Amphitryon

by Molière

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AMPHITRYON

A play

By Moliere

Translated by A.R. Waller

Amphitryon was played for the first time in Paris, at the Theatre du Palais-Royal,

January 13, 1668. It was successfully received, holding the boards until the 18th of March, when Easter intervened. After the re-opening of the theatre, it was played half a dozen times more the same year, and continued to please.

The first edition was published in 1668.

Note: It is perhaps hardly necessary to refer the reader to Amphitryon, by Plautus, the comedy upon which Moliere's charming play was, in the main, based. The rendering attempted here can give but a faint reflection of the original, for hardly any comedy of Moliere's loses more in the process of translation.

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AMPHITRYON

A Comedy

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

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The Scene is at Thebes, before the house of Amphitryon.

PROLOGUE

MERCURY, on a cloud; NIGHT, in a chariot drawn by two horses

MERC. Wait! Gentle Night; deign to stay awhile: Some help is needed from you. I have two words to say to you from Jupiter.

NIGHT. Ah! Ah! It is you, Seigneur Mercury! Who would have thought of you here, in that position?

MERC. Well, feeling tired, and not being able to fulfil the different duties Jupiter ordered me, I quietly sat down on this cloud to await your coming.

NIGHT. You jest, Mercury: you do not mean it; does it become the Gods to say they are tired?

MERC. Are the Gods made of iron?

NIGHT. No; but one must always have a care for divine decorum. There are certain words the use of which debases this sublime quality, and it is meet that these should be left to men, because they are unworthy.

MERC. You speak at your ease, fair lady, from a swiftly rolling chariot, in which, like a dame free from care; you are drawn by two fine horses wherever you like. But it is not the same with me. Such is my miserable fate that I cannot bear the poets too great a grudge for their gross impertinence in having, by an unjust law, which they wish to retain in force, given a separate conveyance to each God, for his own use, and left me to go on foot: me, like a village messenger, though, as everyone knows, I am the famous messenger of the sovereign of the Gods, on the earth and in the heavens. Without any exaggeration, I need more than any one else the means of being carried about, because of all the duties he puts upon me.

NIGHT. What can one do? The poets do what pleases them. It is not the only stupidity we have detected in these gentlemen. But surely your irritation against them is wrong, for the wings at your feet are a friendly gift of theirs.

MERC. Yes; but does going more quickly tire oneself less?

NIGHT. Let us leave the matter, Seigneur Mercury, and learn what is wanted.

MERC. Jupiter, as I have told you, wishes the dark aid of your cloak for a certain gallant adventure, which a new love affair has furnished him. His custom is not new to you, I believe: often does he neglect the heavens for the earth; and you are not ignorant that this master of the Gods loves to take upon himself the guise of man to woo earthly beauties. He knows a hundred ingenious tricks to entrap the most obdurate. He has felt the darts of Alcmene's eyes; and, whilst Amphitryon, her husband, commands the Theban troops on the plains of Boeotia, Jupiter has taken his form, and assuaged his pains, in the possession of the sweetest of pleasures. The condition of the couple is propitious to his desire: Hymen joined them only a few days ago; and the young warmth of their tender love suggested to Jupiter to have recourse to this fine artifice. His stratagem proved successful in this case; but with many a cherished object a similar disguise would not be of any use: it is not always a sure means of pleasing, to adopt the form, of a husband.

NIGHT. I admire Jupiter, and I cannot imagine all the disguises which come into his head.

MERC. By these means he wishes to taste all sorts of conditions: that is the act of a God who is not a fool. However mortals may regard him, I should think very meanly of him if he never quitted his redoubtable mien, and were always in the heavens, standing upon his dignity. In my opinion, there is nothing more idiotic than always to be imprisoned in one's grandeur; above all, a lofty rank becomes very inconvenient in the transports of amorous ardour. Jupiter, no doubt, is a connoisseur in pleasure, and he knows how to descend from the height of his supreme glory. So that he can enter into everything that pleases him, he entirely casts aside himself, and then it is no longer Jupiter who appears.

NIGHT. I could overlook seeing him step down from his sublime stage to that of

men, since he wishes to enter into all the transports which their natures can supply, and join in their jests, if, in the changes which take his fancy, he would confine himself to nature. But I do not think it fitting to see Jupiter as a bull, a serpent, a swan, or what not, and it does not astonish me that it is sometimes talked about.

MERC. Let all the busybodies talk; such changes have their own charms and surpass people's understanding. The God knows what he does in this affair as in everything else: in the movements of their tender passions, animals are not so loutish as one might think.

NIGHT. Let us return to the lady whose favours he enjoys. If, by his stratagem, his pursuit is successful, what more can he wish? What can I do?

MERC. He wishes that you would slacken the pace of your horses, to satisfy the passion of his amorous heart, and so make of a delightful night the longest night of all; that you would give him more time for his transports, and retard the birth of day since it will hasten the return of him whose place he occupies.

NIGHT. Really the employment which the great Jupiter reserves for me is a worthy one! The service he requires of me passes under a very respectable name.

MERC. You are somewhat old-fashioned for a young goddess! Such an employment is not debasing except among people of mean birth. When one has the happiness of belonging to lofty rank, whatever one does is always right and good; things change their names to suit what one may be.

NIGHT. You know more about such matters than I do; I will trust to your enlightened views and accept this employment.

MERC. Come, come, now, Madam Night, a little gently, I beseech you. The world gives you the reputation of not being so scrupulous. In a hundred different climes you are made the confidant of many gallant adventures; and, if I may speak candidly, we do not owe each other anything.

NIGHT. Let us cease these reproaches and remain what we are. Let us not give men

cause to laugh by telling each other the truth.

MERC. Adieu. I am going there to play my part in this business, promptly to strip myself of the form of Mercury and to take in its place the figure of Amphitryon's valet.

NIGHT. I am going to keep station in this hemisphere with my sombre train.

MERC. Good day, Night.

NIGHT. Adieu, Mercury.

(Mercury descends from his cloud to the earth, and Night goes away in her chariot.)

END OF THE PROLOGUE.

ACT I

SCENE I SOSIE

Who goes there? Eh? My fear grows with every step. Gentlemen, I am a friend to all the world. Ah! What unparalleled boldness, to be out at this hour! My master is crowned with fame, but what a villainous trick he plays me here! What? If he had any love for his neighbour, would he have sent me out in such a black night? Could he not just as well have waited until it was day before sending me to announce his return and the details of his victory? To what servitude are thy days subjected, Sosie! Our lot is far more hard with the great than with the mean. They insist that everything in nature should be compelled to sacrifice itself for them. Night and day, hail, wind, peril, heat, cold, as soon as they speak we must fly. Twenty years of assiduous service do not gain us any consideration from them. The least little whim draws down upon us their anger.

Notwithstanding this, our infatuated hearts cling to the empty honour of remaining near them, contented with the false idea, which every one holds, that we are happy. In vain reason bids us retire; in vain our spite sometimes consents to this; to be near

them is too powerful an influence on our zeal, and the least favour of a caressing glance immediately re-engages us. But at last, I see our house through the darkness, and my fear vanishes.

I must prepare some thought-out speech for my mission. I must give Alcmene warlike description of the fierce combat which put our enemies to flight. But how the deuce can I do this since I was not there? Never mind; let us talk of cut and thrust, as though I were an eyewitness. How many people describe battles from which they remained far away! In order to act my part without discredit, I will rehearse it a little.

This is the chamber into which I am ushered as the messenger: this lantern is Alcmene, to whom I have to speak. (He sets his lantern on the ground and salutes it.) 'Madam, Amphitryon, my master and your husband,... (Good! that is a fine beginning!) whose mind is ever full of your charms, has chosen me from amongst all to bring tidings of the success of his arms, and of his desire to be near you.' 'Ah! Really, my poor Sosie, I am delighted to see you back again.' 'Madam, you do me too much honour: my lot is an enviable one.' (Well answered!)

'How is Amphitryon?' 'Madam, as a man of courage should be, when glory leads him.' (Very good! A capital idea!) 'When will my heart be charmed and satisfied by his return?' 'As soon as possible, assuredly, Madam, but his heart desires a speedier return.' (Ah!) 'In what state has the war left him? What says he? What does he? Ease my anxiety.' He says less than he does, Madam, and makes his enemies tremble.' (Plague! where do I get all these fine speeches?) 'What are the rebels doing? Tell me, what is their condition?' 'They could not resist our efforts, Madam; we cut them to pieces, put their chief, Pterelas, to death, took Telebos by assault; and now the port rings with our prowess.' 'Ah! What a success! Ye Gods! Who could ever have imagined it? Tell me, Sosie, how it happened.' 'I will, gladly, Madam; and, without boasting, I can tell you, with the greatest accuracy, the details of this victory.

Imagine, therefore, Madam, that Telebos is on this side. (He marks the places on his hand, or on the ground.) It is a city really almost as large as Thebes. The river is, say, there. Here, our people encamped; and that space was occupied by our enemies. On a height, somewhere about here, was their infantry; and, lower down, on the right side, was their cavalry. After having addressed prayers to the Gods, and issued all the orders, the signal was given. The enemy, thinking to turn our flank, divided their horse soldiers into three platoons; but we soon chilled their warmth, and you shall see how. Here is our vanguard ready to begin work; there, were the archers of our king, Creon; and here, the main army (some one makes a slight noise), which was just going to... Stay; the main body is afraid'; I think I hear some noise.

