

THE STUMBLING BLOCK OF MORALS By Palissot

Adapted and Translated by Frank J. Morlock

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EText by Dagny

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C 2003

** Palissot is attacking Diderot under the name Sophanes. In French this has the connotation of Wise–donkey. It might be better to substitute Diderot's name for Sophanes, or a name like Dodo or Dodie which recall the extinct bird famous for it's stupidity. That's as near as one can come to the double entendre in English. Palissot attacked Diderot in another play, the one for which he remains famous, Les Philosophes (The Philosophers).**

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CHARACTERS:

- HONORE* (*Gernance in the original)
- LYSIMON, a relative and friend of Honore
- SOPHANES, a false philosopher
- MONDOR, financier and man of pleasure
- ROSALIE
- CLORINDE
- ERMINIE
- MARTON, Rosalie's servant
- THE ABBE FICHET
- A COACHMAN
- A LACKEY

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The Action takes place in Paris.

ACT I

ROSALIE: (busy considering different fabrics) Leave me alone to contemplate these new fabrics. What vanity! How beautiful the colors are.

MARTON: Well, at last you are rejoicing in my advice! Are you repenting of having followed it? You are going to eclipse our proudest beauties.

ROSALIE: This Peking ought to be admirable in the light.

MARTON: (showing her a jewel box) This is worth a bit more. Look at these jewels. There, by Jove, solid presents—that can be changed into hard cash. Long live such works.

ROSALIE: This hat enchants me. How it must embellish me! Quick, a mirror, Marton. I want to try it.

MARTON: Let the chiffon be.

ROSALIE: My word, the celebrated Bertin has been outdone. Look at this gracefully twined feather. What a success I'm going to have at the Opera Ball.

MARTON: I recognize my sex in these stupidities. At bottom, this taste for luxury is not blameworthy. But time's come to join utility with pleasantness. It's time to think. See this gold, which certainly comes from Mondor the financier. Its shape is antique and perhaps awkward; and as for me, I'd give all these fashionable chiffons for such a jewel.

ROSALIE: Well, I'll make you a gift of it. This Mondor is so sad and of such a bad tone.

MARTON: You could show him a little complaisance.

ROSALIE: No. I am doing myself violence to endure him. And I cannot suffice to the boring proposals, that he constantly holds me in. With his diamonds, whose collection dazzles and intoxicates him, it's becoming more difficult to live each day; then there's his English hair which he curls at home. But he isn't coming to bring me his boredom.

MARTON: Are you still burning to have a carriage? Well, if he offered it to you—would you have the courage to refuse to let him be one of your friends?

ROSALIE: That would be paying dearly for it in my opinion.

MARTON: Believe me—you must renounce this delicacy. You join to your allures the flower of your youth. Try to profit from it. But for your own good realize that Mondor is a man enjoying favor, an essential man! His clever politics has taught him to make himself useful to the passions of the great. On that head alone he must be kept.

ROSALIE: Does he think he can raise himself by such employment?

MARTON: Does he think it? Why, no question. Are you still unaware that in this century the caduceus honored is the one that is sure to become everything. And that no condition is better greeted by all. It's a favorable act and reduced to a system by more than one important person, by more even than the Abbe. Know our morals and disabuse yourself. Don't you notice they respect us! In the event one is pretty, are ancestors needed? France, by degrees, has polished itself to such a point that we give tone to the town, to the court. And all is pardoned to errors of love. Be confident on that score by my experience. The one that sees you today with indifference, will tomorrow, perhaps, place all his pride in receiving a glance from you.

ROSALIE: You're recounting a romance to me.

MARTON: A romance? No, my darling; Do you have less attractions than Nais and Glycera? You've been able to observe them. Of their obscure origins the world hardly retains a confused memory. They are unaware in what places their youth was spent. Well, one's a Marquise and the other's a Viscountess.

ROSALIE: What! They can forget themselves to this degree?

MARTON: Surely. Whatever injures pride is forgotten in a moment. So then, have a bit of confidence in yourself. I see at your chariot a man of finance. One of our Senators.

ROSALIE: Ah! Don't tell me about him. A dandy in a gown has little appeal for me.

MARTON: You've already known how to charm a Great Wit en titre. And for you he's already composed more than one epistle.

ROSALIE: Yes, the conquest was rare. A blase scribbler who goes about dragging a worn out persiflage

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everywhere. I am unaware of what talents he boasts of his person—but as soon as he sings, the pleasure bores.

MARTON: I have no more respect for his voice than you do. Still, you'll agree it's nice at your age. This glory must sometimes be inconvenient—to receive incense from a fashionable poet. But what seems to me to be more seducing to you is to have obtained the imposing suffrage, the advice, the friendship of great personages, one that philosophy has placed among the ranks of the sages. To serve these gentlemen is not done by half.

ROSALIE: Don't tell me any more of his friend, Marton.

MARTON: Of Honore?

ROSALIE: Doubtless.

MARTON: Still, I understand you. And if I believe in Honore—indeed he has the appearance of a happy mortal—the fortunate conqueror who must enchain your heart to his destiny. Romantic—and that's what pleases your age group. It's through you that love had its first homage. His charming face must have tempted you. And what he proposes to you rightfully flatters you. But with him, especially beware of being imprudent. And if possible, keep an indifferent soul.

ROSALIE: Either I know myself badly, or in my heart it's merely a simple inclination that speaks in his favor. I admire his good faith; his inexperience, his love is so real, so full of confidence that he believes whatever I want, and makes it his own. This sentimental tone is new to me. For, without disguising from myself what belongs to his youth, without blinding myself—still, his respect interests me. Besides, you know he's master of his destiny, and that he can, indeed, freely dispose of his hand. One day he ought to enjoy the greatest ease. Would you, putting faith in an idle hope, counsel me, Marton, not to attach myself to a more substantial happiness that seems to seek me out?

MARTON: You're so used to subjugating Honore. In his presence you've conducted yourself with so much reserve and discretion that I have no doubt of your intention. Still, your dissipated and flighty temperament doesn't suit well with marriage. But employ your rights right up until that day and learn how to join prudence and love.— You owe Mondor some gratitude.

