

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Copyright Protection. This play (the “Play”) is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations, whether through bilateral or multilateral treaties or otherwise, and including, but not limited to, all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, and the Berne Convention.

Reservation of Rights. All rights to this Play are strictly reserved, including, without limitation, professional and amateur stage performance rights; motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video, and sound recording rights; rights to all other forms of mechanical or electronic reproduction now known or yet to be invented, such as CD-ROM, CD-I, DVD, photocopying, and information storage and retrieval systems; and the rights of translation into non-English languages.

Performance Licensing and Royalty Payments. Amateur and stock performance rights to this Play are controlled exclusively by Playscripts, Inc. (“Playscripts”). No amateur or stock production groups or individuals may perform this Play without obtaining advance written permission from Playscripts. Required royalty fees for performing this Play are specified online at the Playscripts website (www.playscripts.com). Such royalty fees may be subject to change without notice. Although this book may have been obtained for a particular licensed performance, such performance rights, if any, are not transferable. Required royalties must be paid every time the Play is performed before any audience, whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. All licensing requests and inquiries concerning amateur and stock performance rights should be addressed to Playscripts (see contact information on opposite page).

Inquiries concerning all other rights should be addressed to Playscripts, as well; such inquiries will be communicated to the author and the author’s agent, as applicable.

Restriction of Alterations. There shall be no deletions, alterations, or changes of any kind made to the Play, including the changing of character gender, the cutting of dialogue, the cutting of music, or the alteration of objectionable language, unless directly authorized by Playscripts. The title of the Play shall not be altered.

Author Credit. Any individual or group receiving permission to produce this Play is required to give credit to the author as the sole and exclusive author of the Play. This obligation applies to the title page of every program distributed in connection with performances of the Play, and in any instance that the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing, or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. The name of the author must appear on a separate line, in which no other name appears, immediately beneath the title and of a font size at least 50% as large as the largest letter used in the title of the Play. No person, firm, or entity may receive credit larger or more prominent than that accorded the author. The name of the author may not be abbreviated or otherwise altered from the form in which it appears in this Play.

Publisher Attribution. All programs, advertisements, and other printed material distributed or published in connection with the amateur or stock production of the Play shall include the following notice:

Produced by special arrangement with Playscripts, Inc.
(www.playscripts.com)

Prohibition of Unauthorized Copying. Any unauthorized copying of this book or excerpts from this book is strictly forbidden by law. Except as otherwise permitted by applicable law, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means now known or yet to be invented, including, without limitation, photocopying or scanning, without prior permission from Playscripts.

Statement of Non-affiliation. This Play may include references to brand names and trademarks owned by third parties, and may include references to public figures. Playscripts is not necessarily affiliated with these public figures, or with the owners of such trademarks and brand names. Such references are included solely for parody, political comment, or other permitted purposes.

Permissions for Sound Recordings and Musical Works. This Play may contain directions calling for the performance of a portion, or all, of a musical work *not included in the Play’s score*, or performance of a sound recording of such a musical work. Playscripts has not obtained permissions to perform such works. The producer of this Play is advised to obtain such permissions, if required in the context of the production. The producer is directed to the websites of the U.S. Copyright Office (www.copyright.gov), ASCAP (www.ascap.com), BMI (www.bmi.com), and NMPA (www.nmpa.org) for further information on the need to obtain permissions, and on procedures for obtaining such permissions.

The Rules in Brief

- 1) Do NOT perform this Play without obtaining prior permission from Playscripts, and without paying the required royalty.
- 2) Do NOT photocopy, scan, or otherwise duplicate any part of this book.
- 3) Do NOT alter the text of the Play, change a character's gender, delete any dialogue, cut any music, or alter any objectionable language, unless explicitly authorized by Playscripts.
- 4) DO provide the required credit to the author(s) and the required attribution to Playscripts in all programs and promotional literature associated with any performance of this Play.

For more details on these and other rules, see the opposite page.

Copyright Basics

This Play is protected by United States and international copyright law. These laws ensure that authors are rewarded for creating new and vital dramatic work, and protect them against theft and abuse of their work.

A play is a piece of property, fully owned by the author, just like a house or car. You must obtain permission to use this property, and must pay a royalty fee for the privilege—whether or not you charge an admission fee. Playscripts collects these required payments on behalf of the author.