SCENE II MERCURY, SOSIE

MERC. (Under the form of Sosie.) Under this mask which resembles him, I will drive away the babbler from here. His unfortunate arrival may disturb the pleasures our lovers are tasting together.

SOS. My heart revives a little; perhaps it was nothing. Lest anything untoward should happen, however, I will go in to finish the conversation.

MERC. I shall prevent your doing that unless you are stronger than Mercury.

SOS. This night seems to me unusually long. By the time I have been on the way, either my master has taken evening for morning, or lovely Phoebus slumbers too long in bed through having taken too much wine.

MERC. With what irreverence this lubber speaks of the Gods! My arm shall soon chastise this insolence; I shall have a fine game with him, stealing his name as well as his likeness.

SOS. Ah! upon my word, I was right: I am done for, miserable creature that I am! I see a man before our house whose mien bodes me no good. I will sing a little to show some semblance of assurance.

(He sings; and, when Mercury speaks, his voice weakens, little by little.)

MERC. What rascal is this, who takes the unwarrantable licence of singing and deafening me like this? Does he wish me to curry his coat for him?

SOS. Assuredly that fellow does not like music.

MERC. For more than a week, I have not found any one whose bones I could break; my arm will lose its strength in this idleness. I must look out for some one's back to get my wind again.

SOS. What the deuce of a fellow is this? My heart thrills with clutching fear. But why should I tremble thus? Perhaps the rogue is as much afraid as I am, and talks in this way to hide his fear from me under a feigned audacity. Yes, yes, I will not allow him to think me a goose. If I am not bold, I will try to appear so. Let me seek courage by reason; he is alone, even as I am; I am strong, I have a good master, and there is our house.

MERC. Who goes there?

SOS. I.

MERC. Who, I?

SOS. I. Courage, Sosie!

MERC. Tell me, what is your condition?

SOS. To be a man, and to speak.

MERC. Are you a master, or a servant?

SOS. As fancy takes me.

MERC. Where are you going?

SOS. Where I intend to go.

MERC. Ah! This annoys me.

SOS. I am ravished to hear it.

MERC. By hook or by crook, I must definitely know all about you, you wretch;

what you do, whence you come before the day breaks, where you are going, and who you may be.

SOS. I do good and ill by turns; I come from there; I go there; I belong to my master.

MERC. You show wit, and I see you think to play the man of importance for my edification. I feel inclined to make your acquaintance by slapping your face.

SOS. Mine?

MERC. Yours; and there you get it, sharp. (Mercury gives him a slap.)

SOS. Ah! Ah! This is a fine game!

MERC. No; it is only a laughing matter, a reply to your quips.

SOS. Good heavens! Friend, how you swing out your arm without any one saying anything to you.

MERC. These are my lightest clouts, little ordinary smacks.

SOS. If I were as hasty as you, we should have a fine ado.

MERC. All this is nothing as yet: it is merely to fill up time; we shall soon see something else; but let us continue our conversation.

SOS. I give up the game. (He turns to go away.)

MERC. Where are you going?

SOS. What does it matter to you?

MERC. I want to know where you are going.

SOS. I am going to open that door. Why do you detain me?

MERC. If you dare to go near it, I shall rain down a storm of blows on you.

SOS. What? You wish to hinder me from entering our own house by threats?

MERC. What do you say, your house?

SOS. Yes, our house.

MERC. O, the scoundrel! You speak of that house?

SOS. Certainly. Is not Amphitryon the master of it?

MERC. Well! What does that prove?

SOS. I am his valet.

MERC. You?

SOS. I.

MERC. His valet?

SOS. Unquestionably.

MERC. Valet of Amphitryon?

SOS. Of Amphitryon himself.

MERC. Your name is?

SOS. Sosie.

MERC. Eh? What?

SOS. Sosie.

MERC. Listen: do you realise that my fist can knock you spinning?

SOS. Why? What fury has seized you now?

MERC. Tell me, who made you so rash as to take the name of Sosie?

SOS. I do not take it; I have always borne it.

MERC. O what a monstrous lie! What confounded impudence! You dare to maintain that Sosie is your name?

SOS. Certainly; I maintain it, for the good reason that the Gods have so ordered it by their supreme power. It is not in my power to say no, and to be any one else than myself.

(Mercury beats him.) MERC. A thousand stripes ought to be the reward of such audacity.

SOS. Justice, citizens! Help! I beseech you.

MERC. So, you gallows-bird, you yell out?

SOS. You beat me down with a thousand blows, and yet do not wish me to cry out?

MERC. It is thus that my arm...

SOS. The action is unworthy. You gloat over the advantage which my want of courage gives you over me; that is not fair treatment. It is mere bullying to wish to profit by the poltroonery of those whom one makes to feel the weight of one's arm. To thrash a man who does not retaliate is not the act of a generous soul; and to show courage against men who have none merits condemnation.

MERC. Well! Are you still Sosie? What say you?

SOS. Your blows have not made any metamorphosis in me; all the change there is is that in the matter I am Sosie thrashed.

MERC. Still? A hundred fresh blows for this fresh impudence.

SOS. Have mercy, a truce to your blows.

MERC. Then a truce to your insolence.

SOS. Anything that pleases you; I will keep silence. The dispute between us is too unequal.

MERC. Are you still Sosie? Say, villain!

SOS. Alas! I am what you wish; dispose of my lot exactly as you please: your arm 'has made you the master of it.

MERC. I think you said your name was Sosie?

SOS. True, until now I thought the matter was clear; but your rod has made me see that I was mistaken in this affair.

MERC. I am Sosie: all Thebes avows it. Amphitryon has never had other than me.

SOS. You, Sosie?

MERC. Yes, Sosie; and if any one trifles with me, he must take care of himself.

SOS. Heavens! Must I thus renounce myself, and see my name stolen by an impostor. How lucky I am a poltroon! Or, by the death...!

MERC. What are you mumbling between your teeth?

SOS. Nothing. But, in the name of the Gods, give me leave to speak one moment with you.

MERC. Speak.

SOS. But promise me, I beseech you, that there shall not be any more strokes. Let us sign a truce.

MERC. Let that pass; go on, I grant you this point.

SOS. Tell me, who put this fancy into your head? What benefit will it be to you to take my name? In short, were you a demon, could you hinder me from being myself, from being Sosie?

MERC. What is this, you dare...

SOS. Ah! Gently: there is a truce to blows.

MERC. What! Gallows-bird, impostor, scoundrel...

SOS. As for abuse, give me as much as you please; it makes but a slight wound and does not bother me.

MERC. You say you are Sosie?

SOS. Yes. Some ridiculous tale...

MERC. So, I shall break our truce, and take back my word.

SOS. I can't help it. I cannot annihilate myself for you, and endure so improbable a tale. Is it in your power to be what I am? Can I cease to be myself? Did any one ever hear of such a thing? And can you give the lie to a hundred clear indications? Do I dream? Do I sleep? Is my mind troubled by powerful transports? Do I not feel I am

awake? Am I not in my right senses? Has not my master, Amphitryon, commanded me to come here to Alcmene his wife? Am I not, in commending his passion to her, to give her an account of his deeds against our enemies? Have I not just come from the harbour? Do I not hold a lantern in my hand? Have I not found you in front of our house? Did I not speak to you in a perfectly friendly manner? Do you not make use of my poltroonery to hinder me from entering our house? Have you not vented your rage upon my back? Have you not showered blows on me? Ah! All this is but too true: would to Heaven it were less real! Cease therefore to jeer at a wretch's lot, and leave me to acquit myself where my duty calls me.

MERC. Stop, or the shortest step brings down upon your back clattering evidence of my just anger. All you have just said is mine, except the blows. It is I, whom Amphitryon sent to Alcmene; who has just arrived from the Persian port; I, who have come to announce the valour of his arm, which has gained us a glorious victory, and slain the chief of our enemies. In short, I am undoubtedly Sosie, son of Dave, an honest shepherd; brother of Arpage, who died in a foreign land; husband of Cleanthis the prude, whose temper drives me wild; I, who received a thousand cuts from a whip at Thebes, without ever saying anything about it; and who was once publicly branded on the back for being too worthy a man.

SOS. He is right. If he were not Sosie, he could not know all he says; all this is so astounding that even I begin to believe him a little. In fact, now I look at him, I see he has my figure, looks, and manners. I wilt ask him some question, in order to clear up this mystery. What did Amphitryon obtain as his share of all the plunder taken from our enemies?

MERC. Five fine large diamonds, beautifully set in a cluster, which their chief wore as a rare piece of handicraft.

SOS. For whom does he intend so rich a present?

MERC. For his wife; he intends her to wear it.

SOS. Where have you put it, until you meet her?

MERC. In a casket sealed with the arms of my master.

