

The Magnificent Lovers

by

Moliere

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Preface

The subject of this play was given by Louis XIV. It was acted before him at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, on February 4, 1670, but was never represented in Paris, and was only printed after Molière's death. It is one of the weakest plays of Molière, upon whom unfortunately now rested the whole responsibility of the court entertainments. His attack upon astrology is the most interesting part.

Molière acted the part of Clitidas.

PREFACE BY THE AUTHOR.

The King, who will have nothing but what is magnificent in all he undertakes, wished to give his court an entertainment which should comprise all that the stage can furnish. To facilitate the execution of so vast an idea, and to link together so many different things, his Majesty chose for the subject two rival princes, who, in the lovely vale of Tempe, where the Pythian Games were to be celebrated, vie with each other in fêting a young princess and her mother with all imaginable gallantries.

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

IPHICRATES & TIMOCLES, princes in love with ERIPHYLE.

SOSTRATUS, a general, also in love with ERIPHYLE.

ANAXARCHUS, an astrologer.

CLEON, his son.

CHOROEBUS, in the suit of ARISTIONE.

CLITIDAS, a court jester, one of the attendants of ERIPHYLE.

ARISTIONE, a princess, mother to ERIPHYLE.

ERIPHYLE, a princess, daughter to ARISTIONE.

CLEONICE, confidante to ERIPHYLE.

A sham VENUS, acting in concert with ANAXARCHUS.

First Interlude

The scene opens with the pleasant sound of a great many instruments, and represents a vast sea, bordered on each side by four large rocks. On the summit of each is a river god, leaning on the insignia usual to those deities. At the foot of these rocks are twelve Tritons on each side, and in the middle of the sea four Cupids on dolphins; behind them the god AEOLUS floating on a small cloud above the waves. AEOLUS commands the winds to withdraw; and whilst four Cupids, twelve Tritons, and eight river gods answer him, the sea becomes calm, and an island rises from the waves. Eight fishermen come out of the sea with mother-of-pearl and branches of coral in their hands, and after a charming dance seat themselves each on a rock above one of the river gods. The music announces the advent of NEPTUNE, and while this god is dancing with his suite, the fishermen, Tritons, and river gods accompany his steps with various movements and the clattering of the pearl shells. The spectacle is a magnificent compliment paid by one of the princes to the princesses during their maritime excursion.

AEOLUS.

Ye winds that cloud the fairest skies,
Retire within your darkest caves,
And leave the realm of waves
To Zephyr, Love, and sighs.

A TRITON.

What lovely eyes these moist abodes have pierced?
Ye mighty Tritons, come; ye Nereids, hide.

ALL THE TRITONS.

Then rise we all these deities fair to meet;
With softest strains and homage let us greet
Their beauty rare.

A CUPID.

How dazzling are these ladies' charms!

ANOTHER CUPID.

What heart but seeing them must yield?

ANOTHER CUPID.

The fairest of th' Immortals--arms
So keen hath none to wield.

CHORUS.

Then rise we all these deities fair to meet;
With softest strains and homage let us greet
Their beauty rare.

A TRITON.

What would this noble train that meets our view?
'Tis Neptune! He and all his mighty crew!
He comes to honour, with his presence fair,
These lovely scenes, and charm the silent air.

CHORUS.

Then strike again,
And raise your strain,
And let your homes around
With joyous songs resound!

NEPTUNE.

I rank among the gods of greatest might;
'Tis Jove himself hath placed me on this height!
Alone, as king, I sway the azure wave;
In all this world there's none my power to brave.

There are no lands on earth my might that know
But trembling dread that o'er their meads I flow;
No states, o'er which the boisterous waves I tread
In one short moment's space I cannot spread.

There's nought the raging billows' force can stay,
No triple dike, but e'en it easily
My waves can crush,
When rolls along their mass with wildest rush.

And yet these billows fierce I force to yield,
Beneath the wisdom of the power I wield;
And everywhere I let the sailors bold
Where'er they list their trading courses hold.