ROSALIE: Peace, Marton. Someone's coming. It's Honore's friend.

(Enter Sophanes.)

SOPHANES: Well! My Rosalie, finally the day has come, prepared for by my efforts, escorted by love, in which our destinies are going to assume a new face. I don't know if Honore has lost his head, but I can depict ill his petulant ardor towards you; he comes from cajoling you to complete his happiness. To excite him further, I've disputed his idea: he doesn't listen to me. His head is determined. And never has passion shown such vigor. I leave to you the care of increasing it further. You can now dress in homespun. I will answer for success.

ROSALIE: Why, my dear Philosopher, can you answer fully for me? We're to be reborn in his heart. If he came to blush? If the public? custom—?

SOPHANES: Custom, as you know, is the scorn of the sage. We've convinced him. Our purest feelings—aren't they always the work of our senses? Why seek a chimeric happiness elsewhere? Morality is only a word. We cling to the physical. You are pleasing to Honore. Well, everything's for the best. Love had its end in mind when it created your eyes. What can you lack with the gift of pleasing? What reproach could Honore make to you? You couldn't have reached the age I see you at without being permitted some attempt of your rights. I like your embarrassment. Why do you forbid it to yourself? You are reproaching yourself for a feeling and a tender heart? Only a misanthrope in his gloomy leisure makes a virtue of scoffing at pleasure. As for me, I sympathize with human weakness; and Ninon, to my liking beats Lucretia.

ROSALIE: Ah! Mr. Sophanes, are you flattering me?

SOPHANES: Not I. I say what I think. Ask Marton.

MARTON: My word, at least this morality is very useful.

SOPHANES: Natural instinct is my rule and my code. I don't bow to those base scruples which rock the cradle of common humans. And I leave to pedants those austere precepts put crime and weakness out of the nest.

ROSALIE: Indeed, but does Honore think as you? And suppose he came to change?

SOPHANES: No, he's too jealous of appearing free of vulgar prejudices ever to revert to these popular errors. You can really be confident of me, anyway. (in a low voice) Between ourselves, you know what I owe you. My favorite virtue is gratitude. And I think I've acquitted myself of it by delivering Honore to you.

ROSALIE: Well! I'm abandoning myself to your advice.

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SOPHANES: By Jove! What can you risk with such a nice wager? Honore, in the heat of his amorous excitement, thinks you're from an honest and unfortunate family. Expressly for you, Love is loaning him its blindfold. And the more his mania is to see everything as perfect. Only, let Marton flatter him and second you. This Marton's got all the good sense in the world. By the way, it's time to use the supposed letter from Milord Calenfort. (fumbling in his pockets) I think I have it on me. Marton will prudently choose the time to regale Marton with it. Why—what? Could I have lost it? No, here it is. (gives letter to Marton) Goodbye. I don't want him to meet me here.

(Exit Sophanes.)

ROSALIE: This Mr. Sophanes is an excellent soul.

MARTON: Yes, his philosophy is completely laughable.

ROSALIE: He spares nothing to serve his friends. He's full of heat.

MARTON: Truly, that's plain to see. His morality. My word, he predicted correctly. Honore is coming to us. Put on your august manner.

(Enter Honore.)

HONORE: Dear Rosalie, you owe it to yourself to relax your reserve towards me. I have some right, at least, to your confidence. To what additional proof will you put my constancy? Who would think that with such soft eyes you are so barbarous?

ROSALIE: But what wrongs have I done? Of what do you complain?

HONORE: (with fire) I complain—I complain to see you indecisive. Is this the friendship you promised me? I want to avenge the unjust fate that rendered Fortune blind in your regard. It's my dearest wish. Cruel adversity in my tender eyes makes you more beautiful. Still, pardon the pressing interest which inspires in me a sympathetic heart for you, and perhaps interested me to excess in your charms. If I believe there are secret alarms in this heart, you have pains you've disguised from me. Could you have relatives exposed to wrongs? I offer you my credit, my services for them.

ROSALIE: (with considerable dignity) No. Fate has kept all its injustices for me. But if my only share was obscurity, if it has placed so much inequality between us, ought I to permit you to have the least hope? Who, me? To swallow you? What are you thinking, Honore?

HONORE: Eh! Why hesitate to receive my hand? What odious caprice—

ROSALIE: You are urging me in vain.

HONORE: Ah, you hate me and all my tenderness.

ROSALIE: (in the most august tone) Honore, in abusing so much delicacy, I am not insensible of love. But I intend to force you to esteem me one day by combating the error by which your soul is seduced. You see to what fate fortune has reduced me. I cannot without terror suppose the moment when your eyes, well forewarned by me suddenly light up, seeing the precipice toward which an amorous caprice is leading you. Think, when I refuse a role so sweet that perhaps I am more to be pitied than you. Like your love my weakness is extreme. But, if possible, I mean to save you from yourself.

MARTON: (low to Rosalie) Marvellous!

HONORE: Cease these superfluous efforts. Learn that my heart is no longer its own. You are reproaching yourself too much for errors of youth that no longer abase your noble soul. Misfortune ought not to inspire remorse. And fortune still wants to repair its wrong. You love me. Ah, deign to say it to me again a hundred times. All these vain prejudices whose power I brave, and that you oppose to me with so much rigor— won't prevent me from recognizing my happiness. Come!

ROSALIE: You wish it. Well, my dear Honore— Why, no. I fear the violence of your love. Try, at least, to moderate its fire and give yourself time to test it a little. Wait, this evening at my home, you will have company. I promised you Clorinde and the young Erminie. What am I doing? Gayety, dissipation, could somewhat divert your fires. You will have need of them. You will come, I hope.

HONORE: What won't I do in my ardor to please you? But my heart, in its turn, imposes a rule on you.

ROSALIE: Which is?

HONORE: That at least tomorrow you will accept my faith.

ROSALIE: (to Marton) How pressing you are! Got to satisfy him. (to Honore) Tomorrow—so be it! I am leaving for a moment on business.

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MARTON: (low to Rosalie) You're going to Mondor's?

ROSALIE: (low to Marton) Got to. (to Honore, aloud) Goodbye.

(Rosalie leaves.)