SOS. He does not tell a single lie at any turn: I begin to doubt myself in earnest. He has already cowed me into believing him to be Sosie; and he might even reason me into thinking him so. Yet, when I touch myself, and recollect, it seems to me I am myself. Where can I find some light that will clearly make my way plain? What I have done alone, and what no one has seen, cannot be known to any one else: that, at least, belongs to me. I will astonish him by this question: it will confound him, and we shall see. When they were at close quarters, what were you doing in our tents, whither you ran to hide yourself away?

MERC. Off a ham

SOS. That is it!

MERC. Which I unearthed, I soon cut two succulent slices: they suited me nicely. I added to them a wine which was usually kept dark, and, gloated over the sight of it before I tasted it. So I took heart for our fighters.

SOS. This unparalleled proof ends matters well in his favour; and, unless he were in the bottle, there is nothing to be said. From the proofs you show me, I cannot deny that you are Sosie: I admit it. But, if you are he, tell me whom you wish me to be; for I must be someone.

MERC. When I shall no longer be Sosie, you may be he, I consent to that; but I promise you it shall be the death of you if you take up such a fancy while I am he.

SOS. All this confusion turns me inside out, for reason is against what I see. But I must end this by some means; and the shortest way for me is to go in there.

MERC. Oh! You gallows-bird, you want to taste the stick.

SOS. What is the matter? Great Gods! He makes the blows ring again; my back will ache for a month. I will leave this devil of a fellow, and return to the harbour. O just

Heavens, what a fine ambassador I have been!

MERC. At last, I have made him fly; this treatment has paid him out for many of his deeds. But here is Jupiter, gallantly escorting his lover Alcmene.

SCENE III JUPITER, ALCMENE, CLEANTHIS, MERCURY

JUP. My dear Alcmene, forbid the torch-bearers to come near. They give me delight in enabling me to see you; but they might betray my being here, and this were best unrevealed. Restrained by all the heavy cares with which the glory of our arms held me bound, my heart has stolen from the duties of my post the moments it has just given to your charms. This theft, which I have consecrated to your beauty, might be blamed by the public voice; and the only witness I want, is she who can thank me for it.

ALC. I take great interest, Amphitryon, in the glory which your illustrious exploits have cast upon you; the fame of your victory moves my heart to its depths. But when I see that this disastrous honour keeps my lover away from me, such is my heart's feeling that I cannot forbear to think ill of it, and to regret the high order which makes you general of the Thebans. It is sweet after a victory to see the glory to which one's lover has been raised; but, from among the perils attached to this glory, a deadly blow, alas! may soon fall. With how many fears is one's heart wounded at the report of the least skirmish! In the horror of such a thought, is there anything that can console for the threatened stroke? And with whatever laurels the victor may be crowned, whatever share one may have in that supreme honour, is it worth what it costs a tender heart, which trembles every moment for its lover?

JUP. I do not see anything in you but what inflames my passion; everything shows me a deeply enamoured heart; and, I confess, it is a great delight to find so much love in a beloved object. But, if I may dare say so, one scruple in the tender sentiments which you show me causes me anxiety; and, in order to enjoy you the more, dear Alcmene, my heart would rather see love only, and not duty, in the

favours which I receive from you; may they arise solely from affection, and have respect to my person only; let not my condition as your husband be the reason for them.

ALC. Yet it is in that name that the ardour which burns me holds the right to show itself: I do not understand this new scruple which troubles your heart.

JUP. The love and tenderness which I have for you far exceeds a husband's; in these sweet moments, you do not realise its delicacy; You do not understand that a heart deeply in love studiously attaches itself to a hundred little trifles, and is restless over the manner of being happy. In me, fair and charming Alcmene, you see a lover and a husband; but, to speak frankly, it is the lover that appeals to me; when near you, I feel the husband restrains him. This lover, who is supremely jealous of your love, wishes your heart to abandon itself solely to him: his passion does not wish anything the husband gives him. He wishes to obtain the warmth of your love from the fountain-head, and not to owe anything to the bonds of wedlock, or to a duty which palls and makes the heart sad, for by these the sweetness of the most cherished favours is daily poisoned. This idea, in short, tosses him to and fro, and he wishes, in order to satisfy his scruples, that you would differentiate where the occasion offends him, the husband to be only for your virtue, and the lover to have the whole affection and tenderness of a heart known to be full of kindness.

ALC. In truth, Amphitryon, you must be jesting, to talk thus; I should be afraid anyone who heard you would think you were not sane.

JUP. There is more reason in this discourse, Alcmene, than you think. But a longer stay here would render me guilty, and time presses for my return to port. Adieu. The stern call of duty tears me away from you for a time; but, lovely Alcmene, I beseech you at least to think of the lover when you see the husband.

ALC. I do not separate what the Gods unite: both husband and lover are very precious to me.

CLE. O Heaven! How delightful are the caresses of an ardently cherished husband! How far my poor husband is from all this tenderness!

MERC. I must tell Night she has but to furl all her sails; the Sun may now arise from his bed and put out the stars.

SCENE IV

CLEANTHIS, MERCURY (Mercury turns to go away)

CLE. So? Is it thus you quit me?

MERC. What would you have? Do you wish me not to do my duty, and follow in Amphitryon's footsteps?

CLE. To separate from me so rudely as this, you villain!

MERC. It is a fine subject to make a fuss about! We have still plenty of time to live together!

CLE. But to go in such a churlish manner, without saying a single kind word to cheer me!

MERC. Where the deuce shall I dig up silly compliments? Fifteen years of married life exhaust nonsense; we said all we had to say to each other a long time ago.

CLE. Look at Amphitryon, you rascal; see how his ardour burns for Alcmene; and then blush for the little passion that you show your wife.

MERC. But, gracious me! Cleanthis, they are still lovers. There comes a certain age when all this passes away; what suits them well in these early days would look ridiculous in us, old married people. It would be it fine sight to see us embracing each other, and saying sweet nothings!

CLE. Oh! You perfidious wretch, must I give up hope that a heart sighs for me?

MERC. No, I should be sorry to say that; but I have too long a beard to dare to sigh; I should make you die of laughter.

CLE. You brute, do you deserve the good fortune of having a virtuous woman for

your wife?

MERC. Good Heavens! You are but too virtuous; this fine virtue is not worth anything to me. Do not be quite so honest a woman, and don't bother me so much.

CLE. What? Do you blame me for being too honest?

MERC. A woman's gentleness is what charms me most: your virtue makes a clatter that never ceases to deafen me.

CLE. You care for hearts full of false tenderness, for those women with the laudable and fine talent of knowing how to smother their husbands with caresses in order to make them oblivious of the existence of lovers.

MERC. Well! Shall I tell you what I think? An imaginary evil concerns fools only; my device should be: 'Less honour and more peace.'

CLE. Would you, without any repugnance, suffer me openly to love a gallant?

MERC. Yes, if I were no longer worried by your tongue, and if it changed your temper and your goings-on. I prefer a convenient vice, to a fatiguing virtue. Adieu, Cleanthis, my dear soul; I must follow Amphitryon. (He goes away.)

CLE Why has not my heart sufficient resolution to punish this infamous scoundrel? Ah, how it maddens me, now, that I am an honest woman!

END OF THE FIRST ACT

ACT II

SCENE I AMPHITRYON, SOSIE

AMPH. Come here, you rascal, come here. Do you know, Master Villain, that your talk is sufficient to cause me to knock you down, and that my wrath waits only for a stick to thrash you as I intend?

SOS. If you take it in that way, Monsieur, I have nothing more to say; you will be always in the right.

AMPH. So? You scoundrel, you wish to impose upon me as truths tales which I know to be extravagantly far-fetched?

SOS. No; I am the servant, and you are the master; it shall not be otherwise than you wish it, Monsieur.

AMPH. Come, I will choke down the anger that inflames me, and hear all you have to say about your mission. I must unravel this confusion before I see my wife. Collect your senses, think well over what you say, and answer each question word for word.

SOS. But, lest I make a mistake, tell me, I beseech you, beforehand, in what way it would please you to have this affair healed. Shall I speak, Monsieur, according to my conscience, or as usual when near the great? Shall I tell the truth or use a certain complaisance?

AMPH. No; I only wish you to give me a perfectly unvarnished account.

SOS. Good. That is enough; leave it to me; you have, but to interrogate me.

AMPH. Upon the order which I lately gave you...

SOS. I set forth under skies veiled in black crape, swearing bitterly against you for this wretched martyrdom, and cursing twenty times the order of which you speak.

AMPH. What do you mean, you villain?

SOS. You have only to speak, Monsieur, and I shall lie, if you desire it.

AMPH. That is how a valet shows his zeal for us. Never mind. What happened to you on the way?

SOS. I had a mortal fright at the least thing I met.

AMPH. Poltroon!

SOS. Nature has her caprices in forming us; she gives us differing inclinations; some find a thousand delights in exposing themselves; I find them in taking care of myself.

AMPH. When you arrived at the house...?

SOS. When I reached the door, I wished to rehearse to myself for a short time, in what tone and in what manner I should give a glorious account of the battle.

AMPH. What followed?

SOS. Some one came to annoy and trouble me.

AMPH. Who was he?

SOS. Sosie; another I, jealous of your orders, whom you sent to Alcmene from the port, and who has as full knowledge of our secrets as I who am speaking to you.

