

- ALCESTE: Madam, I've had a mortal, mortal blow.
 5 If Chaos repossessed the universe,
 I swear I'd not be shaken any worse.
 I'm ruined. . . . I can say no more. . . . My soul . . .
 ÉLIANTE: Do try, Sir, to regain your self-control.
 ALCESTE: Just heaven! Why were so much beauty and
 grace
 10 Bestowed on one so vicious and so base?
 ÉLIANTE: Once more, Sir, tell us
 ALCESTE: My world has gone to wrack:
 I'm — I'm betrayed; she's stabbed me in the back:
 Yes, Célimène (who would have thought it of her?)
 Is false to me, and has another lover.
 ÉLIANTE: Are you quite certain? Can you prove these
 15 things?
 PHILINTE: Lovers are prey to wild imaginings
 And jealous fancies. No doubt there's some
 mistake. . . .
 ALCESTE: Mind your own business, Sir, for heaven's
 sake.
 (To Éliante.) Madam, I have the proof that you
 demand
 20 Here in my pocket, penned by her own hand.
 Yes, all the shameful evidence one could want
 Lies in this letter written to Oronte —
 Oronte! whom I felt sure she couldn't love,
 And hardly bothered to be jealous of.
 25 PHILINTE: Still, in a letter, appearances may deceive;
 This may not be so bad as you believe.
 ALCESTE: Once more I beg you, Sir, to let me be;
 Tend to your own affairs; leave mine to me.
 ÉLIANTE: Compose yourself; this anguish that you
 feel . . .
 30 ALCESTE: Is something, Madam, you alone can heal.
 My outraged heart, beside itself with grief,
 Appeals to you for comfort and relief.
 Avenge me on your cousin, whose unjust
 And faithless nature has deceived my trust;
 35 Avenge a crime your pure soul must detest.
 ÉLIANTE: But how, Sir?
 ALCESTE: Madam, this heart within my breast
 Is yours; pray take it; redeem my heart from her,
 And so avenge me on my torturer.
 Let her be punished by the fond emotion,
 40 The ardent love, the bottomless devotion,
 The faithful worship which this heart of mine
 Will offer up to yours as to a shrine.
 ÉLIANTE: You have my sympathy, Sir, in all you suffer;
 Nor do I scorn the noble heart you offer;
 45 But I suspect you'll soon be mollified
 And this desire for vengeance will subside.
 When some beloved hand has done us wrong
 We thirst for retribution — but not for long;
 However dark the deed that she's committed,
 50 A lovely culprit's very soon acquitted.
 Nothing's so stormy as an injured lover,
 And yet no storm so quickly passes over.
 ALCESTE: No, Madam, no — this is no lovers' spat;
 I'll not forgive her, it's gone too far for that;

My mind's made up; I'll kill myself before
 I waste my hopes upon her any more.
 Ah, here she is. My wrath intensifies.
 I shall confront her with her tricks and lies,
 And crush her utterly, and bring you then
 A heart no longer slave to Célimène.

Scene III [Célimène, Alceste.]

- ALCESTE (*aside*): Sweet heaven, help me to control my
 passion.
 CÉLIMÈNE (*aside*): Oh, Lord. (To Alceste.) Why stand
 there staring in that fashion?
 55 And what d'you mean by those dramatic sighs,
 And that malignant glitter in your eyes?
 ALCESTE: I mean that sins which cause the blood to
 freeze
 Look innocent beside your treacheries;
 That nothing Hell's or Heaven's wrath could do
 Ever produced so bad a thing as you.
 CÉLIMÈNE: Your compliments were always sweet and
 pretty.
 ALCESTE: Madam, it's not the moment to be witty.
 No, blush and hang your head; you've ample
 reason,
 Since I've the fullest evidence of your treason.
 Ah, this is what my sad heart prophesied;
 Now all my anxious fears are verified;
 My dark suspicion and my gloomy doubt
 Divined the truth, and now the truth is out.
 For all your trickery, I was not deceived;
 It was my bitter stars that I believed.
 But don't imagine that you'll go scot-free;
 You shan't misuse me with impunity.
 I know that love's irrational and blind;
 I know the heart's not subject to the mind,
 And can't be reasoned into beating faster;
 I know each soul is free to choose its master;
 Therefore had you but spoken from the heart,
 Rejecting my attention from the start,
 I'd have no grievance, or at any rate
 I could complain of nothing but my fate.
 Ah, but so falsely to encourage me —
 That was a treason and a treachery
 For which you cannot suffer too severely,
 And you shall pay for that behavior dearly.
 Yes, now I have no pity, not a shred;
 My temper's out of hand, I've lost my head
 Shocked by the knowledge of your double-
 dealings,
 My reason can't restrain my savage feelings;
 A righteous wrath deprives me of my senses,
 And I won't answer for the consequences.
 CÉLIMÈNE: What does this outburst mean? Will you
 please explain?
 Have you, by any chance, gone quite insane?
 ALCESTE: Yes, yes, I went insane the day I fell
 A victim to your black and fatal spell,

Thinking to meet with some sincerity
Among the treacherous charms that beckoned me.
CÉLIMÈNE: Pooh. Of what treachery can you
complain?

