disloyalty.
It's my pure love for you that is the reason,
I must apprise you of such wicked treason.

ALCESTE.

I thank you, Madam, for that soothing dart.
Such words do so content a lover's heart.

ARSINOE.

I'm sorry that I speak so of a friend,
But she does not deserve the heart you lend.
The love that she affects is all a fake.

ALCESTE.

And yet, a woman's heart is not opaque;
Do you suppose you're really being kind,
To place suspicious thoughts inside my mind?

ARSINOE.

If you would rather play the willing gull,
I'll drop it while your faith's yet free and full.

ALCESTE.

Whatever hints you might just toss about,
You damage most when you inflict this doubt.
It is not kind to hint at other truth,
Unless you can support it with some proof.

ARSINOE.

That's most well said, *Monsieur*, and I won't fail,
To tack it down with most exacting nail.
If you would but come with me when I go,
I'll show you all it is you need to know
I will set out the details of this scam,
As perpetrated by your dear *Madame*.
And if you're shaken by this wicked stealth,
I might yet...nurse your spirit back to health.

End of Act III

ACT IV

Scene 1

(ELIANTE, PHILINTE.)

PHILINTE.

He acted like a little brat, throughout;
You should have seen the way he'd preen and pout.
However much we pressed, he wouldn't budge
To sacrifice the dictates of this grudge.
This was the first time that the court endured
Such arguments so utterly absurd:
"No Sirs," he said, "that far I cannot sink;
I cannot help it if his verses stink.
But why should it be such an awful sign,
If this good man can't write a decent line?
I might suppose there could be something worse
Than man who cannot write a pleasing verse?
The man's an honored fellow, I confess,
Of courage, merit, heart, I have to stress,
With each new praise, I heap more praise upon it,
Excepting that he cannot write a sonnet!
His wardrobe, dancing, horsemanship's adept,
It's just his rhyming that's a bit inept.
And if a man writes something that's that flawed,
He shouldn't think that we will just applaud.
It ought to be a law, with words so trite,
That he should have to burn the thing outright!"
It was a while 'ere he had quite calmed down,
And lightened somewhat his displeasing frown,
Extending this most feeble olive limb,
And looking to Oronte, addressed to him:
"I'm sorry, Sir, you feel so ill abused;
I wish I was more easily amused.
My greatest wish would be that it inspired
My heart to all the praises you've desired."
A quick embrace cut short the brief confusion,
And there the Marshals gaveled quick conclusion.

ELIANTE.

His actions are quite idiosyncratic
And yet my feelings for him are emphatic.
The pride which seems as such frivolity,
Has, to my mind, a noble quality.
It's rather silly stuff to have so fought on,
And yet I would his attitude had caught on.

PHILINTE.

The better that I know the man, the more
I wonder at the love he would endure.
The character he gets from God above
Would not, I'd think, incline him to such love,
And given such exacting disposition,
I can't see why your cousin's his decision.

ELIANTE.

Such an example surely contradicts
The thought that oil and water never mix.
Or that love's flame demands the inspiration
Of some kind of a common inclination.

PHILINTE.

And do you think his love is here requited?

ELIANTE.

It's hard to say just when her flame's been lighted.
Emotions overcome her with great stealth,
And I suspect she doesn't know herself.
One sometimes sees she loves, though she's blind to it,
Or when she doesn't, seems more inclined to it.

PHILINTE.

I fear Alceste has gone out on a limb,
With one who will be less than kind to him.
If he could read my heart and know my mind,
He'd turn another way where he might find
A love that's of a more responsive kind,
Which you might give him, were he not so blind.

ELIANTE.

To tell you frankly, Sir, you know I would

Be glad of anything that's to his good.
I would not lift a finger to destroy
A love for her which brings him any joy.
And I could never be a moment sad,
If he might find a love which makes him glad.
But if, as happens often, his fond chase
Should not be answered with the hoped-for grace
If Celimene should choose to wed another,
I'd feel no shame to stand in as his lover.
His tender heart would be no sad abasement
When his affections find a fond replacement.

PHILINTE.