AMPH. What nonsense!

SOS. No, Monsieur, it is the simple truth: this I was at your house sooner than I; and, I swear to you, I was there before I had arrived.

AMPH. Pray, where does all this cursed nonsense come from? Is it a dream? Is it drunkenness? Mind-wandering? Or a sorry joke?

SOS. No, it is the thing as it is, and by no means an idle tale. I am a man of honour, I give you my word, and you must please believe it. I tell you, believing I was but one Sosie, I found myself two at your house; and of these two I's, piqued with jealousy, one is at the house, and the other is with you; the I who is here, tired out, found the other I fresh, jolly and active, having no other anxiety than to fight and break bones.

AMPH. I confess I must be of a very placid temper, very peaceable, very gentle, to permit a valet to entertain me with such nonsense!

SOS. If you become angry, no more conference between us: you know all will be over at once.

AMPH. No; I will listen to you without being carried away; I promised it. But tell me in good earnest, is there any shadow of likelihood in this new mystery which you have just told me?

SOS. No; you are right, the matter must appear to everyone past credit. It is a fact

past understanding, an extravagant, ridiculous, far-fetched tale: it shocks common sense; but it is none the less a fact.

AMPH. How can anyone believe it, unless he has taken leave of his senses?

SOS. I myself did not believe it without extreme difficulty: I thought I was losing my senses when I saw myself two, and, for a long time, I treated my other self as an impostor: but he compelled me in the end to recognise myself; I saw it was I, without any trickery; from head to foot he is like me-handsome, a noble air, well built, charming manners; in fact, two peas do not resemble each other more; were it not that his hands are a little too heavy, I should be perfectly satisfied.

AMPH. I had need exhort myself to patience! But did you not in the end go into the house?

SOS. Good, go in! Ah! In what fashion? Have I never wished to listen to reason? Did I not forbid myself to enter our door?

AMPH. In what way?

SOS. With a stick, my back still aches from it.

AMPH. You have been thrashed?

SOS. Truly.

AMPH. And by whom?

SOS. Myself.

AMPH. You have thrashed yourself?

SOS. Yes, I; not the I who is here, but the I from the house, who whacks soundly.

AMPH. Heaven confound you for talking to me like this!

SOS. I am not joking; the I whom I have just met has great advantages over the I who speaks to you. He has a strong arm and great courage; I have had proofs of both; this devil of an I has licked me soundly; he is a fellow who can do wonders.

AMPH. Let us, cease this. Have you seen my wife?

SOS. No.

AMPH. Why not?

SOS. For a sufficiently strong reason.

AMPH. Who hindered you, scoundrel? Explain yourself.

SOS. Must I repeat the same thing twenty times? I, I tell you, this I who is more robust than I, this I who took possession of the door by force, this I who made me slope off, this I who wishes to be the only I, this I who is jealous of myself, this valiant I, whose anger made itself known to this poltroon of an I, in fact, this I who is at our house, this I who has shown himself to be my master, this I who has racked me with pain.

AMPH. His brain must be addled by having had too much to drink this morning.

SOS. May I be hanged if I have had anything to drink but water: I take my oath on it.

AMPH. Then your senses must have been fast asleep: some silly dream has shown you all these fairy tales and confused mysteries which you wish me to take for truths.

SOS. That is just as far away from the truth. I have not slept, and I do not even feel inclined that way. I am speaking to you wide-awake; I was wide awake this morning, upon my life! And the other Sosie was also wide-awake, when he drubbed me so well.

AMPH. Follow me; I order you to be silent. You tire my brain too much; I must be an out-and-out fool to have the patience to listen to the nonsense a valet has to say.

SOS. All talk is nonsense that comes from a man who is unknown. If a great man were to say it, it would be exquisite language.

AMPH. Let us go in without waiting any longer. But here comes Alcmene clothed in

all her charms. Doubtless she does not expect me so soon, and my arrival will surprise her.

SCENE II ALCMENE, CLEANTHIS, AMPHITRYON, SOSIE

ALC. Come, Cleanthis, let us attend the Gods, pay them our homage for my husband's sake, and thank them for the glorious success, of which Thebes, by his arm, reaps the advantage. O ye Gods!

AMPH. Heaven grant that victorious Amphitryon may be met with renewed pleasure by his wife: that this day may be favourable to my passion, and restore you to me with the same heart: may I again find as much love as my heart brings to you!

ALC. Ah! Have you returned so soon.

AMPH. Really, you give me but a sorry proof of your love; this, 'Ah! have you returned so soon?' is scarcely the language a heart really inflamed with love would use on such an occasion as this. I dared to flatter myself I had remained away from you too long. The expectation of an ardently longed for return makes each moment seem of great length; the absence of what we love, however brief it may be, is always too long.

ALC. I do not see...

AMPH. No, Alcmene, time is measured in such cases by one's impatience; you count the moments of absence as one who does not love. When we really love, the slightest separation kills us; the one whom we love to see never returns too soon. I confess that the love I bear you has cause to complain of your reception; I expected different expressions of joy and tenderness from your heart.

ALC. I cannot understand on what you found the words you have just uttered; if you complain of me, upon my word I do not know what would satisfy you. I think I showed a sufficiently tender joy last night, at your happy return; my heart responded by every means you could wish to the claims of your affection.

AMPH. In what way?

ALC. Did I not clearly show the sudden transports of a perfect joy? Could a heart's feelings be better expressed at the return of a husband who is tenderly loved?

AMPH. What do you say?

ALC. That even your affection showed an inconceivable joy at my reception; and that, as you left me at break of day, I do not see that my surprise at this sudden return is so guilty.

AMPH. Did you, in a dream last night, Alcmene, anticipate in idea the reality of my hastened return; and having, perhaps, treated me kindly in your sleep, does your heart think it has fully acquitted itself of its duty to my passion?

ALC. Has some malignant vapour in your mind, Amphitryon, clouded the truth of last night's return? Does your heart pretend to take away from me the credit of all the gentle affection I showed you in my tender welcome?

AMPH. This vapour you attribute to me seems to me somewhat strange.

ALC. It is in return for the dream which you attribute to me.

AMPH. Unless it is because of a dream, what you have just now told me is entirely inexcusable.

ALC. Unless it is a vapour which troubles your mind, what I have heard from you cannot be justified.

AMPH. Let us leave this vapour for a moment, Alcmene.

ALC. Let us leave this dream for a moment, Amphitryon.

AMPH. One cannot jest on the subject in question without being carried too far.

ALC. Undoubtedly; and, as a sure proof of it, I begin to feel somewhat uneasy.

AMPH. Is it thus you wish to try to make amends for the welcome of which I complain?

ALC. Do you desire to try to amuse yourself by this feint?

AMPH. For Heaven's, sake, I beseech you, Alcmene! Let us cease this, and talk seriously.

ALC. You carry your amusement too far, Amphitryon: let there be an end to this raillery.

AMPH. Do you really dare maintain to my face that I was seen here before this hour?

ALC. Have you really the assurance to deny that you came here early yesterday evening?

AMPH. I! I came yesterday?

ALC. Certainly; and you went away again before dawn.

AMPH. Heavens! Was ever such a debate as this heard before? Who would not be astonished at all this? Sosie?

SOS. She needs six grains of hellebore, Monsieur; her brain is turned.

AMPH. Alcmene, in the name of all the Gods, this discourse will have a strange ending! Recollect your senses a little better, and think what you say.

ALC. I am indeed thinking seriously; all in the house saw your arrival. I am ignorant what motive makes you act thus; but, if the thing were in need of proof, if it were true that such a thing could be forgotten, from whom, but from you, could I have heard the news of the latest of all your battles, and of the five diamonds worn by Pterelas, who was plunged into eternal night by the strength of your arm? Could one wish for surer testimony?

AMPH. What? I have already given you the cluster of diamonds which I had for my share, and intended for you?

ALC. Assuredly. It is not difficult to convince you thoroughly on that point.

AMPH. How?

ALC. Here it is.

AMPH. Sosie!

SOS. She is jesting: I have it here; Monsieur, the feint is useless.

AMPH. The seal is whole.

ALC. Is it a vision? There. Will you think this proof strong enough?

AMPH. Ah Heaven! O just Heaven!

ALC. Come, Amphitryon, you are joking in acting thus: you ought to be ashamed of it.

AMPH. Break this seal, quickly.

SOS. (Having opened the casket.) Upon my word, the casket is empty. It must have been taken out by witchcraft, or else it came by itself a guide, to her whom it knew it was intended to adorn.

AMPH. O Gods, whose power governs all things, what is this adventure? What can I augur from it that does not clutch at my heart?

SOS. If she speaks the truth, we have the same lot, and, like me, Monsieur, you are double.

AMPH. Be silent.

ALC. Why are you so surprised? What causes all this confusion?

AMPH. O Heaven! What strange perplexity! I see incidents which surpass Nature, and my honour fears an adventure which my mind does not understand.

ALC. Do you still wish to deny your hasty return, when you have this sensible proof of it?

AMPH. No; but if it be possible, deign to tell me what passed at this return.

ALC. Since you ask an account of the matter, you still say it was not you?