ALCESTE: How sly you are, how cleverly you feign!
But you'll not victimize me any more.

Look: here's a document you've seen before.
This evidence, which I acquired today,

Leaves you, I think, without a thing to say.

CÉLIMÈNE: Is this what sent you into such a fit?

ALCESTE: You should be blushing at the sight of it.

CÉLIMÈNE: Ought I to blush? I truly don't see why.

ALCESTE: Ah, now you're being bold as well as sly;

Since there's no signature, perhaps you'll claim . . .

CÉLIMÈNE: I wrote it, whether or not it bears my name.

ALCESTE: And you can view with equanimity
his proof of your disloyalty to me!

CÉLIMÈNE: Oh, don't be so outrageous and extreme.

ALCESTE: You take this matter lightly, it would seem.

Was it no wrong to me, no shame to you,

That you should send Oronte this *billet-doux*?⁶²

CÉLIMÈNE: Oronte! Who said it was for him?

ALCESTE: Why, those

Who brought me this example of your prose.

But what's the difference? If you wrote the letter

To someone else, it pleases me no better.

My grievance and your guilt remain the same.

CÉLIMÈNE: But need you rage, and need I blush for
shame,

If this was written to a *woman* friend?

ALCESTE: Ah! Most ingenious. I'm impressed no end;

And after that incredible evasion

Your guilt is clear. I need no more persuasion.

How dare you try so clumsy a deception?

D'you think I'm wholly wanting in perception?

Come, come, let's see how brazenly you'll try

To bolster up so palpable a lie:

Kindly construe this ardent closing section

As nothing more than sisterly affection!

Here, let me read it. Tell me, if you dare to,

That this is for a woman . . .

CÉLIMÈNE: I don't dare to.

What right have you to badger and berate me,

And so high-handedly interrogate me?

ALCESTE: Now, don't be angry; all I ask of you

Is that you justify a phrase or two . . .

CÉLIMÈNE: No, I shall not. I utterly refuse,

And you may take those phrases as you choose.

ALCESTE: Just show me how this letter could be meant

For a woman's eyes, and I shall be content.

CÉLIMÈNE: No, no, it's for Oronte; you're perfectly
right.

I welcome his attentions with delight,

I prize his character and his intellect

And everything is just as you suspect.

Come, do your worst now; give your rage free rein;

But kindly cease to bicker and complain.

ALCESTE (*aside*): Good God! Could anything be more
inhuman?

Was ever a heart so mangled by a woman?

When I complain of how she has betrayed me,

She bridles, and commences to upbraid me!

She tries my tortured patience to the limit;

She won't deny her guilt; she glories in it!

And yet my heart's too faint and cowardly

To break these chains of passion, and be free,

To scorn her as it should, and rise above

This unrewarded, mad, and bitter love.

(*To Célimène.*) Ah, traitress, in how confident a
fashion

You take advantage of my helpless passion,

And use my weakness for your faithless charms

To make me once again throw down my arms!

But do at least deny this black transgression;

Take back that mocking and perverse confession;

Defend this letter and your innocence,

And I, poor fool, will aid in your defense.

Pretend, pretend, that you are just and true,

And I shall make myself believe in you.

CÉLIMÈNE: Oh, stop it. Don't be such a jealous dunce,

Or I shall leave off loving you at once.

Just why should I *pretend*? What could impel me

To stoop so low as that? And kindly tell me

Why, if I loved another, I shouldn't merely

Inform you of it, simply and sincerely!

I've told you where you stand, and that admission

Should altogether clear me of suspicion;

After so generous a guarantee

What right have you to harbor doubts of me?

Since women are (from natural reticence)

Reluctant to declare their sentiments,

And since the honor of our sex requires

That we conceal our amorous desires,

Ought any man for whom such laws are broken

To question what the oracle has spoken?

Should he not rather feel an obligation

To trust that most obliging declaration?

Enough, now. Your suspicions quite disgust me;

Why should I love a man who doesn't trust me?

I cannot understand why I continue,

Fool that I am, to take an interest in you.

I ought to choose a man less prone to doubt,

And give you something to be vexed about.

ALCESTE: Ah, what a poor enchanted fool I am;

These gentle words, no doubt, were all a sham,

But destiny requires me to entrust

My happiness to you, and so I must.

I'll love you to the bitter end, and see

How false and treacherous you dare to be.

CÉLIMÈNE: No, you don't really love me as you ought.

ALCESTE: I love you more than can be said or thought;

Indeed, I wish you were in such distress

That I might show my deep devotedness.

Yes, I could wish that you were wretchedly poor,

Unloved, uncherished, utterly obscure;

That fate had set you down upon the earth

62. *billet-doux*: Love letter.