Anyone who violates an author's copyright is liable as a copyright infringer under United States and international law. Playscripts and the author are entitled to institute legal action for any such infringement, which can subject the infringer to actual damages, statutory damages, and attorneys' fees. A court may impose statutory damages of up to \$150,000 for willful copyright infringements. U.S. copyright law also provides for possible criminal sanctions. Visit the website of the U.S. Copyright Office (www.copyright.gov) for more information.

THE BOTTOM LINE: If you break copyright law, you are robbing a playwright and opening yourself to expensive legal action. Follow the rules, and when in doubt, ask us.

Playscripts, Inc.
450 Seventh Ave, Suite 809
New York, NY 10123

toll-free phone: 1-866-NEW-PLAY
email: info@playscripts.com
website: www.playscripts.com

Dramatis Personae

ALCESTE, in love with Celimene

PHILINTE, Alceste's friend

ORONTE, in love with Celimene

CELMENE, Alceste's beloved

ELIANTE, Celimene's cousin

ARSINOE, a friend of Celimene's

ACASTE

CLITANDRE

} Marquis

BASQUE, Celimene's servant

A GUARD, of the Tribunal of the Marshals

DUBOIS, 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 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 demonstrations of 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 psychological torment are simply much more fascinating to follow.

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 Misanthrope is built around two separate “trials,” mostly stemming from Alceste’s inability to keep his mouth shut. One of these occurs entirely off stage, and we hear rumors and reports of the vague details. This trial has apparently dragged on, tied up in the “official” courts. Alceste is apparently 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 likely 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 redundant, and rather than risking confrontation, the rest of society has taken to looking the other way.

Molière never explains this lawsuit. 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 as to the legal merits of his case. This was, of course, a situation rife with 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 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 versus his desire to prove his own rightness that occupies the bulk of the play.

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 Alceste struggles to resist, and layers his response with implications that the poetry isn’t really any good, eventually Oronte corners him into acknowledging this outright. Infuriated, Oronte storms off, and rumor of their confrontation quickly spreads.

The rumor finds its way to a tribunal of Marshals, who call Alceste in for a reprimand. This tribunal was an extra-legal process independent of the courts. It was not intended to punish or imprison, but rather as a stop-gap measure, in which the Marshals would insert themselves into a growing conflict 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, saying, 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 going forward, and the unnamed rogue spreads a rumor, suggesting that Alceste is the author of 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.

Simultaneous to these trials, we have followed the oft-interrupted "romance" of Alceste and Celimene. She is the worst possible woman for Alceste, 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 perhaps she only serves to feed his underlying self-righteous anger, with something else 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 field of psychology, as Molière developed his characters with unflinching psychological 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, 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 find themselves thrown. Minimizing this, or glossing it over with the veneer of too much courtly behavior, or weighting it down 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 baroque 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 biggest 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 will stir an emotional response, simply in the process of speaking.

With the fear of being unable to understand lifted from their shoulders, the audience can sit back and better 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 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. When an audience “signs on” for the game of a play that is written in verse, they will listen to hear just how we play by that game’s rules, and gain satisfaction in seeing those rules employed, while still managing to surprise and delight them with unforeseen word choices.

Added Notes on this 40-minute Version

My goal in this shortened work is to open the world of Molière to as many as I might, and the opportunity to create tightened versions of these plays gives me the hope that the spirit of Molière might be sparked in the hearts of actors and audiences who would never otherwise see him, while challenging young actors to perform with style and language that carries them above and beyond their usual limitations. In order to make this variation work, I restricted myself almost exclusively to dialogue that forwards the action, while sadly leaving out some delicious wordplay. While much of the action should be self-explanatory, a glance at the original (available via Playscripts, Inc.) might resolve any questions of intent.

My hope is that, with the door to Molière wedged open to student-actors early on, they will be comfortable passing through that door again and again through the course of a long career.

Timing

This play has been timed to run under 40 minutes, but this demands an ever more aggressive attack on the speeches, as the verse rolls by without pause for “thought.” This is not to say there is not enough time to get one’s points across clearly, nor need the actors race through the dialogue. The key is delineating “not pausing” from “picking up the pace.” Most actors speeding through material that is this textured become incomprehensible.