AMPH. Pardon me; but I have a certain reason which makes me ask you to give us

this account.

ALC. Have the important cares which perhaps engross you made you so quickly lose the remembrance of it?

AMPH. Perhaps; but, in short, you would please me by telling me the whole story.

ALC. The story is not long. I advanced towards you full of a delighted surprise; I embraced you tenderly, and showed my joy more than once.

AMPH. (to himself.) Ah! I could have done without so sweet a welcome.

ALC. You first made me this valuable gift, which you destined for me from the spoils of the conquered. Your heart vehemently unfolded to me all the violence of its love, and the annoying duties which had kept it enchained, the happiness of seeing me again, the torments of absence, all the care which your impatience to return had given you; never has your love, on similar occasions, seemed to me so tender and so passionate.

AMPH. (to himself.) Can one be more cruelly tortured?

ALC. As you may well believe, these transports and this tenderness did not displease me; if I must confess it, Amphitryon, my heart found a thousand charms in them.

AMPH. What followed, pray?

ALC. We interrupted each other with a thousand questions concerning each other. The table was laid. We supped together by ourselves; and, supper over, we went to bed.

AMPH. Together?

ALC. Assuredly. What a question?

AMPH. Ah; this is the most cruel stroke of all; my jealous passion trembled to assure itself of this.

ALC. Why do you blush so deeply at a word? Have I done something wrong in

going to bed with you?

AMPH. No, to my great misery, it was not I; whoever says I was here yesterday, tells, of all falsehoods, the most horrible.

ALC. Amphitryon!

AMPH. Perfidious woman!

ALC. Ah! What madness is this!

AMPH. No, no; no more sweetness, no more respect; this rebuff puts an end to all my constancy; at this ghastly moment, my heart breathes only fury and, vengeance.

ALC. On whom then would you be avenged? What want of faith in me makes you treat me now as a criminal?

AMPH. I do not know, but it was not I; this despair makes me capable of anything.

ALC. Away unworthy husband, the deed speaks for itself, the imposture is frightful. It is too great an insult to accuse me of infidelity. If these confused transports mean that you seek a pretext to break the nuptial bonds which hold me enchained to you, all these pretences are superfluous, for I am determined that this day all our ties shall be broken.

AMPH. After the unworthy affront, which I now learn has been done me, that is indeed what you must prepare yourself for; it is the least that can be expected; and things may not perhaps remain there. The dishonour is sure; my misery is made plain to me; and my pride in vain would hide it from me. The details are still not clear: My anger is just and I claim to be enlightened. Your brother can positively avouch that I did not leave him until this morning: I will go and seek him, in order that I may confound you about the return falsely imputed to me. Afterwards, we will penetrate to the bottom of a mystery unheard of until now; and, in the fury of a righteous anger, woe to him who has betrayed me!

SOS. Monsieur...

AMPH. Do not accompany me, but remain here for me.

CLE. Must I...?

ALC. I cannot hear anything: leave me alone: do not follow me.

SCENE III CLEANTHIS, SOSIE

CLE. Something must have turned his brain; but the brother will soon finish this quarrel.

SOS. This is a very sharp blow for my master; his fate is cruel. I greatly fear something coming for myself. I will go softly in enlightening her.

CLE. Let me see whether he will so much as speak to me! I will not reveal anything.

SOS. These things are often annoying when one knows about them: I hesitate to ask her. Would it not be better not to risk anything, and to ignore what may have happened? Yet, at all hazard, I must see. I cannot help myself. Curiosity concerning things which one would rather not know is a human weakness. Heaven preserve you, Cleanthis!

CLE. Ah! Ah! You dare to come near me, you villain!

SOS. Good Heavens! What is the matter with you? You are always in a temper, and become angry about nothing!

CLE. What do you call about nothing? Speak out.

SOS. I call about nothing what is called about nothing in verse as well as in prose; and nothing, as you well know, means to say nothing, or very little.

CLE. I do not know what keeps me from scratching your eyes out, infamous rascal, to teach you how far the anger of a woman can go.

SOS. Hullo! What do you mean by this furious rage?

CLE. Then you call that nothing, perhaps, which you have done to me?

SOS. What was that?

CLE. So? You feign to be innocent? Do you follow the example of your master and say you did not return here?

SOS. No, I know the contrary too well; but I will be frank with you. We had drunk some wretched wine, which might have made me forget what I did.

CLE. You think, perhaps, to excuse yourself by this trick,...

SOS. No, in truth you may believe me. I was in such a condition that I may have done things I should regret; I do not remember what they were.

CLE. You do not even remember the manner in which you thought fit to treat me when you came from the port?

SOS. Not at all. You had better tell me all about it; I am just and sincere, and would condemn myself were I wrong.

CLE. Well? Amphitryon having warned me of your return, I sat up until you came; but I never saw such coldness: I had myself to remind you that you had a wife; and, when I wanted to kiss you, you, turned away your head, and gave me your ear.

SOS. Good.

CLE. What do you mean by good?

SOS. Good gracious! You do not know why I talk like this, Cleanthis: I had been eating garlic, and, like a well-bred man, just turned my breath away from you.

CLE. I showed you every possible tenderness; but you were as deaf as a post to everything I said; never a kind word passed your lips.

SOS. Courage!

CLE. In short, my flame bad to burn alone, its chaste ardour did not find anything in you but ice; you were the culprit in a return that might have been so different: you even went so far as to refuse to take your place in bed, which the laws of wedlock oblige you to occupy.

SOS. What? Did I not go to bed?

CLE. No, you coward.

SOS. Is it possible?

CLE. It is but too true, you rascal. Of all affronts this affront is the greatest; and, instead of your heart repairing its wrong this morning, you left me with words full of undisguised contempt.

SOS. Vivat Sosie!

CLE. Eh, what? Has my complaint had this effect? You laugh at your fine goings on?

SOS. How pleased I am with myself!

CLE. Is this the way to express your grief at such an outrage?

SOS. I should never have believed I could be so prudent.

CLE. Instead of condemning yourself for such a perfidious trick, you rejoice at it to my face!

SOS. Good gracious! Gently, gently! If I appear pleased, you must believe that I have a very strong private reason for it; without thinking of it, I never did better than in using you in such a manner as I did.

CLE. Are you laughing at me, you villain?

SOS. No, I am speaking openly to you. I was in a wretched state. I had a certain load, which your words have lifted from my soul. I was very apprehensive, and feared that I had played the fool with you.

CLE. What is this fear? Come, let us know what you mean.

SOS. The doctors say that, when one is drunk, one should abstain from one's wife, for, in that condition we can only have children who are dull, and who cannot live. Think, if my heart had not armed itself with coldness, what troubles might have followed!

CLE. I do not care a fig for doctors, with their insipid reasonings. Let them rule

those who are sick without wishing to govern healthy people. They meddle with too many affairs when they seek to rein in our chaste desires; in addition to the dog days, and their strict rules, they tell us a hundred ridiculous stories into the bargain.

SOS. Gently.

CLE. No; I maintain theirs is a worthless conclusion: those reasons come from idiotic brains. Neither wine nor time ought to prevent the duties of conjugal love from being fulfilled; doctors are donkeys.

SOS. I entreat you, moderate your anger against them; they are honest people, whatever the world may say of them.

CLE. Things are not what you think them; you can shut up; your excuse will not go down; and, sooner or later, I tell you plainly, I will avenge myself for the contempt you show me every day. I remember everything you said just now, and I shall try to make use of the liberty you gave me, You faithless, cowardly husband.

SOS. What?

CLE. You told me just now, you villain, that you would heartily agree to my loving another.

SOS. Ah! In that matter I was wrong. I retract; my honour is at stake. You had better beware you do not give way to that sentiment.

CLE. Nevertheless if some time I can make up my mind to the thing...

SOS. Just stop talking for the present. Amphitryon is coming back, and he seems pleased.

SCENE IV JUPITER, CLEANTHIS, SOSIE

JUP. I shall take this opportunity of appearing to Alcmene to banish the sorrow in which she wishes to indulge, and, under the pretence that brings me here, I will gratify my passion with the delight of a reconciliation with her. Alcmene is upstairs, is she not?

CLE. Yes; she is thoroughly upset and wishes to be left alone: she has forbidden me to follow her.

JUP. Whatever prohibition she may have given you does not concern me.

CLE. So far as I can see, his grief has beaten a quick retreat.

SCENE V CLEANTHIS, SOSIE

SOS. What do you say, Cleanthis, to these cheerful looks, after his terrible rage?

CLE. That we should all do well to send all men to the devil; the best of them is not worth much.

SOS. You say that because you are in a passion; but you are too fond of men; upon my word, you would all look as black as thunder if the devil were to take them all away.

CLE. Really...

SOS. Here they come. Hush.

SCENE VI JUPITER, ALCMENE, CLEANTHIS, SOSIE

JUP. Do you want to drive me to despair? Alas! Stay, lovely Alcmene.

ALC. No, I cannot remain longer with the author of my grief.

JUP. I beseech you

ALC. Leave me.

JUP. What...?

ALC. Leave me, I tell you.

JUP. Her tears touch me to the heart; her sorrow troubles me. Allow me to

ALC. No, do not follow me.