Nor do I, Madam, grudge your tender feeling,
Which finds my friend so good and so appealing.
I cannot tell you quite how often I've
Found ways in conversation to contrive
To plead your case. But if we found instead,
That those two were one day to turn up wed,
Then I shall be so bold to press my suit,
If I might so provide a substitute.
If you might some day find you less adore him,
I would be pleased if I might fill in for him.

ELIANTE.

You tease, Philinte.

PHILINTE.

No, Madam, I'd not dare
I couldn't be more earnest if I'd swear.
And I'll await when I might be revealing
To you expression of my deepest feeling.

ACT IV**Scene 2**

(ALCESTE, ELIANTE, PHILINTE.)

ALCESTE.

Ah! Madam! Glad am I to find you here!
You must avenge a touch which strikes me near.

ELIANTE.

What is it? What brings you to such a fever?

ALCESTE.

Madame, I only know that I must leave her.
My universe has been so wholly shaken...
All that I knew up 'til today's mistaken.
I'm done with...I cannot...I say no more.

ELIANTE.

Do pull yourself together. I implore.

ALCESTE.

Just Heaven! Why combine so in one belle
So much of Heaven next to so much Hell?

ELIANTE.

But please, Sir, tell...

ALCESTE.

I'm totally undone!
I've been destroyed within this plot she's spun.
I have been so betrayed by Celimene,
Who's been untrue to me with other men!

ELIANTE.

But are you certain? Have you any proof?

PHILINTE.

Perhaps you've been the victim of some spoof.
A jealous lover may quite well suppose...

ALCESTE.

Good, God! Find somewhere else to stick your nose!
(*To ELIANTE:*) I have the proof right here that you request.
A letter, in her own hand, she addressed

To our Oronte, to whom she wrote with fervor,
The last man I'd imagine might deserve her!

PHILINTE.

And yet, a letter that's been intercepted
May hold some other meaning than expected.

ALCESTE.

Did I not tell you, Sir, to please butt out?
It's my affair, and not for you to doubt!

ELIANTE.

Alceste, I beg you, calm yourself, now, please!

ALCESTE.

'Tis only you, *Madame*, who now can ease
The outrage of my broken, shattered spirit.
I have a proposition, if you'd hear it:
Avenge me on that wicked temptress now,
Who has betrayed the fealty I'd vow.
Avenge me for that crime I know you hate.

ELIANTE.

But how, Sir?

ALCESTE.

Let us two entwine our fate.
Take this heart that to you I here surrender
Avenging me upon the foul tormentor.
Let's punish her with love that's so devout
That all the court and town must talk about.
Allow my love to know the final laugh
By all the love I'd give on your behalf.

ELIANTE.

I sympathize, good sir, with all your feeling,
It's not that what you offer's not appealing,
It's just that in the heat of this confusion,
My cousin may yet find some absolution.
A lover who's aggrieved quickly reacts,
But thirst for vengeance just as quickly slacks.
However guilty she may be in deed,
A lovely convict may be quickly freed.

No storm has winds that match a lover's fury,
And yet such storms blow over in a hurry.

ALCESTE.

Oh, no, *Madame*, this is no rash attack.
I'm done with her. There is no turning back.
I'd sooner die before my sad heart gropes
To reinstate her in my foolish hopes.
And here the traitress comes! I'll demonstrate,
How far I've come from former tender state.
I'll see to it the two of us are sundered,
And bring to you a heart no longer plundered.

ACT IV

Scene 3

(CELIMENE, ALCESTE.)

ALCESTE. (*Aside:*)

From my resolve, Lord, let me not be shook.

CELIMENE.

Why is it that you're giving me that look?
What is that heavy sigh supposed to mean?
Have you some trouble gnawing at your spleen?

ALCESTE.

There's naught I know to match the wicked sins
Of which you're guilty. Nothing that begins.
In all of Hell or Heaven's worst designs,
There's nothing with more evil so entwines.

CELIMENE.

You always know the perfect thing to say.

ALCESTE.