And yet, a simple elimination of pauses between one character’s lines and the next (people whose objectives are so compelling that they “can’t wait to get a word in edgewise”) will shorten the play by as much as fifteen minutes. If we take “silence” as our cue, then we’ve already dropped the ball. If we are thinking while our fellow performers are speaking, then, as in any heated discussion, there is never a moment of silence.

The “motor” which drives this play is the iambic pentameter, and this is a terrific opportunity for actors to participate in a rhythm

that is larger than themselves as, theoretically at least, ten one-word lines can be spoken in the same span as a single ten-word line. It's an important exercise in ensemble acting, one which may well dazzle your audiences in the process.

Have fun!
Tim Mooney

Acknowledgments

The full-length 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 was as follows:

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

THE MISANTHROPE

(SHORT VERSION)

by Timothy Mooney

FROM THE PLAY BY JEAN BAPTISTE POQUELIN DE MOLIÈRE

ACT I

Scene One

(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.

I really must insist, as your good friend...

ALCESTE.

Your friend? Oh don't include me in that trend!

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, man! You should die of self-abasement!

You greet a man with firm and fond embrace;

You wish him every benefit and grace;

Yet when I ask about him, to your shame,

You barely can recall the fellow's name!

PHILINTE.

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
 These toadies who hug everyone they know,
 Would fool a friend while flattering a foe!
 And as you lay it on so thick and deep,
 Your friendship, I must say, comes all too cheap!
 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.

Let inmost thought of man be known and heard,
 To boldly be expressed in every word!

PHILINTE.

So you would, when with one whom you deplore,
 Make pains to so apprise him on that score?

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.
 In short, when they act more like horse's feces,
 I want to break away from my own species!

PHILINTE.

So from your hatred, no man might escape?

ALCESTE.

I view all men as one step from the ape.

PHILINTE.

And all are indexed with this same disgust?
 There's some...

ALCESTE.

No, all the race has gone quite bust.
 Just look at how they treat that stupid brute
 Who has engaged me in this silly suit!

There's no one who won't know with but a glance
That he's the greatest rogue to put on pants!
The world knows him a knave who cheats and tricks—
And all agree! There, no one contradicts!
But if there is some fame, reward or credit...
The honest vie in vain; that oaf will get it!

PHILINTE.

The world we live in needs some tact and charm;
An angry virtue does the greater harm.

ALCESTE.

And if a friend should denigrate 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.
It's no worse than to see a vulture waiting,
A monkey play a prank, or rabbits mating.

ALCESTE.

I won't give in to politics and guile.

PHILINTE.

And who will represent you at your 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'll never sink to beg, to cheat—

PHILINTE.

But 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?
 Of all, it's Celimene for whom you fret,
 Who seems, at best, a flighty, bold coquette!
 With traits which you so fervently despise,
 How does she measure up within your eyes?

ALCESTE.

I still see all her weaknesses and faults
 I separate the truthful from the false.
 And yet, 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.
 Her cousin, Eliante would be my pick.
 Her heart is true and fast, not sly and slick.

ALCESTE.

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

Scene Two

(ORONTE, ALCESTE, PHILINTE.)

ORONTE.

Our Celimene, it seems, has 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.
 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, or unaware that he is being spoken to.*)

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

ALCESTE.

Who, me, Sir?

ORONTE.

You, yes you. Do they offend you?

ALCESTE.

Why, no. I never knew I might befriend you!

ORONTE.

I cannot be the first here on that score;
The world must beat a path to your front door!

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:
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.

ORONTE.

Good God, man! I agree right to the letter!
And all this makes me love you even better!
You know, the King treats me with some due deference,
And should you find some matter needing preference...
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.
"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.
'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 suppose that we can't tell 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 much the same;
I told him that a gentleman must not
Give in to jotting down each little thought.

ORONTE.
And so, you're saying that 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.

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.
 It borrows phrasings that some feeble hack lent;
 Yet nature never spoke with such an accent.
 It seems such stuff, that's so preferred today,
 Is filled with words, with nothing, though, to say.

ORONTE.

I think I'd say, 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 somewhat 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.

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.

Scene Three

(PHILINTE, ALCESTE.)

PHILINTE.

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 One

(ALCESTE, CELIMENE.)

ALCESTE.

Madame, shall my thoughts be quite plainly stated?
The things you do make 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,
That 'ere too long I'll be constrained to go.

CELMENE.

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!

CELMENE.