JUP. Where are you going?

ALC. Where you are not.

JUP. That would be a vain attempt to make. I am linked to your beauty by too close

a bond to suffer a moment's separation from you. I shall follow you everywhere, Alcmene.

ALC. And I shall flee from you everywhere.

JUP. I am very terrible, then!

ALC. Yes, more than I can say. Indeed, I look upon you as a frightful monster, a cruel, furious monster, whose approach is to be feared; as a monster to be avoided everywhere. My heart suffers incredible grief at the sight of you; it is a torture that overpowers me; I do not know anything under Heaven so frightful, horrible and odious, that I could not better endure than you.

JUP. Alas! Do these words really come from your mouth?

ALC. I have many more in my heart; I only regret I cannot find words to express all I feel.

JUP. Ah! What has my heart done to you, Alcmene, that I should be looked upon as such a monster?

ALC. Oh! Just Heaven! He can ask that? Is it not enough to drive me mad?

JUP. Yet, in a milder spirit...

ALC. No; I do not wish either to see or to hear anything of you.

JUP. Have you really the heart to treat me thus? Is this the tender love which I heard yesterday was to last so long?

ALC. No, no, it is not; your base insults have ordained it otherwise. That passionate and tender love does not exist any longer; you have cruelly killed it in my heart by a hundred keen wounds. In its place stands an inflexible wrath, a lively resentment, an invincible indignation, the despair of a heart justly incensed, which resolves to hate you for this grievous injury, as much as it was willing to love you; that is to say to hate as much as possible.

JUP. Alas! Your love must have had but little strength, if it can be killed by so slight

a matter! Can a jest divorce us? Is there any need to be so roused at a trifle?

ALC. Ah! It is just that which offends me: that which my anger cannot pardon. I should have felt less wounded by the justifiable transports of a fit of jealousy. Jealousy makes impressions the force of which oftentimes carries us beyond our control; at such times the most discreet mind, no doubt, finds it difficult enough to answer for its deeds. The violence of a heart which may have been deluded has, in its very delusion, a peace-offering for an aggrieved soul, and the love that gave birth to its fears, furnishes, in spite of all its violence, at least some reasons to urge as excuse. Outbursts such as these ever have love as an excuse against anger: for love gave birth to them, and we can easily pardon what we cannot control.

But to fly into uncontrollable fury, in gaiety of heart, and so causelessly and keenly to wound the tenderness and honour of a heart that dearly loves you, ah! It is too cruel a blow: my grief can never forget it.

JUP. Yes, you are right, Alcmene; I admit it. This action is unquestionably an odious crime; I do not pretend to justify it longer: yet allow my heart to defend itself in your eyes, and let it reveal to you who is to blame for this insulting fury. To tell you frankly, it is the husband Alcmene, who has done this wrong; it is the husband whom you must blame. The lover has no share in this churlish anger: his heart is not capable of offending you. He has too much respect and affection for you ever to think of it; had he been guilty of the crime of doing aught that could wound you, he would pierce himself with a hundred stabs before your eyes. But the husband has cast aside that humble submission which should always be yours; by his harsh deeds, the husband has made himself known; he thought the rights of marriage allowed him everything. Yes, it is he no doubt who is guilty towards you; he only has ill-treated your lovely person. Hate, detest the husband; I consent to it; I yield him to your mercy; but, Alcmene, spare the lover from the anger which such an offence gives you; do not let him suffer; differentiate between him and the guilty

one; and, finally, in order to be just, do not punish him for what he has not done.

ALC. Oh! All these subtleties are but frivolous excuses; such language only annoys incensed minds. In vain do you use these ridiculous prevarications. I do not make any distinction in him who offends me; everything in him becomes the object of my anger, the lover and the husband are alike confounded in its just violence. Both occupy my thoughts; both are painted in the same colours by my wounded heart. Both are guilty; both have offended me; and both are odious to me.

JUP. Well! Then, since you wish it, I must charge myself with the offence. Yes, you are right, when you sacrifice me as a guilty victim to your resentment. Anger towards me sways you; it is but too just, and all the terrible wrath you show causes me to suffer only lawful torments. It is right you should shun my presence, and in your anger threaten to flee from me everywhere. I must be a detestable object to you; you are right in thinking ill of me. My crime in being offensive in your charming eyes surpasses every horror; it is a crime that offends men and Gods; in short, as punishment for my insolence I deserve that your hatred should vent its utmost upon me. I beg your forgiveness, I beg it upon my knees, I beg it for the sake of the most lively passion, of the tenderest love for you, which has ever been kindled in a human breast. If, charming Alcmene, your heart refuses me the pardon which I have the audacity to seek, then shall a well-aimed stroke put an end to my life, and release me from the harsh severity of a penalty which I can no longer bear. Yes, this state of things drives me to despair. Do not think, Alcmene, that, enamoured as I am of your celestial charms, I can live a day under your wrath. Even these moments' agony is barbarously prolonged and my sad heart sinks under their mortal blows. The cruel wounds of a thousand vultures are not comparable in any way to my lively grief. Alcmene, you have but to tell me I need not hope for pardon: and immediately this sword, by a happy thrust, shall pierce the heart of a miserable wretch before your eyes. This heart, this traitorous heart, too deserving of death, since it has offended an adorable being, will be happy if, in descending into the place of shades,

my death appeases your anger, and, after this wretched day, it leaves in your soul no impression of hatred in remembering my love! This is all I ask as a sovereign favour.

ALC. Ah! Cruel husband.

JUP. Speak, Alcmene, speak.

ALC. Must I still keep some kindness for you, who insult me by so many indignities?

JUP. Whatever resentment an outrage causes us, can it hold out against the remorse of a heart deeply in love?

ALC. A heart full of passion would rather expose itself to a thousand deaths, than offend the object beloved.

JUP. The more one loves, the easier it is

ALC. No, do not speak to me any longer about it; you deserve my hatred.

JUP. You hate me then?

ALC. I make every effort to do so, and it annoys me to feel that all your insults do not yet carry my vengeance so far as yield to it.

JUP. But why this violence, since I offer to kill myself to satisfy your revenge? Pronounce the sentence and immediately I will obey.

ALC. It is impossible to wish for another's death if hatred be absent.

JUP. I cannot live unless you abandon the wrath that overwhelms me, and unless you grant me the favour of a pardon which I beg at your feet. Decide to do one or the other quickly: to punish, or to absolve.

ALC. Alas! The only resolution I can take is but too clearly apparent. My heart has too plainly betrayed me, for me to wish to maintain this anger: is it not to say we pardon, when we say we cannot hate?

JUP. Ah, charming Alcmene, overwhelmed with delight I must...

ALC. Forbear: I hate myself for such weakness.

JUP. Go, Sosie, make haste; a sweet joy fills my soul. See what officers of the army you can find, and ask them to dine with me. (Softly aside.) Mercury can fill his post, while he is away from here.

SCENE VII CLEANTHIS, SOSIE

SOS. Come! Now, you see, this couple, Cleanthis. Will you follow their example, and let us also make peace? Indulge in some slight reconciliation?

CLE. For the sake of your lovely mug, Oh yes! I will, and no mistake.

SOS. What? You will not?

CLE. No.

SOS. It doesn't matter to me. So much the worse for you.

CLE. Well, well, come back.

SOS. No, not, likely! I shall not do anything of the kind, I shall be angry. I turn now.

CLE. Go away, you villain, let me alone; one gets tired now and then of being an honest woman.

END OF THE SECOND ACT

ACT III

SCENE I AMPHITRYON

Yes, so doubt fate hides him purposely from me; at last am I tired of trying to find him. I do not know anything that can be more cruel than my lot. In spite of all my endeavours, I cannot find him whom I seek; all those I do not seek I find. A thousand tiresome bores, who do not think they are so, drive me mad with their congratulations on our feats of arms, although they know little of me. In the cruel embarrassment and anxiety that troubles me, they all burden me with their

attentions, and their rejoicings make my uneasiness worse. In vain I try to pass them by, to flee from their persecutions; their killing friendship stops me on all sides; whilst I reply to the ardour of their expressions by a nod of the head, I mutter under my breath a hundred curses on them. Ah! How little we are flattered by praise, honour and all that a great victory brings, when inwardly we suffer keen sorrow! How willingly would I exchange all this glory to have peace of mind! At every turn my jealousy twits me with my disgrace; the more my mind ponders over it, the less can I unravel its miserable confusion. The theft of the diamonds does not astonish me; seals may be tampered with unperceived; but my most cruel torment is that she insists I gave the gift to her personally yesterday. Nature oftentimes produces resemblances, which some impostors have adopted in order to deceive; but it is inconceivable that, under these appearances, a man should pass himself off as a husband; there are a thousand differences in a relationship such as this which a wife could easily detect. The marvellous effects of Thessalian magic have at all times been renowned; but I have always looked upon as idle tales the famous stories everyone talks of. It would be a hard fate if I, after so glorious a victory elsewhere, should be compelled to believe them at the cost of my own honour. I will question her again upon this wretched mystery, and see if it is not a silly fancy that has taken advantage of her disordered brain. O righteous Heaven, may this thought be true, and may she even have lost her senses, so that I may be happy!