I am not joking with you here today.
No, blush and hang your head in abject shame!
I know your treason. Righteous is this blame.
How well I knew my love for you was wrong;
And that this thing would happen all along!

The very doubts of which you made much mock
Have helped me see, and take this truthful stock.
You near convinced me, yet I gave more weight
To that fell star that governs o'er my fate.
You lost your chance to get off of this easy;
How dare you treat my love so slight, so...breezy.
How well I know the blindness of the dart
Which Cupid fires in his most fickle art.
And that that dart did never penetrate you,
Would be no reason for which I might hate you.
Had you informed me you felt no such prong,
I might have sadly shrugged and moved along,
To curse the fate that I had wandered through,
Instead of having naught to curse but you.
To lead me on, to feed my heart's desire,
Was stacking lie on lie, piled ever higher,
Until your soul had built up quite a pyre,
Which now my flame of anger sets afire.
From this day forth come not within my sight.
Where you're concerned, I don't know wrong from right!
And, given how you tread this dual path,
I don't expect I might control my wrath.
And if this wrath you manage to incur,
I will not answer for what might occur.

CELIMENE.

I must say I could not be more amazed!
Have you at last become completely crazed?

ALCESTE.

I've long been crazy! How could I forget?
It happened on that fateful day we met!
The moment that I thought some sort of charity,
Might be found in a heart without sincerity.

CELIMENE.

And might I be so bold to ask my crime?

ALCESTE.

Oh, oh! Such innocence! It's so sublime!
But I'll no more torment you in your fall.

Here is a page in your familiar scrawl.
Do not pretend that you don't recognize it
The evidence is clear. You can't disguise it.

CELIMENE.

So this is what brought forward all that gush?

ALCESTE.

Can you look at this thing and not now blush?

CELIMENE.

Perhaps you might give me a little clue?

ALCESTE.

First treachery, and now you're brazen too!
Perhaps, since signature is in some doubt...

CELIMENE.

Oh, it's my letter, with name or without.

ALCESTE.

And you can look at this thing without wincing?
This proof of your deception so convincing?

CELIMENE.

Don't be ridiculous and so absurd!

ALCESTE.

Excuse me, but perhaps you haven't heard;
Can you yet act under the supposition
That with Oronte you have reached no...fruition?

CELIMENE.

Where do you get "Oronte?" Who ever mentioned...

ALCESTE.

From those who brought these words to my attention.
But what's the difference? Whoe'er the man may be
Why might that knowledge ever comfort me?
Might you be thus less guilty; me less harmed?

CELIMENE.

But must I blush and need you be so armed
If the addressee was a *female* friend?

ALCESTE.

Oh, such a waste! Such lies you so expend!
With such dexterity you dodge the facts!
Which now you crown with more abnormal acts!
What kind of dupe do you now take me for?
What wealth of lies think you that I'll endure?
Come now, let's see how you might play it out;
How will you put to rest my paltry doubt?
This passage here, explain now, if you please,
How this might be but *lady's* pleasantries?
Here, now, I'll read it out and test your skill,
Explain please...

CELIMENE.

No, I don't think that I will.
What right have you to that high-handed tone?
To treat me thus? To think to have me known?

ALCESTE.

Don't take it wrongly, simply please explain,
Just justify this slight, discordant strain.

CELIMENE.

I won't. However you care to harangue,
Have at me as you will with tooth and fang.

ALCESTE.

Just say how for a woman this could be
And I'll be quick to see it and agree.

CELIMENE.

Oh no, you're right. I wrote that for Oronte.
It's him, you see, that I most dearly want.
I love his character, his sonneteering,
And everything's exactly what you're fearing.
Go on. Have at me. There's no more explaining.
But I'll hear no more whining and complaining.