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.
The hopes you stir of dividend sublime,
Keep all these suitors 'round you all the time!
But please, I think 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 that 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?
Or does his giggle, or that shrill falsetto
Carve up your heart as though with a stiletto?

CELMENE.

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.

Is not the fact I love you quite enough?

ALCESTE.

What stops you giving all these men that bluff?

CELIMENE.

To stick my neck out with such declaration
I'd think would merit some consideration.

ALCESTE.

But where's the certainty that you don't say
The same thing to these men in just this way?

CELIMENE.

Well, to save you from your suspicious gall,
I have no choice but to retract it all!

ALCESTE.

Again, within this war the demon wins!
This love is punishment for all my sins.
However much you might wish to deny,
No man has ever loved as much as I.

CELIMENE.

Your love is quite unique, I do not doubt;
You show it in the way you chew me out!

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...

Scene Two

(ALCESTE, CELIMENE, BASQUE.)

CELIMENE.

What is it?

BASQUE.

It's Acaste.

CELIMENE.

Ah, show him in.

Scene Three

(ALCESTE, CELIMENE.)

ALCESTE.

You don't imagine that you might just once,
Not open up the door to every dunce?

CELIMENE.

You'd like me to antagonize him so?

ALCESTE.

Why keep from him what you and I 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.

ALCESTE.

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

Scene Four

(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.

CELIMENE.

You must stay here, my dear.

ALCESTE.

I tell you no.

CELIMENE.

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

Scene Five

(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.

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!

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.

ACASTE.

And our Geralde?

CELIMENE.

His talk takes but one course,
'Tis nothing but the hunt, the hound, the horse.

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!
No matter how you yawn and stretch your necks it...
Is futile to attempt to cue her exit.

ACASTE.

And of Adraste?

CELIMENE.

His ego's so inflated
That at the slightest snub he's agitated.

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?

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.

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.

PHILINTE.

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

CELIMENE.

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!

ALCESTE.

The laughers, Madam, give 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.

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.

CELIMENE.

In short, sir, if we all marched to your drum,
The end of all endearments soon would come.

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 bony lover has "a slender grace,"
And fat one has "a most majestic waist."
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...

Scene Six

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

BASQUE.

Sir, there's a fellow here
Who has some private business for your ear.

ALCESTE.

There is no business might deliver me.

BASQUE.

He's dressed in tailcoat and his livery
Is trimmed in gold.

(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 One

(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.
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.
I have a strong physique, a handsome face,
A narrow waist and all my teeth in place.
To visit with them all the lords implore me,
And all the lasses say how they adore me.

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;
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.
I might express my interest here a little
If she might simply...meet me in the middle.

CLITANDRE.

So has 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.

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've got yourself a deal.
But hush!

Scene Two

(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.

Scene Three

(BASQUE, CELIMENE, ACASTE, CLITANDRE.)

BASQUE.

Arsinoe

Is here, *Madame*.

CELIMENE.

What might she want today?

ACASTE.

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

CELIMENE.

Oh, yes, it's all a show.

Since no one offers her advances lude,
She hides behind the stiff veneer of prude,
And late at night she prays she might be blessed
With such a suitor as our dear Alceste.
In short, she is a vicious, petty bitty,
With no redeeming substance, more's the pity,
I...

Scene Four

(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, 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.
There were 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.
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.
And think that I might repay you your due,
By telling of what people say of you!
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.
"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!"
 I tried, but 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!
 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, some slight respect.

CELIMENE.

I think, *Madame*, we're quick to censure sin
 According to what season we are in.
 Perhaps when my attractions pass their spring,
 My tone will take on just your angry ring,

ARSINOE.

The way you flaunt your age with such a brag;
 A listener would think me some old hag!
 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?
 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?
 From this, there's but one thesis to deduce;
 Which is these men come for a love that's loose!
 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!

ARSINOE.

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.
This timely man comes now just to say "hi."
And you'll find him more interesting than I.

Scene Five

(ALCESTE, ARSINOE.)

ARSINOE.

I'm glad she gives me this chance to approach
You while we wait upon my coming coach.
I'm only sad to see they sell you short
In paying proper tribute at the court.

ALCESTE.

What reason have I, Madam, to feel slighted?
What have I done that might get them excited?

ARSINOE.

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.
I'd not call it significant, exactly,
When it's afforded every little lackey.

ARSINOE.

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.
And anyone so candid or so blunt,
For courtier's career should never hunt.