SCENE II MERCURY, AMPHITRYON

MERC. Since love does not offer me any pleasure here, I will at least enjoy myself in another way, and enliven my dismal leisure by putting Amphitron out of all patience. This may not be very charitable in a God; but I shall not bother myself about that; my planet tells me I am somewhat given to malice.

AMPH. How is it that the door is closed at this hour?

MERC. Hullo! Gently, gently! Who knocks?

AMPH. I.

MERC. Who, I?

AMPH. Ah! Open.

MERC. What do you mean by 'open'? Who are you, pray, to make such a row, and speak like that?

AMPH. So? You do not know me?

MERC. No, nor have I the least wish to.

AMPH. Is every one losing his senses today? Is the malady spreading? Sosie! Hullo, Sosie!

MERC. Come, now! Sosie: that is my name; are you afraid I shall forget it?

AMPH. Do you see me?

MERC. Well enough. What can possess your arm to make such an uproar? What do you want down there?

AMPH. I, you gallows-bird! What do I want?

MERC. What do you not want then? Speak, if you want to be understood.

AMPH. Listen, you villain: I will come up with a stick to make you understand, and give you a fine lesson. How dare you speak to me like that?

MERC. Softly, softly! If you make the least attempt to create an uproar, I shall send you down some messengers who will annoy you.

AMPH. Oh Heavens! Did anyone ever conceive such insolence? And from a servant, from a beggar?

MERC. Come, now! What is the matter? Have you gone over everything correctly? Have your big eyes taken everything in? He glares, so savage he looks! If looks could bite, he would have torn me to shreds by now.

AMPH. I tremble at what you are bringing upon yourself with all this impudent talk.

What a frightful storm you are brewing for yourself! What a tempest of blows will storm down on your back!

MERC. If you do not soon disappear from here, my friend, you may come in for some mauling.

AMPH. Ah! You villain, you shall know to your confusion what it is for a valet to attack his master.

MERC. You, my master?

AMPH. Yes, rascal. Do you dare to say you do not recognise me?

MERC. I do not recognise any other master than Amphitryon.

AMPH. And who, besides myself, may this Amphitryon be?

MERC. Amphitryon?

AMPH. Certainly.

MERC. Ah! What an illusion! Come, tell me in what decent tavern you have addled your brain?

AMPH. What? Again?

MERC. Was it a feast-day wine?

AMPH. Heavens!

MERC. Was it old or new?

AMPH. What insults!

MERC. New goes to one's head, if drunk without water.

AMPH. Ah! I shall tear your tongue out soon.

MERC. Pass on, my dear friend; believe me, no one here will listen to you. I respect wine. Go away, make yourself scarce, and leave Amphitryon to the pleasures which he is tasting.

AMPH. What! Is Amphitryon in there?

MERC. Rather: covered with the laurels of his fine victory, he is side by side with the lovely Alcmene enjoying the delights of a charming tete-a-tete. They are tasting the pleasures of being reconciled, now their love-tiff has blown over. Take care how you disturb their sweet privacy, unless you wish him to punish you for your excessive rashness.

SCENE III AMPHITRYON

Ah! What a frightful blow he has given me! How cruelly has he put me to confusion! If matters are as this villain says, to what a state are my honour and my affection reduced? What course can I adopt? Am I to noise it abroad or keep it secret? Ought I, in my anger, to keep the dishonour of my house to myself or make it public? Come! Must one even think what to do in so gross an affront? I have no standing, nothing to hope for; all my anxiety now shall be how to avenge myself.

SCENE IV SOSIE, NAUCRATES, POLIDAS, AMPHITRYON

SOS. All I have been able to do, Monsieur, with all my diligence, is to have brought these gentlemen here.

AMPH. Ah! You are here?

SOS. Monsieur.

AMPH. Insolent, bold rascal!

SOS. What?

AMPH. I shall teach you to treat me thus.

SOS. What is it? What is the matter with you?

AMPH. What is the matter with me, villain?

SOS. Hullo, gentlemen, come here quickly.

NAU. Ah! Stay, I beseech you.

SOS. Of what am I guilty?

AMPH. You ask me that, you scoundrel? Let me satisfy my righteous anger.

SOS. When they hang any one, they tell him why they do it.

NAU. At least condescend to tell us what his crime may be.

SOS. I beseech you, gentlemen, keep a tight hold of me.

AMPH. Yes! He has just had the audacity to shut the door in my face, and to add threats to a thousand impudent jeers! Ah! You villain!

SOS. I am dead.

NAU. Restrain this anger.

SOS. Gentlemen.

POL. What is it?

SOS. Has he struck me?

AMPH. No, he must have his reward for the language he has made free to use just now.

SOS. How could that be when I was elsewhere busy carrying out your orders? These gentlemen here can bear witness that I have just invited them to dine with you.

NAU. That is true: he has just delivered us this message, and would not quit us.

AMPH. Who gave you that order?

SOS. You.

AMPH. When?

SOS. After you made your peace, when you were rejoicing at the delight of having appeased Alcmene's anger.

AMPH. O Heaven! Every instant, every step, adds something to my cruel martyrdom; I am so utterly confused that I no longer know either what to believe or what to say.

NAU. All he has just told us, of what has happened at your house, surpasses what is

natural so much, that before doing anything and before flying into such a passion, you ought to clear up the whole of this adventure.

AMPH. Come; you can second my efforts; Heaven has brought you here most opportunely. Let me see what fortune brings me today; let me solve this mystery, and know my fate. Alas! I burn to learn it, and I dread it more than death.

SCENE V JUPITER, AMPHITRYON, NAUCRATES, POLIDAS, SOSIE

JUP. What is this noise that compels me to come down? Who knocks as though he were master where I am master?

AMPH. Good Gods! What do I see?

NAU. Heaven! What prodigy is this? What? Here are two Amphitryons!

AMPH. My soul is struck dumb. Alas! I cannot do anything more: the adventure is at an end; my fate is clear; what I see tells me all.

NAU. The more narrowly I watch them, the more I find they resemble each other.

SOS. Gentlemen, this is the true one; the other is an impostor who ought to be chastised.

POL. Truly, this marvellous resemblance keeps my judgment in suspense.

AMPH. We have been tricked too long by an execrable rogue; I must break the spell with this steel.

NAU. Stay.

AMPH. Leave me alone.

NAU. Ye Gods! What would you do?

AMPH. Punish the miserable treachery of an impostor.

JUP. Gently, gently! There is very little need of being carried away by passion; when a man bursts out in such a rage as this, it makes one think he has bad reasons.

SOS. Yes; it is an enchanter, who has a talisman that enables him to resemble the

masters of houses.

AMPH. For your share in this insulting language, I shall make you feel a thousand blows.

SOS. My master is a man of courage: he will not allow his followers to be thrashed.

AMPH. Let me assuage my deep anger, and wash out my affront in the scoundrel's blood.

NAU. We shall not suffer this strange combat of Amphitryon against himself.

AMPH. What? Does my honour receive this treatment from you? Do my friends undertake the defence of a rogue? Far from being the first to take up my vengeance, they themselves place obstacles in the way of my resentment?

NAU. What do you wish us to decide, when two Amphitryons are before us and all the warmth of our friendship is in suspense? If we were now to show towards you, we fear we might make a mistake, and not recognise you. Truly we see in you the appearance of Amphitryon, the glorious support of the Thebans' well-being; but we also see the same appearance in him, and we cannot judge which he is. Our duty is not doubtful, the impostor ought to bite the dust at our hands; but this perfect resemblance hides him between you two; and it is too hazardous a stroke to undertake in the dark. Let us find out quietly on which side the imposture may be; then, as soon as we have unravelled the adventure, it will not be necessary for you to tell us our duty.

JUP. Yes, you are right, this resemblance authorises you to doubt both of us. I am not offended to see you cannot make up your minds: I am more reasonable, and excuse you. The eye cannot differentiate between us. I see one can easily be mistaken. You do not see me give way to anger, nor draw my sword: that is a bad way to enlighten a mystery; I can find one more gentle and more certain. One of us is Amphitryon; and both of us may seem so in your eyes. It is for me to end this confusion. I intend to make myself so well known to all, that, at the overwhelming

proofs I shall bring forward to show who I am, he himself shall agree concerning the blood from which I sprang, and he shall no longer have occasion to say anything. Before all the Thebans I will reveal the truth to you; the affair is, unquestionably, of sufficient importance to justify my seeking to clear it up in the sight of all. Alcmene expects this public testimony from me; her virtue, which is outraged by the noise of this mischance, demands justification, and I will see justice is done it. My love for her compels me to it. I shall call together an assembly of the noblest chiefs, for the explanation her honour requires. While waiting with you for these desirable witnesses, I pray you to condescend to honour the table to which Sosie has invited you.

SOS. I was not mistaken, gentlemen, this word puts an end to all irresolution: the real Amphitryon is the Amphitryon who gives dinners.

AMPH. O Heaven! Can my humiliation go further? Must I indeed suffer the martyrdom of listening to all that this impostor has just said to my face, my arms bound, though his words drive me mad?