ALCESTE. (*Aside:*)

Oh, God! How cruelly she has me tangled!
Was ever man so twisted and so mangled?
When I complain of shame and her disgrace

She throws my rationale back in my face!
 I cannot calm my fear; she undermines it;
 She'll not deny her guilt, but underlines it!
 And yet, my heart's too timid and too tame
 To force myself from she who gives this shame.
 To take the proper tone of bitter scorn.
 To pluck from out my foot this little thorn.
(To CELIMENE:) Ah, infidele, you feed my blind distress,
 To take advantage of my spinelessness.
 You turn my blade aside by now employing
 The great abundant love you've been enjoying!
 At least do me this favor and retract
 The mock confession to that awful act.
 Put up the show of making a defense,
 And I, poor fool, will aid in the pretense.
 I beg you, make show of fidelity,
 And I'll believe each word you tell to me.

CELIMENE.

You silly dunce. Such things you're jealous of!
 I ought to simply drop my misused love.
 Why ever would I need put up a show?
 What makes you think that I would stoop so low?
 And if I felt so strongly for some other,
 Why wouldn't I just tell you, like a brother?
 Considering how I've exposed my feelings
 You still think that you've nosed some double dealings?
 I give you all, but now, apparently,
 That isn't quite enough a guarantee.
 And since a woman's naturally quite cowed,
 From saying what she feels right out loud,
 Since our discretion stops us from expressing
 Just how we might wish to bestow a blessing,
 Should man for whom we break this prohibition
 Turn our exposure into inquisition?
 Should he not rather stand to our defense
 Against the rumoring of malcontents?
 Bah! How I loathe this wicked defamation
 It's hardly worth the angry provocation.
 I'm such a fool, so helpless in my love,

In spite of all that you accuse me of.
I ought to find another to engage,
To give you reason for your jealous rage.

ALCESTE.

I'm such a fool, and knowingly so, too.
How can I trust such honeyed words from you?
And yet, I am constrained here by my fate,
My soul cannot *not* nibble at your bait.
My love would have me know now just how far
You'll go, and quite how treacherous you are.

CELIMENE.

No. I think you don't love me now quite rightly.

ALCESTE.

I swear love to the skies for just you. Nightly!
I wish I was the only one on earth
Who recognized your beauty or your worth,
That Heaven had not tendered any blessing
Of birth or rank, or any slight possessing,
Or that your very life were in some doubt,
Just so I might step in to help you out!
So that my love alone to you might render
The greatest joy one man might yet engender.
'Twould be the greatest thrill if you might owe,
Your very life to that love I would show.

CELIMENE.

Now that's a happy wish for my good fortune!
May God not grant to you the slightest portion!
I'll have you know... Well, here's Monsieur Du Bois!

ACT IV

Scene 4

(DU BOIS, CELIMENE, ALCESTE.)

ALCESTE.

What this? This costume and this look of awe?
What's wrong?

DU BOIS.

Sir...

ALCESTE.

Yes?

DU BOIS.

I've come, Sir, on the double.

ALCESTE.

What is it?

DU BOIS.

It's, I think sir, that it's trouble.

ALCESTE.

What?

DU BOIS.

How's that?

ALCESTE.

Speak! Speak up! Come on, man, spill.

DU BOIS.

Can she hear this?

ALCESTE.

You stupid imbecile!

You waste my time!

DU BOIS.

We must go quickly off!

ALCESTE.

How's that?

DU BOIS.

We can't delay for any sloth!

ALCESTE.

What's this about?

DU BOIS.

We quickly have to fly!

ALCESTE.

And why?

DU BOIS.

We cannot linger for good bye.

ALCESTE.

But what's the reason I'd like to be knowing?

DU BOIS.

The reason, Sir, is we have to be going.

ALCESTE.

I got that! And if you don't now explain,
I'll reach in through your ear and crush your brain!

DU BOIS.

A man came to the house, sir, dressed in black,
Which matched the dark scowl that he shot me back.
He left a paper scrawled with such a scratch
There were no letters I might make to match.
It's for your lawsuit, least that's what I think,
But even Satan couldn't read that ink.

ALCESTE.

And, so? What then? I still cannot make out
How this should put us to such awful rout.

DU BOIS.

Well, sir. 'Twas but an hour's more duration;
A gentleman who's been here on occasion,
He came to find you, looking quite upset,
Gave me a message that you were to get.
(He knew to trust I'd not be slow or stalled.)
He said to say...now what was that man called?