ARSINOE.

All right, but if I might yet 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.

ALCESTE.

It's not kind to suggest some 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.
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 One

(ELIANTE, PHILINTE.)

PHILINTE.

He acted like a little brat, throughout
You should have see the way he'd preen and pout.
"No Sirs," he said, "that far I will not sink;
I cannot help it if his verses stink.
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!
It ought to be a law, with words so trite,
That he should have to burn the thing outright!"
And then, extending this most feeble limb,
While 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.
It's rather silly stuff to have so fought on,
But I would wish his attitude had caught on.

PHILINTE.

The better that I know the man, the more
I wonder at the love he would endure.
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.

PHILINTE.

I fear Alceste has gone out on a limb,
With one who will be less than kind to him.
If he knew better, he might turn and find
What you might give him, were he not so blind.

ELIANTE.

I would not lift a finger to destroy
 A love for her which brings him any joy.
 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.

PHILINTE.

Well, if you 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.

Scene Two

(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.
 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?
 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:) This letter that she wrote Oronte, 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 troubled, shattered spirit.
I have a proposition, if you'd hear it:
Avenge me for that crime I know you hate!

ELIANTE.

But how, Sir?

ALCESTE.

Let us two entwine our fate.
Let's punish her with love that's so devout
That all the court and town must talk about!

ELIANTE.

I sympathize, good sir, with all your feeling,
It's not that what you offer's not appealing,
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.
And here the traitress comes! I'll see we're sundered,
And bring to you a heart no longer plundered.

Scene Three

(CELIMENE, ALCESTE.)

ALCESTE. (*Aside:*)

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

CELIMENE.

Why is it that you're giving me that look?

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!
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.
From this day forth come not within my sight!
Where you're concerned, I don't know wrong from right!

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.

CELIMENE.

So this is what brought forward all that gush?

ALCESTE.

Can you look at this thing and not now blush?
Perhaps, since signature is in some doubt...

CELIMENE.

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

ALCESTE.

And can you yet suggest the supposition
That with Oronte you've yet 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!
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.

ALCESTE.

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

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.

ALCESTE. (*Aside:*)

Oh, God! How cruelly she has me tangled!
Was ever man so twisted and so mangled?
(*To CELIMENE:*) Ah, infidele, you feed my blind distress,
To take advantage of my spinelessness.
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.

CELIMENE.

You silly dunce. Such things you're jealous of!
I ought to simply drop my misused love.
See, if I felt so strongly for some other,
Why wouldn't I just tell you...like a brother?

ALCESTE.

I'm such a fool: 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 man 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!
'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!

Scene Four

(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'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.

A man who came to find you, 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.

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 One

(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.

His lies have won the day to my undoing!
This gross inequity gets public viewing!
There is a book so loathsome, with such 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!
We'll now be enemies from this forever,
All this because his sonnet wasn't clever!
Hear this, you savages! You wretched race!
No longer shall you look upon my face!

PHILINTE.

A higher court would put him in his place.
They'd not...

ALCESTE.

Oh, no. I mean to rest my case.
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.
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.

Scene Two

(CELIMENE, ORONTE, ALCESTE.)

ORONTE.

But, Madam, if I'm to be yours alone,
I do not want a heart that's out on loan.
To prove your love is true, and not a jest,
I'd ask that you let go of your Alceste.

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.

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 time for such evasion now expires.
We want to know which one your will desires.

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.

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

ALCESTE.

The other one will leave you well alone.

CELIMENE.

But gentlemen, a public, crass expression
 To me, shows no degree of kind discretion.
 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.

Scene Three

(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;
 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.

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

ALCESTE.

Or else your silence will say even more.

Scene Four

(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.

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:*) "Our bumbling friend, you note, 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;
I see no value in the man at all!
And then, the man whose ribbons are in green..."²
(*To ALCESTE:*) It's you, now, Sir, the lady seems to mean.
"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.
"He transcribes every little thing he knows.
His verse is quite as wretched as his prose!
So know, such festive nights are not so 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."
It's quite a portrait that these letters frame
And for such *congress*, you know, there's a name!

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."

**THIS PLAY IS
NOT OVER!**

In order to protect our associated authors against copyright infringement, we cannot currently present full electronic scripts.

To purchase books with the full text, and to apply for performance rights, click ORDER or go back to:

www.playscripts.com