HONORE: At last, I've the happiness of obtaining her confession. But my dear Marton, you, who read in my soul—from whence comes this frigidity which is unworthy of my flame? I thought I noticed a certain embarrassment in her. Really, does she love me?

MARTON: Ah! You cannot suspect it. Never has the eye of love been able to mistake itself. This timid embarrassment is easy to understand. She loves you and fears, by accepting your wishes, to abase you, despite yourself, to the power of her eyes.

HONORE: She complains so often of the wrongs of fortune. My curiosity may seem importunate. But I will return to it, still, you know all her secrets—of relatives she supports and, perhaps, indiscreet— Don't they abuse her fond kindness?

MARTON: Why should she make a useless mystery up to you? It's true, her family is not in splendor. Without opulence, they can be far from misfortune. Ah! you know Rosalie's heart. Without wanting to boast, nor believing it accomplished, sir, you will discover great ingenuity in it.

HONORE: I believe it. Her portrait can only be flattering.

MARTON: I'd still like to see her more prudent. And that she were less indolent about her fortune. But I don't have the gift of persuading her. Sir, it's on that topic she must be scolded. And not her coldness, which is apparent. If you knew the seductive offer she sacrificed to you—

HONORE: To me, Marton?

MARTON: For you. But her heart is too jealous of such secrets. I must respect it.

HONORE: Mercy.

MARTON: I promised my mistress to keep silent. Oh, no weakness.

HONORE: Can you suspect me, dear Marton? Let yourself be disarmed.

MARTON: Ah, my heart is too good. (gives him a letter) Here, sir, read. Judge if she loves you. And if you are not extremely unjust, see what is being refused. Well? Am I wrong?

HONORE: (reading the end of the letter) "The fortune and the hand of Lord Calenfort."

MARTON: Alas, he left for London in despair.

HONORE: That so noble a proceeding justly confuses me! In a humble fortune, o heaven! How much grandeur! You don't astonish me; I've read in her heart. And yet I am going to dry the murmurings, the bitter reproaches, perhaps the insults of a crowd of fools, whose importunate voices are soon going to rise in condemnation of my choice. I admire extremely human inconsequentiality! Do you believe it, madam? Even Mr. Sophanes, whom I've seem combat with so much vigor the rigidity of public prejudices a hundred times, opposed this vain tyranny against me this morning and seemed, for me alone, to give the lie to his genius.

MARTON: What! Mr. Sophanes?

HONORE: I made him blush for it. But what a difference there is between talking and acting. At least you will see me display more courage in creating my happiness despite custom. But, what can be bringing my relative, Lysimon? From whence is he coming here? Withdraw, Marton.

(Marton leaves.)

LYSIMON: (entering) My dear, Honore, I've learned strange news. Must I displease you in proving my zeal? Friendship forbids me to disguise anything from you. If I believe the public you are going to marry a girl without name, that your seduced soul apparently is unaware of her morals and her conduct. From whence proceeds this suspicion with which you are besmirched? I learned from Sophanes that you were here. And I flew to you without losing a moment. Wounded honor inspires all that is in me in such a situation. How has this injurious rumor spread?

HONORE: I respect the bonds of our attachment, Lysimon; you respect Rosalie's heart. Often one is deceived in all that the public knows of my heart—which sees nothing in itself to reproach itself for, nor to reveal, nor to hide from you. Nor reason to consult common opinion. Far from ambition, master of my fortune, I intend, it's true, to dispose of my faith. Henceforth it no longer exists except for me.

LYSIMON: Now that's where philosophy is leading you; by abusing thought, it glorifies itself, the better to be able to brave morality.

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HONORE: Philosophy only makes war on unjust errors.

LYSIMON: You can pride yourself on heroic courage by renouncing public esteem for yourself. But the fruits of the marriage that you are contemplating, victims of the scorn you affect here, will be condemned to blush at the mere name of their mother, and be punished by their birth for the weakness of a father. Will they have, at need, this odious courage?

HONORE: Lysimon, I'll take care to open their eyes against the prejudices that incense the vulgar. Let's discontinue a conversation that's offensive to friendship. You are speaking of an object that is foreign to you. You must know her before judging her. You know what poison slander spreads. You yourself would blush, in seeing Rosalie, for having lent your ear to such imposture if you knew her heart.

LYSIMON: Since the public voice has condemned her morals I won't see her without some repugnance, except to prevent misfortune to Honore.

HONORE: What! Not even want to be disabused? Your eyes—

LYSIMON: I don't think that would have injured me. I am disinterested and love is distracting you.

HONORE: No, since I honor in this case the rarest virtue. Believe that to love alone I am not proud. Rosalie, to my eyes, without wealth and without attractions, would still have qualities that please me. (showing him the letter from Calenfort) Judge if this refusal is that of a vulgar soul. Weigh this procedure.

LYSIMON: (after having read) You believe that? Why, the first talent of these tricky ladies is to dare, at need, to forge these titles for themselves. I only wish that your eyes be opened. And that I could prove to you—

HONORE: You can't prove anything to me.

LYSIMON: I've known Calenfort. There must be a way, since he's left, of obtaining a proof—. allow there to be a test.

HONORE: No, my dear Lysimon. Return that letter to me. If you please, let's terminate the discussion of this object. You may think me either fantastic or credulous— My choice may to you seem bizarre or ridiculous. I will consult only my heart on this matter. Goodbye.

(Honore leaves.)

LYSIMON: Let's try again to save him from his error. In all social ranks a blind licensee produces so much assurance in broad daylight! This guilty excess has lasted too long. And I would dare to expect a lucky change. The French have always followed the example of their Master. Everything invites me to think that morals are going to revive.

CURTAIN

ACT II

MARTON: Love will be able to do it! It's speaking marvelously. But one time, at least, danger is awaiting you. Time presses; let's try to embroil them both. Or Honore, in the end might open his eyes.

ROSALIE: This Mr. Lysimon is really so formidable then?

MARTON: Oh, I'll answer for that. I think he's the devil that Hell detached specifically against us. To struggle against us and to interfere with our plan. I went on guard seeing him appear. And to parry the blows that he brought us in train, from this closet I found the way to listen right to the end of their annoying conversation. What an abominable man with such an austere face. I never experienced so much rage. And if he hadn't left just as I was about to burst, I don't know to what excess I might have been carried.