ALCESTE.

Forget the name! The message! So he said it?

DU BOIS.

Well, he's a friend. At least that's sure. Forget it.
He said to run off quick now without fail,
And if you wait you might end up in jail.

ALCESTE.

But nothing more?! What did he tell you then?

DU BOIS.

He asked me for some ink and for a pen.
And wrote this note, which ought to well explain
These things which seem to give you such a strain.

ALCESTE.

All right. Let's have it.

CELIMENE.

What's all this ado?

ALCESTE.

I don't know, but I'm fin'ly getting through.
What are you waiting for you stupid lunk?

DU BOIS. (*After an elaborate search:*)

I think I must have left it on my bunk.

ALCESTE.

Why, I should...

CELIMENE.

No, no, that can wait, Alceste.
For now, you'd better look into this mess.

ALCESTE.

It seems that Fate now makes its occupation
Not letting us complete a conversation.
But 'ere this day is done I shall return,
And you will know the love which I will earn.

End of Act IV

ACT V

Scene 1

(ALCESTE, PHILINTE.)

ALCESTE.

Oh, no. You can debate until you're hoarse...

PHILINTE.

I know it's hard, but why should this blow force...

ALCESTE.

Please don't so much as even waste your breath.

I will not change my mind on threat of death!

I'm so beset by wickedness and vanity,

I mean to here withdraw from all humanity!

Do honor, right and our own constitution

Not howl against this foul persecution?

Here in the face of this rank inquisition

I put my faith in truth of my position,

Which every man within this land of late knows!

To country's shame, and to expand my great woes

His lies have won the day to my undoing!

This gross inequity gets public viewing!

A sycophant whose guile's authenticated

Tears down the law, and anarchy's created!

His perjury's condoned by court's decree

And truth and virtue nod as to agree!

As if, however, that was not enough,

He circulates a scurrilous low bluff.

There is a book that's passing underground,

Upon which all the court has lately frowned;

A book so loathsome, filled with so much slime,

To even speak the title is a crime!

Well, here the dog adds fire to his plea,

By rumoring the book was penned by me!

And then, Oronte, to further foul my name,

Gives credence to the rogue's most wretched claim!

Oronte! An honored man of noble promise,

With whom I've always been completely honest!

Who came to twist my arm that I would tell

My feelings on his verse. The infidel!
 And just because I wouldn't stoop to laud
 A verse which was so seriously flawed,
 He takes my adversary's point of view.
 I see now that's the price of speaking true!
 We'll now be enemies from this forever,
 All this because his sonnet wasn't clever!
 And yet, it's not as though this man's the sole
 Contentious fox with such a shallow goal.
 The teeming masses play a noble game,
 But lie and cheat and swindle all the same!
 I cannot bear to see how man deceives;
 I must take leave from this dark den of thieves
 Hear this, you savages! You wretched race!
 No longer shall you look upon my face!

PHILINTE.

I think you're being just a bit abrupt.
 I'm sure the race is not all that corrupt.
 It seems to me, since you've not yet been jailed,
 Their plans to implicate you have quite failed.
 And since it's so outrageous, how he's acted,
 He'll soon find that he'll be forced to retract it.

ALCESTE.

No, these outrageous lies are now his style
 And none will fault him for this wicked guile.
 However clear his insubordination,
 It only serves to build his reputation.

PHILINTE.

In that case, well, I hardly need to mention
 His rumoring is given scant attention.
 I don't believe you need to be concerned.
 Your suit, too, can be quickly overturned.
 A higher court would put him in his place.
 They'd not...

ALCESTE.

Oh, no. I mean to rest my case.
 Whatever penalty I have to pay,

Injustices must not be swept away.
I'd have it stand for all eternity!
For generations all will turn to me,
To better understand these wicked times
And how a man was victimized by crimes.
Those twenty thousand francs will earn my place
As lone good man amid the world's disgrace.
I treasure this oppression as my ticket
For telling all mankind where they can stick it!

PHILINTE.

Now, look...

ALCESTE.