Without possessions, rank, or gentle birth;
 Then, by the offer of my heart, I might
 Repair the great injustice of your plight;
 155 I'd raise you from the dust, and proudly prove
 The purity and vastness of my love.
 CÉLIMÈNE: This is a strange benevolence indeed!
 God grant that I may never be in need. . . .
 Ah, here's Monsieur Dubois in quaint disguise.

Scene IV [Célimène, Alceste, Dubois.]

ALCESTE: Well, why this costume? Why those frightened
 eyes?
 What ails you?
 DUBOIS: Well, Sir, things are most mysterious.
 ALCESTE: What do you mean?
 DUBOIS: I fear they're very serious.
 ALCESTE: What?
 DUBOIS: Shall I speak more loudly?
 ALCESTE: Yes; speak out.
 DUBOIS: Isn't there someone here, Sir?
 5 ALCESTE: Speak, you lout!
 Stop wasting time.
 DUBOIS: Sir, we must slip away.
 ALCESTE: How's that?
 DUBOIS: We must decamp without delay.
 ALCESTE: Explain yourself.
 DUBOIS: I tell you we must fly.
 ALCESTE: What for?
 DUBOIS: We mustn't pause to say good-by.
 ALCESTE: Now what d'you mean by all of this, you
 10 clown?
 DUBOIS: I mean, Sir, that we've got to leave this town.
 ALCESTE: I'll tear you limb from limb and joint from
 joint
 If you don't come more quickly to the point.
 DUBOIS: Well, Sir, today a man in a black suit,
 15 Who wore a black and ugly scowl to boot,
 Left us a document scrawled in such a hand
 As even Satan couldn't understand.
 It bears upon your lawsuit, I don't doubt;
 But all hell's devils couldn't make it out.
 20 ALCESTE: Well, well, go on. What then? I fail to see
 How this event obliges us to flee.
 DUBOIS: Well, Sir, an hour later, hardly more,
 A gentleman who's often called before
 Came looking for you in an anxious way.
 25 Not finding you, he asked me to convey
 (Knowing I could be trusted with the same)
 The following message. . . . Now, what *was* his
 name?
 ALCESTE: Forget his name, you idiot. What did he say?
 DUBOIS: Well, it was one of your friends, Sir, anyway.
 30 He warned you to begone, and he suggested
 That if you stay, you may well be arrested.
 ALCESTE: What? Nothing more specific? Think, man,
 think!
 DUBOIS: No, Sir. He had me bring him pen and ink,

And dashed you off a letter which, I'm sure,
 Will render things distinctly less obscure. 35
 ALCESTE: Well — let me have it!
 CÉLIMÈNE: What is this all about?
 ALCESTE: God knows; but I have hopes of finding out.
 How long am I to wait, you blitherer?
 DUBOIS: (*after a protracted search for the letter*):
 I must have left it on your table, Sir.
 ALCESTE: I ought to . . .
 CÉLIMÈNE: No, no, keep your self-control; 40
 Go find out what's behind his rigmareole.
 ALCESTE: It seems that fate, no matter what I do,
 Has sworn that I may not converse with you;
 But, Madam, pray permit your faithful lover
 To try once more before the day is over. 45

ACT V • Scene 1 [Alceste, Philinte.]

ALCESTE: No, it's too much. My mind's made up, I tell
 you.
 PHILINTE: Why should this blow, however hard,
 compel you . . .
 ALCESTE: No, no, don't waste your breath in argument;
 Nothing you say will alter my intent;
 5 This age is vile, and I've made up my mind
 To have no further commerce with mankind.
 Did not truth, honor, decency, and the laws
 Oppose my enemy and approve my cause?
 My claims were justified in all men's sight;
 I put my trust in equity and right; 10
 Yet, to my horror and the world's disgrace,
 Justice is mocked, and I have lost my case!
 A scoundrel whose dishonesty is notorious
 Emerges from another lie victorious!
 Honor and right condone his brazen fraud, 15
 While rectitude and decency applaud!
 Before his smirking face, the truth stands charmed,
 And virtue conquered, and the law disarmed!
 His crime is sanctioned by a court decree!
 And not content with what he's done to me, 20
 The dog now seeks to ruin me by stating
 That I composed a book now circulating,
 A book so wholly criminal and vicious
 That even to speak its title is seditious!
 25 Meanwhile Oronte, my rival, lends his credit
 To the same libelous tale, and helps to spread it!
 Oronte! a man of honor and of rank,
 With whom I've been entirely fair and frank;
 Who sought me out and forced me, willy-nilly,
 30 To judge some verse I found extremely silly;
 And who, because I properly refused
 To flatter him, or see the truth abused,
 Abets my enemy in a rotten slander!
 There's the reward of honesty and candor!
 35 The man will hate me to the end of time
 For failing to commend his wretched rhyme!
 And not this man alone, but all humanity
 Do what they do from interest and vanity;