ROSALIE: But how did Honore react?

MARTON: He was annoyed. A concentrated scorn that he had trouble controlling, and that his passion wanted to hide. He seemed at every word ready to exhale. Never has love had such empire over a mortal. It's a blindness that approaches delirium! But he must awaken. With a new effort they might conquer the strongest in his head, and banish the prestige wherein our hopes are founded. Have you, by chance, met this Mr. Lysimon in society?

ROSALIE: Very little.

MARTON: I appreciate that. But do you know him?

ROSALIE: I've seen him sometimes.

MARTON: That's enough. I intend—Honore is so credulous! Yes, this expedient is not very ridiculous. Sophanes, at need, can prop him up again. It will succeed for us.— You've seen Mondor?

ROSALIE: Yes, I've warned him of Honore's plans and he seemed flattered by this confidence.

MARTON: And he approves your action?

ROSALIE: But with conditions.

MARTON: I'm listening.

ROSALIE: He first of all seized the opportunity to send right away to inform Erminie, even Clorinde, so that nothing will take place in front of Honore, through stupidity, that could cause some umbrage.

MARTON: Very fine. Either I'm much deceived or this precaution, quite naturally, would have escaped you. For we have a spirit of frailty; a butterfly is not more flighty. Happily, Mondor is always full of zeal. (looking attentively at Rosalie's hand) Why, what new diamond is sparkling on your fingers? It's of the most beautiful fire.

ROSALIE: By the way, Marton, has my guitar instructor arrived?

MARTON: Who? Your Abbe Fichet? What the devil are you doing with that gigolo? This is really the moment for it!

ROSALIE: How strict you've become! Do you know that people dote on such a light voice! So well modulated, such brilliant timber. It's from him that Clorinde's taken a hankering for singing.

MARTON: And it seems you are burning to be taught by him? What if Honore comes?

ROSALIE: You will make him wait. And it's also my day for drawing.

(Exit Rosalie.)

MARTON: Truly painting is what we are lacking! Nice arrangement! Come on, although stupid, she has some fine whims, and in the end, I cannot place my services better. I am trumps at gambling, besides. A Lysimon must not beat Marton on credit. Here, very much apropos, I see Honore coming.

HONORE: (entering, to himself) What an excess of wildness, what extravagance. Marton, has your mistress returned?

MARTON: Not yet.

HONORE: How many moments stolen from love.

MARTON: She cannot be late. You seem enraged, sir. Allow me to clarify a mystery. You see me again in an emotion.

HONORE: What is it?

MARTON: You wouldn't have had, you and this Lysimon—a quarrel?

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HONORE: Where's this apprehension come from? It surprises me.

MARTON: Alas, my soul was very affected seeing him first. How very jealous he is—he used to have some great plans for us.

HONORE: What—for Rosalie?

MARTON: Eh, yes! Truly for her! I was trembling that he'd come to seek a quarrel with you. For between ourselves, he was so badly treated, and I've often seen an animosity that caused me a terrible fear for her.

HONORE: What are you telling me, Marton? Is it credible?

MARTON: What? Nothing is more certain. But what's stopped me, is that up to now they didn't want you to be told. It's true, Rosalie rid herself of him so promptly, that he's hardly in her thoughts. But Mr. Sophanes ought to remember it.

HONORE: Kiss me, my heart cannot contain itself.

MARTON: Why's that?

HONORE: If you knew with how much address he came to me to blacken your mistress, to reproach my choice, and my blindness. How he counterfeited the tone of feeling. Oh! I would defy you to prevent yourself from laughing.

MARTON: On honor—it was he who came to tell you?

HONORE: On honor!

MARTON: Oh, my word. The deed is very amusing.

HONORE: I never saw anything so diverting. But if I were to depict to you his prudish manner, his gravity, his arrogance and his pedantry— (he laughs) You couldn't contain yourself. Well, let him be imposing with his great airs. I promise myself truly to take my revenge.

MARTON: I would bring him a thrust less frank; oppose trick for trick, and without emotion, without losing my temper, without any explanation, I would, until the end, follow his perfidy. My word, I would stretch the comedy out until after your marriage.

HONORE: That would be best. Well said, ha, ha, ha.

SOPHANES: (entering) You are laughing with a good heart indeed? I came to denounce myself to you, dear Honore, for having perhaps committed an extreme indiscretion by addressing this sad Lysimon to you.

MARTON: (very hurriedly) You are accusing yourself justly. The mistreated rival whose jealousy approaches frenzy; for you know how his pride was injured, and how ardent he is, despite his glacial manner. By luck, his scorn is limited to insults.

SOPHANES: Murmurs are permitted to unhappy love. (To Honore) You must forgive him.

HONORE: If he only offended me; but Rosalie!

SOPHANES: Well, it ought to be one more triumph for you. At least nothing makes me prouder than a jealous rival. He really told you about it then?

HONORE: I was unaware of his motive, but by Jove, vanity is indeed vindictive. It's a wild outburst against my marriage.

SOPHANES: Indeed, I warned you. You have only the suffrage that some wits have hardly noticed. And, yet, for certain, attacked by envy. You are doing what presently I thought you must be told. But by the sovereign empire of your reason, you are raised, above the claims of the senseless mob, which shrieks in the name of morality. Myself, blindly, I invite you to do it. Rosalie has wit, talent, looks. As an honest man, at least, I believe she has the virtues needed for happiness. What more do you need?

HONORE: Ah! I recognize you by this noble language. What can prejudice accomplish against the voice of Wisdom!

MARTON: My word. True happiness is to live for oneself.

SOPHANES: Did you really know that Marton is a philosopher?

MARTON: Me! All I know are the laws of nature. I would be so little bothered if the world murmured about it. As for the slanderers— But, someone is coming.

HONORE: See if it's Rosalie.

MARTON: Oh, yes, I hear her voice. I'm going!

SOPHANES: Goodbye, my dear fellow. Certain duties of custom force me to leave you; but there's compensation for you of a very sweet sort.

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(Sophanes notices Rosalie and greets her respectfully.)