Yet rocks sometimes are found within my states,
Where ships do perish, so doomed by fates;
Yet 'gainst my power none murmurs aye,
For Virtue knows no wreck where'er I sway.

A SEA GOD.

Within this realm are many treasures bright;
All mortals crowd its pleasant shores to view.
And would you climb of fame the dazzling height,
Then seek nought else, but Neptune's countenance sue.

SECOND SEA GOD.

Then trust the god of this vast billowy realm,
And shielded from all storms, you'll guide the helm;
The waves would fain inconstant often be,
But ever constant Neptune you will see.

THIRD SEA GOD.

Launch then with dauntless zeal, and plough the deep;
Thus shall you Neptune's kindly favour reap.

ACT I

SCENE I.--SOSTRATUS, CLITIDAS.

CLI. (aside). He is buried in thought.

SOS. (believing himself alone). No, Sostratus, I do not see where you can look for help, and your troubles are of a kind to leave you no hope.

CLI. (aside). He is talking to himself.

SOS. (believing himself alone). Alas!

CLI. These sighs must mean something, and my surmise will prove correct.

SOS. (believing himself alone). Upon what fancies can you build any hope? And what else can you expect but the protracted length of a miserable existence, and sorrow to end only with life itself.

CLI. (aside). His head is more perplexed than mine.

SOS. (believing himself alone). My heart! my heart! to what have you brought me?

CLI. Your servant, my Lord Sostratus!

SOS. Where are you going, Clitidas?

CLI. Rather tell me what you are doing here? And what secret melancholy, what gloomy sorrow, can keep you in these woods when all are gone in crowds to the magnificent festival which the Prince Iphicrates has just given upon the sea to the princesses. There they are treated to wonderful music and dancing, and even the rocks and the waves deck themselves with divinities to do homage to their beauty.

SOS. I can fancy all this magnificence, and as there are generally so many people to cause confusion at these festivals, I did not care to increase the number of unwelcome guests.

CLI. You know that your presence never spoils anything, and that you are never in the way wherever you go. Your face is welcome everywhere, and is not one of those ill-favoured countenances which are never well received by sovereigns. You are equally in favour with both princesses, and the mother and the daughter show plainly enough the regard they have for you; so that you need not fear to be accounted troublesome. In short, it was not this fear that kept you away.

SOS. I acknowledge that I have no inclination for such things.

CLI. Oh indeed! Yet, although we may not care to see things, we like to go where we find everybody else; and whatever you may say, people do not, during a festival, stop all alone among the trees to dream moodily as you do, unless they have something to disturb their minds.

SOS. Why? What do you think could disturb my mind?

CLI. Well, I can't say; but there is a strong scent of love about here, and I am sure it does not come from me, and it must come from you.

SOS. How absurd you are, Clitidas!

CLI. Not so absurd as you would make out. You are in love; I have a delicate nose, and I smelt it directly.

SOS. What can possibly make you think so?

CLI. What? I daresay you would be very much surprised if I were to tell you besides with whom you are in love.

SOS. I?

CLI. Yes; I wager that I will guess presently whom you love. I have some secrets, as well as our astrologer with whom the Princess Aristione is so infatuated; and if his science makes him read in the stars the fate of men, I have the science of reading in the eyes of people the names of those they love. Hold up your head a little, and open your eyes wide. E, by itself, E; r, i, ri, Eri; p, h, y, phy, Eriphy; l, e, le, Eriphyle. You are in love with the Princess Eriphyle.

SOS. Ah! Clitidas, I cannot conceal my trouble from you, and you crush me with this blow.

CLI. You see how clever I am!

SOS. Alas! if anything has revealed to you the secret of my heart, I beseech you to tell it to no one; and, above all things, to keep it secret from the fair princess whose name you have just mentioned.

CLI. But, to speak seriously, if for awhile I have read in your actions the love you wish to keep secret, do you think that the Princess Eriphyle has been blind enough not to see it? Believe me, ladies are always very quick to discover the love they inspire, and the language of the eyes and of sighs is understood by those to whom it is addressed sooner than by anybody else.

