

**THE MISANTHROPE:
COMEDY IN
FIVE ACTS**

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The misanthrope: comedy in five acts by Moliere

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MOLIERE

**THE MISANTHROPE:
COMEDY IN
FIVE ACTS**

TEN CENT POCKET SERIES NO. 134

Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

The Misanthrope

Comedy in Five Acts

Moliere, Jean Baptiste
Poquelin, 1622-1673.

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PERSONAGES

Alceste, Lover of *Celimene*.

Philinte, Friend of *Alceste*.

Oronte, Lover of *Celimene*.

Celimene, a young widow.

Etlante, Cousin of *Celimene*.

Arsinoc, friend of *Celimene*.

Acaste

Clitrandre } Marquises.

Basque, footman to *Celimene*.

Soldier, of the Marshals' Guard.

Dubois, valet to *Alceste*.

THE SCENE IS IN PARIS AT THE HOUSE OF CELIMENE

THE MISANTHROPE

ACT I.

SCENE I.

Philinte. What is the matter? What troubles you, Alceste?

Alceste (seated). Leave me, I beg of you.

Philinte. But still, tell me, what whim—

Alceste. Leave me, I say; take yourself out of sight.

Philinte. But at least you might listen to a man without being angry.

Alceste. I choose to be angry, and I do not choose to listen.

Philinte. I cannot understand you when your temper is hot; and though we are friends, I—

Alceste. Friends! I your friend? Strike my name off your list. Till now I have professed to be your friend; but after what I have just seen of you, I tell you bluntly I am no longer. I will hold no place in a corrupted heart.

Philinte. Then, am I guilty in your eyes, Alceste?

Alceste. You ought to die of shame; such conduct cannot be excused; all men of honor must feel humiliated by it. I see you overwhelming a stranger with attentions; testifying the utmost ardor for him; making protestations, offers of service, vows; and when I ask you afterward who he is, you can hardly tell me the man's name! Your ardor for him sinks the moment

that you leave him, and you inform me he is nothing to you. Good God! it is a shameful thing, base, infamous, thus to degrade your soul by treachery; if I, through some misfortune, had done as much I would go hang myself in sheer remorse.

Philinte. I cannot see, for my part, that mine's a hanging case; so I make bold to appeal against your sentence and beg you not to hang me, if it please you.

Alceste. Jesting is most unseemly.

Philinte. Seriously, then, what would you have me do?

Alceste. I would have you be sincere, and, as a man of honor, say no word that is not from your heart.

Philinte. But when a man comes up to you and salutes you joyfully, surely you must pay him in the self-same coin, make some response to his civilities, return him offer for offer and vow for vow.

Alceste. No,—I cannot endure that abject custom which the majority of your worldly friends affect. I hate nothing so much as the bowing and scraping of those great makers of protestations, those affable givers of trumpery kisses, those obliging praters of empty words, who strive to outdo each other with civilities, and treat an honest man and a scoundrel with the same air and manner. What advantage is it to you if a man courts you, swears friendship, faith, zeal, honor, tenderness, makes you some fulsome compliment, and then turns round to the first rascal whom he meets, and does the same? No, no, a well-conditioned soul wants no esteem so prostituted; the finest hospitalities are valueless when we find ourselves rated with the crowd. Esteem is based on pref-

erence; to esteem the whole world alike is to feel no esteem for any one. And because you addict yourself to these vices of the time, *monbleu!* you are not of my kind. I refuse the vast complaisance of a heart that sees no shades of merit; I choose that mine shall be distinguished, and—to cut the matter short—the friend of the whole human race is not to my liking.

Philinte. But so long as we live in social life, we must pay the outward civilities that custom demands.

Alceste. No, I tell you, no; we ought to chastise, pitilessly, this shameful interchange of make-believe friendship. I want a man to be a man, and let the bottom of his heart be seen in all he says, and in all he does. Let it be himself who speaks,—not masking his real feelings behind false compliments.

Philinte. There are many situations in which plain frankness would become ridiculous, and is not permissible; and sometimes—if it please your lofty honor—it may be well to hide what is in our hearts. Would it be fitting, would it be decent to tell all men what we think of them? And if there be any one whom we dislike or think unpleasant ought we to let him know it?

Alceste. Yes. *Philinte.* What! would you tell old Emille that 't is unbecoming at her age to play the pretty girl; or that the paint she wears shocks every one?

Alceste. Undoubtedly. *Philinte.* Would you tell Dorilas that he is tiresome; that there is not an ear at court he does not weary with tales of his own bravery and the glory of his race?

Alceste. I should. *Philinte.* You are joking.

Alceste. I am not joking. In future I will spare none. My eyes are too offended. Court and society both show me nought but things that stir my bile. When I see men living together as they do a black spleen seizes me, a bitter grief. Everywhere I find base flattery, injustice, self-interest, treachery, deceit. I cannot bear it longer; I am enraged; and my intention is to tell the truth henceforth, to all the human race.

Philinte. Your philosophic wrath is somewhat savage; I laugh at that black spleen I see has gripped you. You and I are like the brothers in the "School for Husbands," brought up as one, and yet—

Alceste. Good God! give up those dull comparisons.

Philinte. Give up yourself this churlish virulence. Your teachings cannot change the world. Since frankness charms you, I will tell you bluntly this disease of yours is laughed at everywhere you go. Such wrath against the ways of the world makes you ridiculous in the eyes of many."

Alceste. So much the better; good heavens! so much the better; that is what I want; to me 't is the best of signs and a great satisfaction. Men have become so odious to me that I'd be grieved indeed to be well thought of by them.

Philinte. Then you attribute nought but evil to human nature?

Alceste. I do; I hate it with a dreadful hatred.

Philinte. All poor mortals, then, without exception, are included in this deep aversion? Surely there may be, in our present age—

Alceste. No, it is universal; I hate all men: some because they are wicked and evil-doers;

others because they fawn upon the wicked, and dare not show that vigorous hatred which virtuous souls should feel to vice. From such compliance comes immunity for the bare-faced villain whom I now am suing. Behind his mask the knave is seen, wherever he is known, for what he is; the rolling of his eye, his bated voice, impose on none but those who do not live here. All others know about the sneaking fellow, fit only to be shunned, has by the foulest actions foisted himself upon society, where his career, by their connivance clothed in splendor, makes merit groan and virtue blush. No cries of "shame" can make his miserable honor hear them. Call him a knave, a scoundrel, a damned villain, all the world agrees, and no man contradicts you; *but*—he is welcomed everywhere; wherever he may worm himself he's greeted; men smile upon him; and if there's a canvass to be made, a place to be intrigued for, you will see him get the better of honest men. Great God! it is to me a mortal wound to see how vice is thus condoned and trafficked with. At times the impulse seizes me to flee to a desert and renounce my kind.

Philinte. Good heavens! why take the customs of our time so hard; why be so little merciful to human nature? Examine it less sternly, and see its failures with some gentleness. In social life we need a pliant virtue; severe integrity is often blamable; sound reason shuns extremes, and teaches wisdom with sobriety. The rigid virtue of the olden time jars with our age and with our modern customs. We must yield somewhat to our time, and not reluctantly. It is a folly, second to no other, to meddle with the world and try to