HONORE: Till tomorrow.

SOPHANES: Surely.

(Exit Sophanes.)

HONORE: His eyes will witness our engagement, charming Rosalie, and this faithful friend will make our union yet more solemn. He will be the guarantee of the vows of love.

ROSALIE: For me, I wish to give you a guarantee in my turn, which ought never to be less costly it seems to me. Look at this portrait. Do you find it resembles me?

MARTON: I find it speaking.

HONORE: It's indeed precious to me. But, pardon—my heart doesn't see your eyes there. Those eyes, so seducing, that love alone can make. Perhaps, in the artist, it is nothing to be found. I agree, the portrait is charming—but wait—there! Without prejudice, you yourself examine it. See if that mouth wherein reigns such a sweet smile here offers allures that cannot be described. That sweet freshness, this sensual tone. How unfruitful the efforts of art seem. To the glance of a lover it seems unfaithful! How much more touching and beautiful. I feel the entire price of a favor so dear.

ROSALIE: They say you've got a story to tell me. Aren't you going to speak to me of Mr. Lysimon?

HONORE: I would think you lacking in pronouncing his name. But mercy, pardon his extravagance. He's punished enough by your indifference.

ROSALIE: (with cleverness) His speech didn't make an impression on you?

HONORE: You can judge.

MARTON: I think the acts of a jealous man are not made to give umbrage.

HONORE: He wouldn't have inspired so much in me, if I had known of his secret feelings. Regretfully, he deprived me of my sweetest moments; but I am sacrificing them to my unique business. I've set up a meeting tonight at my notary's. It's your interests that we must regulate. And I still have some papers to put together. Goodbye.

ROSALIE: Come back—we're having company.

HONORE: I'll do it.

(Exit Honore.)

MARTON: That child loves you to madness and you owe him some tenderness in return.

ROSALIE: In the end so much love must inspire love. I think that by degrees his passion is inflaming me. And it's no longer pride which commands my soul.

MARTON: I think I hear someone.

ROSALIE: It's Mondor, surely, who's bringing company. Quickly, arrange armchairs. (Rosalie runs to greet her friends) What! It's you.

(CLORINDE, ERMINIE, and MONDOR enter.)

CLORINDE: We are running, my queen, to congratulate you on your coming grandeur!

MONDOR: Is Honore here?

ROSALIE: No, but he'll return.

ERMINIE: We had plans to go to the opera. But we preferred you to Chevalier Gluck. We've come to spend the evening with you.

ROSALIE: Nothing is more obliging. Marton, show them in; and tell Marin to come light up the place. (to the company) Well! what news do you have to bring me?

CLORINDE: They say that Arsinoe has just left Clitandre.

MONDOR: What, truly?

CLORINDE: Yes, truly, and the deed is really good. (to Rosalie) You know they were taken with a beautiful passion. It was mutual, at least in appearance, like loves of olden times, incredible constancy. They sequestered themselves from the world absolutely, and this is called a thunderbolt of love.

ROSALIE: Well?

CLORINDE: To make it short for you, one fine morning our august heroine, took flight on the sly; the servants were seduced, the baggage carried off, the poor lover was sleeping in the faith of oaths. Judge of his awakening, when a fatal indicia made him see plainly that he'd lost his Eurydice.

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ERMINIE: (drawling plaintively) I lost my Eurydice.

ROSALIE: He'll get her back without going to hell.

HORTENSE: Why, truly they say he's been replaced.

ROSALIE": What! already?

MONDOR: No question: Arsinoe was never vacant.

ERMINIE: Her conduct, it is true, was always very prudent.

ROSALIE: What do they say about Aglaea?

ERMINIE: My word, the handsome Orval is running about with her; you cannot do much worse; He had carried her off from the Financier Chryasante, who had built her a charming house. He at least owed her compensation. He just left her pitilessly to take up with the celebrated Amelie at the Opera.

ROSALIE: It seems to me Aglaea is a thousand times prettier.

ERMINIE: She has beautiful hair.

CLORINDE: But of a very pronounced blond.

ROSALIE: I'd never suspected it.

CLORINDE: It's a fact nonetheless.

ROSALIE: Her complexion—

MONDOR: Has some dazzle thanks to the powder she uses.

ROSALIE: Her?

MONDOR: You only have to see her to judge.

ROSALIE: Ah, that's slander.

MONDOR: I tell you she uses it. If only she'd asked me the secret, I wouldn't have told it.

ERMINIE: A more incredible fact. And between ourselves, I treated it as first as a fable— It's that Julie—

ROSALIE: Well?

ERMINIE: Oh, my word. Guess!

MONDOR: I'm unable.

ROSALIE: Nor can I.

ERMINIE: Try, imagine.

CLORINDE: Has she made yet another dupe?

ERMINIE: Would I hold you in suspense for a bagatelle like that. She's become religious to the point of affecting remorse.

ROSALIE: (bursting into laughter) Julie, remorseful?

MONDOR: She's got the devil in her.

ERMINIE: You're missing the point; the prude's getting married.

MONDOR: Who is the mortal whose soul is so hardened—?

ERMINIE: He's a sort of grouch, a noble country bumpkin—they say Mr. Nacquard.

ROSALIE: Nacquard as much as you like; but despite her reform, her ignoble manners, and her enormous body, Julie is, in every respect, a revolting sight.

MONDOR: Ah! her eyes reveal that enough.

ROSALIE: Yes, that's the only thing human she has about her.

ERMINIE: For all that the news is not less certain.

CLORINDE: May God preserve forever from all bad luck, the face, the august face of good Mr. Nacquard.

ROSALIE: You have nothing to tell me of the illustrious Arsenie?

MONDOR: They pretend she's leading a sad enough life with her Commander. He's so jealous of her that no one can speak to her without throwing him into a rage. In all Paris they are the most somber duo. At performances, at balls, he follows her like a shadow, and doesn't perceive that she's providing him this supreme happiness that he's tasting in avenging himself.

CLORINDE: What can keep her in this harsh slavery?

MONDOR: Greed. He gives her a brilliant outfit. Diamonds without number, a train longer than you are. And they even fight in more than one house. He's gambling to ruin himself, despite his opulence, and that is what Arsenie is prudently awaiting.