Why? What's left for us to discuss?
Don't waste your foolish breath with all your fuss.
Do you suppose here to prolong the fictions
Excusing man for wicked derelictions?

PHILINTE.

Oh, no. I won't oppose that point of view:
I will agree that men seem to pursue
A wicked path of trickery and greed
And goodness never seems, now, to succeed.
But is that cause for us to so desert
Mankind, to go and nurse our petty hurt?
Each calumny and every evil faction
Helps us test our philosophy in action.
And that's the greatest challenge to our virtue.
If no man ever agonized or hurt you;
If every man were true, just and correct,
Then all our virtues would have no effect!
Our welcome of the sun would be less loud,
If it was never hid behind a cloud.
A heart well-armed with virtue has the chance...

ALCESTE.

You're very good at arguing your stance;
Your words are always thoughtful, warm and subtle.
But I'll not labor through a long rebuttal.
I cannot quite keep up your praising patter;

My tongue will trip each time it tries to flatter.
I will not stay to be so very vexed,
To live in fear of what I might say next.
Now please leave me to wait for Celimene.
I'll hear what she might have to tell, and then
I'll know, from her reaction to my plan
If she might truly love me as a man.

PHILINTE.

Come, let's go visit Eliante's fair quarters.

ALCESTE.

No, leave me contemplate these sad disorders.
You go. Enjoy your little loving lark.
I'll sit here. In the corner. In the dark.

PHILINTE.

Why that's no company to ease your frown!
I'll see if Eliante will not come down.

ACT V

Scene 2

(CELIMENE, ORONTE, ALCESTE.)

ORONTE.

But, Madam, if I'm to be yours alone,
I do not want a heart that's out on loan.
I need assurance that you would comply
By bidding all these other men good-bye.
And just to show my heart would not be broken,
I'd ask you for a simple little token.
To prove your love is true, and not a jest,
I'd ask that you let go of your Alceste.
Release him, Madam. Send him on his way,
And I will know our love is here to stay.

CELIMENE.

But why this falling off between you lately?
A week ago I heard you praise him greatly.

ORONTE.

Our differences are not so prevalent,
As to whom you're the more benevolent.
So, if you would, *Madame*, please raise your voice,
And I'll decide now, based upon your choice.

ALCESTE. (*Coming out from the corner.*)

That's right, *Madame*, he should not be denied.
I find that I am fully on his side!
The love I feel gives me the same concerns.
I, too, would know for whom your ardor burns.
The time for such evasion now expires.
We want to know which one your will desires.

ORONTE.

I hope you know, Sir, I would not intrude,
If you should win her loving attitude.

ALCESTE.

And I assure you, though this may be pride,
I'll not, with any man, her heart divide.

ORONTE.

If she should think you were the one for her...

ALCESTE.

If you should be the man that she'd prefer...

ORONTE.

I swear I'll not set foot inside this place.

ALCESTE.

I swear I'll never look upon her face.

ORONTE.

Now, give us, please, your clear and firm reply.

ALCESTE.

We both demand you break this foolish tie.

ORONTE.

Just say which one you'd have to be your own.

ALCESTE.

The other one will leave you well alone.

ORONTE.

What's this? Do you not have a resolution?

ALCESTE.

What? Even now you can't come to conclusion?

CELIMENE.

Oh, gentlemen, please stop this foolish stunt!

I cannot act with instrument so blunt!

It isn't that my choice is not most clear;

I know quite well which one I hold more dear.

It's just that such a public, crass expression,

To me, shows no degree of kind discretion.

I cannot make a formal proclamation

With both men here to hear the declaration.

A little subtlety and some compassion,

Can hardly have gone so far out of fashion!

There are more gentle ways one might discover

The news that one no longer is a lover.

ORONTE.

No, go ahead. Please, Madam, don't resist.

I want to know your thoughts.

ALCESTE.

And I insist.

There's no one here will think you so uncouth,

If you present us with unvarnished truth.

We both will owe you a substantial debt,

Once you might drop the pose of a coquette.

We'll be most pleased if you don't tease and bait us,

If I'm refused, at least I'll know my status.