NAU. You are wrong to complain. Let us await the explanation which shall render resentment seasonable. I do not know whether he imposes upon us or not; but he speaks on the matter as though he were right.

AMPH. Go, you weak-kneed friends, and flatter the imposture. Thebes has other friends who will flock round me, different from you. I will go and find some who, sharing the insult, will know how to lend their hand in my just cause.

JUP. Ah well! I await them; I shall know how to decide the discussion in their presence.

AMPH. You rogue, you think perhaps to evade justice thus; but nothing shall shield you from my vengeance.

JUP. I shall not now condescend to answer this insulting language; soon I shall be able to confound your fury with two words.

AMPH. Not Heaven, not Heaven itself can protect you: I shall dog your footsteps even to Hell.

JUP. It will not be necessary; you will soon see I shall not fly away.

AMPH. Now, before he goes away with these, I will make haste to gather together friends who will aid my cause; they will come to my house and help me to pierce him with a thousand thrusts.

JUP. No ceremony, I implore you; let us go quickly into the house.

NAU. Really, this adventure utterly confounds the senses and the reason.

SOS. A truce, gentlemen, to all your surprises; let us joyfully sit down to feed until the morning. I intend to feast well, so that I may be in good condition to relate our valiant deeds! I am itching to attack the dishes; I never felt so hungry.

SCENE VI MERCURY, SOSIE

MERC. Stop. What have you come to poke your nose in here for, you impudent turn-spit?

SOS. Ah! Gently, gently, for mercy's sake!

MERC. Ah! You have come back again! I shall tan your hide for you.

SOS. Ah! Brave and generous I, compose yourself, I beseech you. Sosie, spare Sosie a little, and do not divert yourself by knocking yourself down.

MERC. Who gave you liberty to call yourself by that name? Did I not expressly forbid you to do so, under penalty of experiencing a thousand cuts from the cane?

SOS. It is a name we both may bear at the same time, under the same master. I am recognised as Sosie everywhere; I permit you to be he, permit me to be so, too. Let us leave it to the two Amphitryons to give vent to their jealousies, and, though they contend, let the two Sosies live in the bonds of peace.

MERC. No, one is quite enough; I am determined not to allow any division.

SOS. You shall have precedence over me; I will be the younger, and you shall be the

elder.

MERC. No: a brother is a nuisance, and not to my taste; I intend to be the only son.

SOS. O barbarous and tyrannical heart! Allow me at least to be your shadow.

MERC. Not at all.

SOS. Let your soul humanise itself with a little pity! Allow me to be near you in that capacity: I shall be everywhere so submissive a shadow that you will be pleased with me.

MERC. No quarter; the law is immutable. If you again have the audacity to go in there, a thousand blows shall be the fruit.

SOS. Alas! Poor Sosie, to what miserable disgrace are you reduced!

MERC. So? Your lips presume again to give yourself a name I forbid!

SOS. No, I did not intend myself; I was speaking of an old Sosie, who was formerly a relative of mine, and whom, with the utmost barbarity, they drove out of the house at dinner hour.

MERC. Take care you do not fall into that idiocy if you wish to remain among the number of the living.

SOS. How I would thwack you if I had the courage, for your wretched puffed up pride, you double son of a strumpet!

MERC. What do you say?

SOS. Nothing.

MERC. I am sure you muttered something.

SOS. Ask anyone; I do not breathe.

MERC. Nevertheless I am absolutely certain that something about a son of a strumpet struck my ear.

SOS. It must have been a parrot roused by the beautiful weather.

MERC. Adieu. If your back itches for a currying, here is where I live.

SOS. O Heavens! What a cursed hour is the dinner hour to be turned out of doors! Come, let us yield to fate in our affliction. Let us today follow blind caprice, and join the unfortunate Sosie to the unfortunate Amphitryon: it is a suitable union. I see he is coming in good company.

SCENE VII AMPHITRYON, ARGATIPHONTIDAS, POSICLES, SOSIE

AMPH. Stay here, gentlemen, follow me a little way off, and do not all advance, I pray you, until there is need for it.

POS. I quite understand this blow touches you to the heart.

AMPH. Ah! My sorrow is bitter through and through: I suffer in my affection, as much as in my honour.

POS. If this resemblance is such as is said, Alcmene, without being guilty...

AMPH. Ah! In this affair, a simple error becomes a veritable crime, and, though no way consenting, innocence perishes in it. Such errors, in whatever way we look at them, affect us in the most sensitive parts; reason often, often pardons them, when honour and love cannot.

ARGAT. I do not bother my thoughts about that; but I hate your gentlemen for their disgraceful delay; it is a proceeding which wounds me to the quick, and one which courageous people will never approve. When any man has need of us, we ought to throw ourselves headforemost into his concerns. Argatiphontidas is not one for compromising matters. It is not seemly for men of honour to listen to the arguments of a friend's adversary; one should only listen to vengeance at such times. The proceeding does not please me; in quarrels such as these we ought always to begin sending the sword through the body, without any nonsense. Yes, whatever happens, you shall see that Argatiphontidas goes straight to the point. I entreat you not to let the villain die by any other hand than mine.

AMPH. Come on.

SOS. I come, Monsieur, to undergo at your knees the just punishment of cursed audacity. Strike, beat, drub, overwhelm me with blows, kill me in your anger; you will do well, I deserve it; I shall not say a single word against you.

AMPH. Get up. What is the matter?

SOS. I have been turned away unceremoniously; thinking to eat and rejoice like them, I did not think that, as it turned out, I was waiting there to thrash myself. Yes, the other I, valet to the other you, has played the very devil with me once more. The same cruel fate seems to pursue us both today, Monsieur. In short, they have un-Sosied me, as they un-Amphitryon'd you.

AMPH. Follow me.

SOS. Is it not better to see if anybody is coming?

SCENE VIII CLEANTHIS, NAUCRATES, POLIDAS, SOSIE, AMPHITRYON, ARGATIPHONTIDAS, POSICLES

CLE. O Heaven!

AMPH. What frightens you like this? Why are you afraid of me?

CLE. Why! You are up there and I see you here!

NAU. Do not hurry; here he comes to give, before us all, the explanation we want. If we may believe what he has just said about it, it will banish away your trouble and care.

SCENE IX

MERCURY, CLEANTHIS, NAUCRATES, POLIDAS, SOSIE, AMPHITRYON, ARGATIPHONTIDAS, POSICLES

MERC. Yes, you shall all see him; know beforehand that it is the grand master of the Gods, whom, under the cherished features of this resemblance, Alcmene has caused to descend here from the heavens. As for me, I am Mercury. Not knowing

what else to do, I have given him a drubbing whose appearance I took. He may now console himself, for strokes from the wand of a God confer honour on him who has to submit to them.

SOS. Upon my word, Monsieur God, I am your servant; I could have done without your attentions.

MERC. I now give you leave to be Sosie. I am tired of wearing such an ugly mug; I am going to the heavens, to scrape it all off with ambrosia. (He flies away to the skies.)

SOS. May Heaven forever keep you from the desire of wishing to come near me again! Your fury against me has been too bitter; never in my life have I seen a God who was more of a devil than you!

SCENE X

JUPITER, CLEANTHIS, NAUCRATES, POLIDAS, SOSIE, AMPHITRYON, ARGATIPHONTIDAS, POSICLES

JUP. (In a cloud,) Behold, Amphitryon, who has imposed on you; under his own aspect you see Jupiter. By these signs you may easily know him; they are sufficient, I think, to restore your heart where it should be to bring back peace and happiness to your family. My name, which the whole earth continually adores, thus stifles all scandal that might be spread abroad. A share with Jupiter has nothing that in the least dishonours, for doubtless, it can be but glorious to find one's self the rival of the sovereign of the Gods. I do not see any reason why your love should murmur; it is I, God as I am, who ought to be jealous in this affair. Alcmene is wholly yours, whatever means one may employ; it must be gratifying to your passion to see that there is no other way of pleasing her than to appear as her husband. Even Jupiter, clothed in his immortal glory, could not by himself undermine her fidelity; what he has received from her was granted by her ardent heart only to you.

SOS. The Seigneur Jupiter knows how to gild the pill.

JUP. Cast aside, therefore, the black care that stifles your heart; restore perfect peace to the ardour which consumes you. In your house shall be born a son, who, under the name of Hercules, shall cause the vast universe to ring with his deeds. A glorious future crowned with a thousand blessings shall let every one see I am your support; I will make your fate the envy of the whole world. You may boldly flatter yourself with what these promises confer. It is a crime to doubt them, for the words of Jupiter are the decrees of fate. (He is lost in the clouds.)

NAU. Truly, I am delighted at these evident marks...

SOS. Gentlemen, will you please take my advice? Do not embark in these sugary congratulations; it is a bad speculation; phrases are embarrassing on either side, in such a compliment. The great God Jupiter has done us much honour, and, unquestionably, his kindness towards us is unparalleled; he promises us the infallible happiness of a fortune crowned with a thousand blessings, and in our house shall be born a brave son. Nothing could be better than this. But, nevertheless, let us cut short our speeches, and each one retire quietly to his own house. In such affairs as these, it is always best not to say anything.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK AMPHITRYON ***

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