ROSALIE: They say her sister is much happier.

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ERMINIE: They say she's always more amorous.

ROSALIE: At least she had good guarantees for her tenderness.

CLORINDE: What do you mean?

ROSALIE: He left the little Duchess, who, priding himself, for the first time on honor, purchased constancy, at least for the term of a month. They say she's furious, outre, inconsolable. At bottom, Alceste must be a man too good to be true, to occasion such lively sorrows.

ERMINIE: They say he gains by the exchange?

ROSALIE: Yes, on the side of morals.

MONDOR: Still, for Cleone it's a very fine sacrifice.

ROSALIE: No question, and very flattering for the daughter of a Swiss.

CLORINDE: What! That's all she is!

ERMINIE: Perhaps even less.

CLORINDE: That ought to take her down a peg or two.

ROSALIE: My word, the picture of our morals is really bizarre.

ERMINIE: What! Reflections? That fantasy is rare. (singing offstage) What's that uproar mean? Is it a wedding song?

MONDOR: Eh! it's Abbe Fichet in all his originality.

CLORINDE: He is always found in good company.

ABBE: (entering) Your two arias are noted, divine Rosalie. You have the first and the second.

MONDOR: That's the way it's done!

ERMINIE: What hardened eyes he has!

CLORINDE: Who cares, he will teach us some new songs.

ABBE: I always regret refusing the beauties. But indiscreetly, a month ago, I took too much punch which has scratched my voice. They are giving a superb party for Celainte. I have to sing and act a proverb. What's more maddening to me than a proverb! and honor bright, I am forced to be strict. One day I shall be the victim of my talent. And I am going, some time, to exile myself on a diet. I am annihilated.

ERMINIE: What! without remission?

ABBE: What, me pray? that's my aversion.

ROSALIE: Ah! don't make an indiscreet demand on him. He needs—

ABBE: I am going to risk an Aria, since you force me to do it, but it's in secrecy. Celainte would never forgive me—

(He hums a bit and then sings a short aria.)

ROSALIE: Delicious!

CLORINDE: Inconceivable!

ERMINIE: Unique!

MONDOR: Profound harmony! Speaking of music, would you have plans for Vaux–Hall tonight?

ERMINIE: (excitedly) Vaux–Hall is deserted, rather let's go to the ball. Mondor will take us.

MONDOR: No, I gave my word to go to the Marais for the lottery.

ROSALIE: You couldn't miss this engagement?

MONDOR: No, but for you I see another arrangement. You could dispose of my English coach.

ROSALIE: Ah! You are charming!

MONDOR: You will be comfortable in it. At need, the Abbe will stay with you. You shall have it in an hour.

ROSALIE: Till much later, dear Mondor.

MONDOR: You can count on it.

CLORINDE: (to Rosalie) Eh! why, charming queen, tell us a little about your august chain. Are you irredeemably going to take a husband?

MONDOR: By Jove, this is a great day for you!

ERMINIE: How are you managing this wretched Honore? Is he still blind and full of confidence. Apparently we won't ruin you?

MONDOR: Oh! no! (noticing Honore) Why, it's himself.

CLORINDE: (composing herself, and raising her voice so Honore will hear it) They say he's of the best

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fashion. (to Honore) Ah, we were speaking of you and, from the bottom of my soul, I was praising you to Madame.

ERMINIE: Assuredly, it's evident you are a connoisseur, and you couldn't place your heart better.

CLORINDE: Let's not rob them of moments full of charm (low to Erminie) Tonight we must all put ourselves under arms. (to Rosalie) Mondor, let's take leave of Madame. Till later. We are going to rush to return sooner. (they leave)

ROSALIE: You were indeed delayed?

HONORE: I'm coming from my Notary; but one is never done with these men of business! Forgive me. This duty grasped my heart too much; I was very jealous to assure my happiness.

ROSALIE: I thought I could count on your complaisance.

HONORE: Ah, never doubt your claims on me.

ROSALIE: They mentioned a ball which must be charming. There we could talk freely, by ourselves. This plan made me smile and I can no longer stop myself. Go change clothes and come back to take me.

CURTAIN

ACT III

ROSALIE: Is my rouge on good, Marton?

MARTON: Divinely.

ROSALIE: I think this mole is placed artistically. How do you like me?

MARTON: I find you charming and the ball will not have a beauty more brilliant. Honore, proudly enchained under your sway, will see all eyes applauding his choice. You are going to ignite a thousand flames in all hearts, charm all husbands and desolate all wives.

ROSALIE: Today I have no such pretension. And I am even pondering—

MARTON: What! Truly?

ROSALIE: I was thinking that Clorinde, Erminie, are no longer suitable for me.

MARTON: What craziness! You who cannot be without them for a moment!

ROSALIE: Between ourselves, I find them a little indecent. In their eyes, loaded with jealousy, didn't you see the secret scorn with which their souls are seized? And I do not escape their sneering tones, their wanton remarks, their mocking smiles. Marrying Honore, I must accustom myself henceforth to place an immense interval between that world and myself. To humiliate them, Marton, I intend to have a Swiss footman in rich livery, in the end a complete outfit, that custom grants to women of my rank. And if by some chance I meet them I shall make it my happiness to put them in despair.

MARTON: That will be your situation; what could they say?

ROSALIE: Ah! nothing will contain the fury of their scorn;. But that will be from a distance, and I won't hear their insolent remarks, their perfidious outbursts. Ah, Marton, what delight to crush rivals who believe themselves right in treating us as equals. How greatly I'm going to rejoice in their confusion.

MARTON: Why, it's necessary to stand on one's rank. I much approve of you. Still, from prudence, dissimulate this desire for revenge until after your wedding.

ROSALIE: Indeed, that's what I'm doing, and even forcing them to second my intentions. It's necessary to put a reign on their treacherous tongues, to squander the most tender caresses on them. They will lose nothing by it, and my feelings—

(Enter Sophanes.)

SOPHANES: Well, all is prepared by your arrangement, my dear Rosalie? are you marrying Honore? Beware of betraying yourself through some negligence. Lysimon may be hiding some bad plan, and I am informed he has some maneuver in hand.