And should you choose to stand there saying naught

It will support the worst thing that I've thought.

If all you do is hem and haw and squirm,

My worst suspicions you will thus confirm.

ORONTE.

I thank you warmly for the righteous way,

You said exactly what I meant to say.

CELIMENE.

Oh, this is all too troublesome and vexing
Must you two make this meeting so perplexing?
Have I not told you of my gentle nature?
Here's Eliante. She'll take my side, I wager.

ACT V

Scene 3

(ELIANTE, PHILINTE, CELIMENE, ORONTE, ALCESTE.)

CELIMENE.

Good cousin, I'm beset on either side
By these two men, who will not be denied,
But want me to quite publicly reveal
Which one of them has more or less appeal;
That I should, right here, tally up the score,
And kick the losing party out the door.
Have you yet heard of such an inquisition?

ELIANTE.

You really want to know of my position?
I'm not in favor of such insularity;
I'm all for openness and for sincerity.

ORONTE.

I think that that's the last of your support.

ALCESTE.

Surrender, Madam. You've come up quite short.

ORONTE.

It's time to speak, *Madame*. You can't ignore.

ALCESTE.

Or else your silence will say even more.

ORONTE.

You can resolve this all with just one word.

ALCESTE.

But if you don't, your answer will be heard.

ACT V**Scene 4**

(ACASTE, CLITANDRE, ARSINOE, PHILINTE, ELIANTE,
ORONTE, CELIMENE, ALCESTE.)

ACASTE.

Madame, forgive our interrupting, thus,
But there's a little matter to discuss.

CLITANDRE. (*To ORONTE and ALCESTE:*)

Your presence, Sirs, is lucky happenstance,
This matter impacts you as well, by chance.

ARSINOE. (*To CELIMENE:*)

I'm only here because my arm was twisted;
I didn't want to, but these men insisted.
They came to me aggrieved and all upset,
About the lowest thing I've heard of yet.
And knowing of your virtue and good grace,
I'd not accept that you could be so base,
No matter how their proof might indicate,
I've set aside our differences of late,
To back you up in these considerations,
And see you clear yourself of accusations.

ACASTE.

Yes, Madam, all of us would like to see
Just how calm and resourceful you might be.
Clitandre got this note from you last week?

CLITANDRE.

And to Acaste, you wrote this sharp critique?

ACASTE. (*To ORONTE and ALCESTE:*)

The script, you see, comes from familiar source,
Considering her breadth of...intercourse.

I fear to several friends such letters go;

But wait, Sirs. This is something you should know:

(*Reading:*) "You tax my idle friendships, and have seized
Upon the notion that I am more pleased

When you are absent than when you're around.
 Your argument, Sir, stands on shaky ground,
 And I demand a quick apology,
 Or you'll get no forgiveness, here, from me.
 Our bumbling friend, the Viscount, you so fear..."

(Looking up:) A shame the fellow's not around to hear.
 "Our bumbling friend, whom you allude to first,
 Can bore me sometimes 'til I'm fit to burst,
 And since the day I saw him spend his power,
 By standing at the well almost an hour,
 Depositing small rivulets of spit
 To contemplate the circles made by it,
 I've haven't thought so very highly of him,
 And hardly, as you note, to think to love him.
 And for the next you list, the small Marquis,"

(Looking up:) I do believe, good gentlemen, that's me.
 "Who, yesterday, sat squeezing at my hand:
 Well, I can think of no one in the land,
 Who's quite as insignificant or small;
 The only valued thing of him at all,
 Are his good sword and his unfailing cape,
 Which helps, at least, to mitigate his shape.
 And now, the man whose ribbons are in green..."²

(To ALCESTE:) It's you, now, Sir, the lady seems to mean.
³"His bluntness may amuse me, I confess,
 But otherwise he can be quite a pest.
 And then there is our friend the sonneteer,"

(To ORONTE:) She's speaking of your talents, sir, I fear.
 "The sonneteer has got it in his head
 That he should write what never should be read.