SOS. Leave her, Clitidas, leave her to read, if she can, in my sighs and looks the love with which her beauty has inspired me; but let us be careful not to let her find it out in any other way.

CLI. And what is it you dread? Is it possible that this same Sostratus, who feared neither Brennus nor all the Gauls, and whose arm has been so gloriously successful in ridding us of that swarm of barbarians which ravaged Greece; is it possible, I say, that a man so dauntless in war should be so fearful as to tremble at the very mention of his being in love?

SOS. Ah! Clitidas, I do not tremble without a cause; and all the Gauls in the world would seem to me less to be feared than those two beautiful eyes full of charms.

CLI. I am not of the same opinion, and I know, as far as I am concerned, that one single Gaul, sword in hand, would frighten me much more than fifty of the most beautiful eyes in the world put together. But, tell me, what do you intend to do?

SOS. To die without telling my love.

CLI. A fine prospect! Nonsense, you are joking; you know that a little boldness always succeeds with lovers; it is only the bashful and timid who are losers; and were I to fall in love with a goddess, I would tell her of my passion at once.

SOS. Alas! too many things condemn my love to an eternal silence.

CLI. But what?

SOS. The lowness of my birth, by which it pleased heaven to humble the ambition of my love; the princess's rank, which puts between her and my desires such an impassable barrier. The rivalry of two princes who can back the offer of their heart by the highest titles; two princes who offer the most magnificent entertainments by turn to her whose heart they strive to win, and between whom it is expected every moment that she will make a choice. Besides all this, Clitidas, there is the inviolable respect to which she subjugates the violence of my love.

CLI. Respect is not always as welcome as love; and if I am not greatly mistaken, the young princess knows of your affection, and is not insensible to it.

SOS. Ah! pray do not, out of pity, flatter the heart of a miserable lover.

CLI. I do not say it without good reasons. She is a long time postponing the choice of a husband, and I must try and discover a little more about all this. You know that I enjoy a kind of favour with her, that I have free access to her, and that, by dint of trying all kinds of ways, I have gained the privilege of saying a word now and then, and of speaking at random on any subject. Sometimes I do not succeed as I should like, but at others I

succeed very well. Leave it to me, then; I am your friend, I love men of merit, and I will choose my time to speak to the princess of....

SOS. Oh! for heaven's sake, however much you may pity my misfortune, Clitidas, be careful not to tell her anything of my love. I had rather die than to be accused by her of the least temerity, and this deep respect in which her divine charms....

CLI. Hush! they are all Coming.

SCENE II.--ARISTIONE, IPHICRATES, TIMOCLES, SOSTRATUS ANAXARCHUS, CLEON, CLITIDAS.

ARI. (to IPHICRATES). Prince, I cannot say too much, there is no spectacle in the world which can vie in magnificence with this one you have just given us. This entertainment had wonderful attractions, which will make it surpass all that can ever be seen. We have witnessed something so noble, so grand and glorious that heaven itself could do no more; and I feel sure there is nothing in the world that could be compared to it.

TIM. This is a display that cannot be expected in all entertainments, and I greatly fear, Madam, for the simplicity of the little festival which I am preparing to give you in the wood of Diana.

ARI. I feel sure that we shall see nothing there but what is delightful; and we must acknowledge that the country ought to appear very beautiful to us, and that we have no time left for dulness in this charming place, which all poets have celebrated under the name of Tempe. For, not to mention the pleasures of hunting, which we can enjoy at any hour, and the solemnity of the Pythian Games which are about to be celebrated, you both take care to supply us with pleasures that would charm away the sorrows of the most melancholy. How is it, Sostratus, that we did not meet you in our walks?

SOS. A slight indisposition, Madam, prevented me from going there.

IPH. Sostratus is one of those men who think it unbecoming to be curious like others, and who esteem it better to affect not to go where everybody is anxious to be.

SOS. My Lord, affectation has little share in anything I do, and, without paying you a compliment, there were things to be seen in this festival which would have attracted me if some other motive had not hindered me.

ARI. And has Clitidas seen it all?

CLI. Yes, Madam, but from the shore.

ARI. And why from the shore?

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