ROSALIE: What! could he still give us some umbrage?

MARTON: If it's necessary to struggle against a new storm, we will know how to put Senor Lysimon in the shadow. Haven't you got Love and Marton on your side. (pointing to Rosalie) And above all, what I am confiding myself to are those eyes, and Mr. Sophanes and his philosophy!

ROSALIE: And Honore, besides; could Honore at this moment renounce his tender eagerness?

SOPHANES: Sometimes a moment is not without consequences. Still, to speak truly, I see little sign of it. But if, in the end by mischance he came to change, there would really be not much to be afflicted over. At bottom, marriage is only a popular bond. A mere nothing.

MARTON: Without a doubt. With his character marriage would never find grace in my eyes.

SOPHANES: You could easily find yourself much better or worse as far as fortune goes in the age we are living in. Interest is the god that captivates men. In Paris everything depends on casting over one's name an imposing glaze of reputation, and everything is useful for that, even a little scandal. Hold on, I have for example a Treatise on Morality, that I am just now ready to publish. My word, I am tempted to dedicate it to you. Suddenly, by means of this trick you will have the certificate of a great female wit, a club, a tribunal, an accredited name. That's the way we use celebrity. Amongst us there's no slender genius, no author so little celebrated that he lacks his Aspasia. I'll put you in the secret. In such a role, at need, you might succeed, and it will take you very far. Confide yourself to my zeal, to my experience. Besides, it's not certain that you will lose Honore.

ROSALIE: Be it love, be it pride, I cling to this romantic novel.

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MARTON: By Jove! I cling to it also; I carried out the plan of it, and I've known how to dispose of Honore in a way that he ought to get in a fight with Lysimon. (to Rosalie) Go, I predict for you the most delightful success. But, with the concurrence of Mr. Sophanes, you must think of dressing quickly, Madame. That's one way the more for our success. Tonight we will have Honore under hand. We will lead him to the ball and finish him off tomorrow.

(Exit Rosalie and Marton.)

SOPHANES: (alone) As of now, Rosalie is very sterile goods, but one day her beauty might make her useful. Got to manage her. You never know what you can do with such a pretty face.

(Enter Honore.)

SOPHANES: Ah, there you are Honore, garbed as a conqueror. It's apparent that you are preparing a celebration for Love. It's still for tomorrow?

HONORE: Yes, that's the happy day that's is going to deliver Rosalie to my wishes. Nothing can equal my tender impatience. Why, what! It's Lysimon.

(Enter Lysimon.)

LYSIMON: I see my dear Honore that you weren't expecting my importunate return. You are counting the moments that I stole from love. But I've just completed some necessary courses which could give you important light. You thought my mind was rather preoccupied: indeed, false rumors could have deceived me. One is so trusting when one is in love, anyway. But I had to come right here immediately. With facts really conflated, very certain, very plain. You owe yourself these enlightenments at least. I am awaiting them, I tell you, and you are going to learn the destiny, which, but for me, threatens you. My resource is still in the depth of your heart. Consult it; it was born for honor, Honore.

HONORE: Lysimon, you could spare yourself these efforts; I've already told you, your proceedings are in vain. Besides, I know their motives, and that's enough. But to spare you so many ill-placed cares, I am marrying Rosalie. Do not outrage any further a name that is allied to mine. (ironically) I won't urge you to be a witness. I see you could get carried away too far.

LYSIMON: Don't you blush at such an alliance? (to Sophanes) How is it you suffer it, you the friend of Honore, you that I am surprised to meet here, you Mr. Sophanes?

SOPHANES: (in a light hearted tone) He is really hardened. I attempted, like you to combat his passion. But all my morality slid off his soul. To speech that soon I couldn't control, he himself must think me a prejudiced man. Indeed, I know that people will blame his mania. But indiscreet zeal becomes tyranny. Besides, even friendship has its bias. The happy, as you know, cling to their opinions. He is braving all inconvenient custom. Each has the right to be happy after his own fashion.

LYSIMON: O Heaven! with what stumbling blocks he is surrounded. How the name of friend seems profaned to me! Eh, what vile flatterers by their culpable cleverness always lead imprudent youth astray.

HONORE: My heart grasps the entire worth of this moral jargon. Still, between ourselves, I am not surprised that it was sometimes capable of wearying Rosalie.

LYSIMON: Wearying her? Who? me? What is this folly, Honore?

SOPHANES: (to Honore) You will see that he doesn't know her.

HONORE: You act wondrously, and the air of embarrassment is very comic, at least.

LYSIMON: (to himself) I see through this artifice.

HONORE: The wisest sometimes have their moments of caprice. Only he must take a less harsh tone.

LYSIMON: I don't fathom this obscure persiflage. I've easily unveiled the secret source. Everywhere I recognize the error that dominates you. I see you surrounded by seductive counselors. But friendship remains to you and vengeful remorse will soon lead virtue into your soul. I will no longer see you the slave of a woman, distracted by love, faithless to honor exposing yourself throughout a century without modesty, and abjuring the nobility of a respectable name, to rise up in a cowardly manner at the feet of a Mistress.

HONORE: You might offend me with all these vain outbursts, with all this false heat, which doesn't impose on me. I will say only one word to you. Rosalie is at home. She could, with a single glance, confound your zeal which takes you too far from your own dwelling.

LYSIMON: I am staying here, and you know what's right. But do you believe that the passion to do you a service would ever impose on me a greater sacrifice. Too well, I see the ascendant hereabouts. What an air of

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contagion one breathes hereabouts. But I see your perils, I am necessary to you. Sincere friendship won't be rebuffed. In this time of error you may misunderstand me; this pressing interest which dominates my heart. You won't see me sensitive to this outrage. I want to measure my courage against your danger. And were your imprudent wrath to fall on me, I must ravish you from dishonor despite yourself.

SOPHANES: (to Honore) Truly, this is carrying delirium to extreme.

HONORE: (to Rosalie, who enters) Come, come here. Defend yourself. He's too hard to manage. If possible, make his confusion equal his obstinacy. Reveal yourself; let him blush in seeing you, so beautiful. I swear to you, before his eyes, an eternal ardor.