² Costumers have a habit of not regarding this line, which suggests a green costume for Alceste, and this creates the challenge of writing a new rendering of this line with each new choice of color. My favorite: "And now, the man whose outfits are of orange... A shade, it seems, indicative of your tinge."

³ While the original treats this all as a monologue by Acaste, the director may choose to have Acaste pass the note to Alceste, to read his portion, who in turn, passes it to Oronte to read "The sonneteer has got it in his head..." (It lends some greater impact if the victim of each critique is reading the words describing himself.)

He transcribes every little thing he knows.
 His verse is quite as wretched as his prose!
 So know, my entertainment's much more poor,
 Than it would be if you might visit more.
 In fact my spirits have severely flagged
 For all the parties to which I've been dragged.
 Such festive nights are not so greatly treasured,
 When not shared with the one with whom I'm pleased."

CLITANDRE.

And now for me. (*Reading from another letter:*) "You mention your
 Clitandre

His honeyed speeches make me feel no fonder.
 I flee from him as I might an infection,
 So far is he from stirring my affection.
 In thinking that he's loved he's as absurd
 As you for *not* believing in my word.
 Please trade with him the premises you hold,
 And promise me that you will make more bold
 In coming out to act as my dear cure
 For all the other visits I endure."
 It's quite a portrait that these letters frame
 And for such *congress*, you know, there's a name!
 Enough. We shall make known both near and far,
 Of what a tender character you are.

ACASTE.

I'll not waste time, *Madame*, on such commotions.
 I'll spare my insignificant emotions,
 For those more honest loves which, you may see,
 Might squeeze the little hand of this Marquis.

ACT V

Scene 5

(CELIMENE, ELIANTE, ARSINOE, ALCESTE, ORONTE,
PHILINTE.)

ORONTE.

So! After all the love you so expressed,
You plunge this dagger deep within my breast!
Your love's a banner, which has been unfurled,
To welcome every wanderer of the world!
How long I've been so stupid and so blind;
I thank you for enlightening my mind.
My heart's my own, and that new resolution
Will be a very special retribution.

(*To ALCESTE:*) She's yours, sir, and may you have plenty of her,
That is if you can find a way to love her.

ACT V

Scene 6

(CELIMENE, ELIANTE, ARSINOE, ALCESTE, PHILINTE.)

ARSINOE. (*To CELIMENE:*)

No longer can I keep respectful silence,
Not after I've observed the dreadful violence
Which you've performed upon these men. I'm shocked
At just how these fine men have been so mocked.
Forgetting all the others, here, Alceste,
The finest man our city has possessed,
Lays down his heart based on your wicked bluff...

ALCESTE.

I thank you, Madam, that will be enough.
I'd ask you not concern about my health,
And leave me please to fight my wars myself.
For though I might feel some small gratitude,
My heart does not feel quite the latitude
To repay your concern for how I'm used,
As you'd not be the alternate I'd choose.

ARSINOE.

How dare you, sir, assume that I would care
 To pick up after this most base affair!
 You must think quite a bit of your own merit
 To think that every lady wants to snare it.
 Your vain imagination weaves great weavings,
 To so suppose I want this lady's leavings!
 I hate to burst your most deluded bubble,
 But I would think you hardly worth the trouble.
 Stay here with her, and be this hussy's lover
 You two are simply perfect for each other.

ACT V**Scene 7**

(CELIMENE, ELIANTE, ALCESTE, PHILINTE.)

ALCESTE. (*To CELIMENE:*)

Well, I have shown a little bit of poise,
 In letting all the others make their noise.
 Have I remained sufficiently serene?
 And may I now...

CELIMENE.

Go on, Sir. Vent your spleen.
 Have at me; call me any name you please;
 I can't contest it. My heart now agrees.
 I've wronged you so that I cannot now hide
 Behind my impudence or foolish pride.
 While all these others I might wish to fight,
 I recognize how far you're in the right.
 I've earned your retribution to the hilt,
 And realize the fullness of my guilt.
 I've lost your fair esteem through this foul treason
 And if you hate me, you have plenty reason.
 Go on; Have at me, please.

ALCESTE.

You traitoress!
 With all you've now done...How my fate resists!

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