ROSALIE: (to Lysimon) Eh! What! you please yourself to surprise me in this way. I didn't expect to find you here. But don't pretend not to know me. Perhaps your resentment will calm. What subject do you complain against me? May I not freely dispose of my faith?

LYSIMON: They warned me of the dazzle of your charms. Seeing you, I experience new worries. I don't pride myself on insensibility. And I know the homage one owes to beauty. I am not defending myself against it. This lovable face will render its weakness excusable in other eyes. As for myself, I could pardon a mistake; but he has plans reprov'd by honor. See to what dangers his passion exposes him. One day, perhaps, his heart will hate the cause. Foresee these misfortunes, and you yourself, today, lend him a generous support against you. Agree to advice for the good of you both. From prudence, renounce the gift he wishes to make to you. Or fear that soon a sad clarity may unveil to his eyes the frightful truth.

ROSALIE: I won't listen any further. I have little fear of the threat. Still, I agree that this tone is embarrassing to me. And at least, you could better hide your humor. Does Honore have a master? Are you his tutor? What are your rights over him?

LYSIMON: Those of a faithful friend. And that was enough to excite my zeal. But to recall to him what he owes to his rank, I have still other rights and interests of blood.

HONORE: Lysimon, that's too much.

LYSIMON: No, I dare to predict that reason will regain its empire over you.

ROSALIE: (to Lysimon) Are you coming to the ball?

LYSIMON: (coldly) Yes, if need be.

ROSALIE: The furor to oblige cannot go any further. This will be amusing.

SOPHANES: Very amusing.

(Enter Clorinde, Erminie, Marton, dressed to serve.)

CLORINDE: (to Rosalie) Ah, my dear, don't scold us. You seem to be in a pet. We haven't lost the minutest minute. You can judge by our attire. They say the ball will be so magnificent, memorable forever— Good evening, Mr. Honore.

SOPHANES: (to Honore on one side of the stage) Lysimon promised you revelations. He himself may have fabricated these fictions. Friendship never has such threatening passion.

HONORE: (to Rosalie, in an uneasy tone) In my eyes, Rosalie is only more touching.

ERMINIE: But we didn't see the carriage below.

ROSALIE: Oh, Mondor is punctual and won't be late.

CLORINDE: I hope so. By the way, they say he's preparing a rare marvel for next Friday.

ROSALIE: What's that?

CLORINDE: An opera they say, of the utmost beauty, an astonishing spectacle, with choruses in the latest fashion even, whose libretto is very much praised.

ROSALIE: (calling a lackey) Marin! Rush this evening to secure me a box at the opera. Try to get the first row. Don't forget to go there. Nothing amuses me as much as seeing a new work in full bloom. (to Honore) Will you accompany me?

HONORE: Do you doubt it?

ERMINIE: (to Rosalie) My beauty— (low, pointing to Lysimon) We will leave too late. Who's that werewolf?

ROSALIE: (low to Erminie) A relative of Honore. A sort of madman.

CLORINDE: (to Rosalie) Mondor has surely forgotten his word.

ROSALIE: It's his treacherous gambling; his cursed lottery.

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LYSIMON: (aside, with a feeling of sorrow) Eh! If Honore doesn't open his eyes in the end?

HONORE: (fondly, to Rosalie) For you this ball is very dear, very precious? Well! Why's Mondor necessary to you? Truly, I don't have my usual coach, but since this morning, obliged to run about, I am using a substitute and I can offer it to you.

ERMINIE: Truly, we will accept it with gratitude.

CLORINDE: He's always nice and full of complaisance.

ROSALIE: Let the coachman get ready as fast as possible, Marton.

(Marton leaves. A Lackey enters.)

LACKEY: This letter is addressed to Mr. Lysimon.

(The Lackey leaves after delivering the letter to Lysimon.)

LYSIMON: (joyfully, after having perused the letter) Ah! Finally, I can breathe. Dear Honore, up to this point I hoped that, wounded by this tone of indecency, you would reproach yourself for the shame of your passion. This last dart, at least is going to clear your eyes. Read, undeceive yourself of an unworthy trick. They boasted to you of the brilliant sacrifice of Milord Calenfort. This letter is from him.

SOPHANES: (covering his embarrassment with a tone of persiflage) No question it arrives from London today?

ROSALIE: (in the same tone but a bit uncertain) Your supposition by chance is publicly known. Calenfort has departed.

LYSIMON: You must have thought that; myself, this morning, I thought so, too. But how to challenge the witness that's here? (to Honore) Read this.

HONORE: (uneasily, and scornfully, he remains unsure) You wish it—you must be satisfied. But beware—

LYSIMON: (with nobility) Respect the friend who enlightens you.

CLORINDE: Where can all this squabble be leading?

ERMINIE: Right! you will see all this will be cleared up at the Ball. (to Marton, who is returning) Well, Marton?

MARTON: This man is truly very strange. He has a rare tenderness for his horses. He says they cannot take you.

COACHMAN: (entering) No, my word. Lose control of yourself, sir, beat me, kill me. I love my horses too much, each has his fancy.

ROSALIE: Will you look at such insolence.

COACHMAN: (suddenly struck by Rosalie and observing her with the greatest surprise) Eh! That's my sister, Javotte.

ROSALIE: (with feigned indignation, mixed with a great deal of trouble) Who you; my brother? you!

COACHMAN: What! you are no longer my sister. If my lowliness troubles you to the depths of your heart, mine is really disturbed even more by your magnificence.

HONORE: (confounded) O Heaven! Where was my blind imprudence leading me!

ROSALIE: (with the most vivid emotion, leaning on Sophanes) I am humiliated enough! Take me away from here. I intend to hide myself forever from my own eyes.

COACHMAN: (placing himself in front of Rosalie who moves away) I see that you are scorning your brother from pride. It's for me to blush; respect my misery. At least it is honest.

ERMINIE: (as she leads Clorinde away) I pity her. Still, let's agree that the Ball would have been less amusing.

HONORE: (hurling himself in Lysimon's arms) Ah, my dear Lysimon. What was my delirium?

LYSIMON: Heaven gave you a heart easy to seduce. Come, let friendship console you over this day—and save you forever from the errors of love!

CURTAIN