

ЖАН-БАТИСТ МОЛЬЕР

THE COUNTESS OF
ESCARBAGNAS

Жан-Батист Мольер

The Countess of Escarbagnas

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Molière

The Countess of Escarbagnas

'La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas' was acted before the Court at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, on December 2, 1671, and in the theatre of the Palais Royal on July 8, 1672. It was never printed during Molière's lifetime, but for the first time only in 1682. It gives us a good picture of the provincial thoughts, manners, and habits of those days.

PERSONS REPRESENTED

The Count, *son to the Countess.*

The Viscount, *in love with Julia.*

Mr. Thibaudier, *councillor, in love with the Countess.*

Mr. Harpin, *receiver of taxes, also in love with the Countess.*

Mr. Bobinet, *tutor to the Count.*

Jeannot, *servant to Mr. Thibaudier.*

Criquet, *servant to the Countess.*

The Countess of Escarbagnas.

Julia, *in love with the Viscount.*

Andrée, *maid to the Countess.*

The scene is at Angoulême.

SCENE I. – JULIA, THE VISCOUNT

Visc. What! you are here already?

Ju. Yes, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself, Cléante; it is not right for a lover to be the last to come to the rendezvous.

Visc. I should have been here long ago if there were no importunate people in the world. I was stopped on my way by an old bore of rank, who asked me news of the court, merely to be able himself to detail to me the most absurd things that can well be imagined about it. You know that those great newsmongers are the curse of provincial towns, and that they have no greater anxiety than to spread, everywhere abroad all the tittle-tattle they pick up. This one showed me, to begin with, two large sheets of paper full to the very brim with the greatest imaginable amount of rubbish, which, he says, comes from the safest quarters. Then, as if it were a wonderful thing, he read full length and with great mystery all the stupid jokes in the Dutch Gazette, which he takes for gospel.¹ He thinks that France is being brought to ruin by the pen of that writer, whose fine wit, according to him, is sufficient to defeat armies. After that he raved about the ministry, spoke of all its faults, and I thought he would never have done. If one is to believe him, he knows the secrets of the cabinet better than those who compose it. The policy of the state is an open book to him, and no step is taken without his seeing through it. He shows you the secret machinations of all that takes place, whither the wisdom of our neighbours tends, and controls at his will and pleasure all the affairs of Europe. His knowledge of what goes on extends as far as Africa and Asia, and he is informed of all that; is discussed in the privy council of Prester John.²

Ju. You make the best excuse you can, and so arrange it that it may pass off well and be easily received.

Visc. I assure you, dear Julia, that this is the real reason of my being late. But if I wanted to say anything gallant, I could tell you that the rendezvous to which you bring me here might well excuse the sluggishness of which you complain. To compel me to pay my addresses to the lady of this house is certainly reason enough for me to fear being here the first. I ought not to have to bear the misery of it, except when she whom it amuses is present. I avoid finding myself alone with that ridiculous countess with whom you shackle me. In short, as I come only for your sake, I have every reason to stay away until you are here.

Ju. Oh! you will never lack the power of giving a bright colour to your faults. However, if you had come half an hour sooner, we should have enjoyed those few moments. For when I came, I found that the countess was out, and I have no doubt that she is gone all over the town to claim for herself the honour of the comedy you gave me under her name.

Visc. But, pray, when will you put an end to this, and make me buy less dearly the happiness of seeing you?

Ju. When our parents agree, which I scarcely dare hope for. You know as well as I do that the dissensions which exist between our two families deprive us of the possibility of seeing each other anywhere else, and that neither my brothers nor my father are likely to approve of our engagement.

Visc. Yes; but why not profit better by the opportunity which their enmity gives us, and why oblige me to waste, under a ridiculous deception, the moments I pass near you?

Ju. It is the better to hide our love; and, besides, to tell you the truth, this deception you speak of is to me a very amusing comedy, and I hardly think that the one you give me to-day will amuse me as much. Our Countess of Escarbagnas, with her perpetual infatuation for "quality," is as good a

¹ After the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1668, this newspaper never ceased to attack Louis XIV. and the French nation. In 1672 Louis XIV attempted the conquest of Holland

² The name given in the middle ages to a supposed Christian sovereign and priest (presbyter) in the interior of Asia.

personage as can be put on the stage. The short journey she has made to Paris has brought her back to Angoulême more crazy than ever. The air of the court has given a new charm to her extravagance, and her folly grows and increases every day.

Visc. Yes; but you do not take into consideration that what amuses you drives me to despair; and that one cannot dissimulate long when one is under the sway of love as true as that which I feel for you. It is cruel to think, dear Julia, that this amusement of yours should deprive me of the few moments during which I could speak to you of my love, and last night I wrote on the subject some verses that I cannot help repeating to you, so true is it that the mania of reciting one's verses is inseparable from the title of a poet:

"Iris, too long thou keepst on torture's rack
One who obeys thy laws, yet whisp'ring chides
In that thou bidst me boast a joy I lack,
And hush the sorrow that my bosom hides.

Must thy dear eyes, to which I yield my arms,
From my sad sighs draw wanton pleasure still?
Is't not enough to suffer for thy charms
That I must grieve at thy capricious will?

This double martyrdom a pain affords
Too keen to bear at once; thy deeds, thy words,
Work on my wasting heart a cruel doom,

Love bids it burn; constraint its life doth chill.
If pity soften not thy wayward will,
Love, feigned and real, will lead me to the tomb."

Ju. I see that you make yourself out much more ill-used than you need; but it is the way with you poets to tell falsehoods in cold blood, and to pretend that those you love are much more cruel than they are, in order to make them correspond to the fancies you may take into your heads. Yet, I should like you, if you will, to give me those verses in writing.

Visc. No, it is enough that I have repeated them to you, and I ought to stop there. A man may be foolish enough to make verses, but that is different from giving them to others.

Ju. It is in vain for you to affect a false modesty; your wit is well known, and I do not see why you should hide what you write.

Visc. Ah! we must tread here with the greatest circumspection. It is a dangerous thing to set up for a wit. There is inherent to it a certain touch of absurdity which is catching, and we should be warned by the example of some of our friends.

Ju. Nonsense, Cléante; I see that, in spite of all you say, you are longing to give me your verses; and I feel sure that you would be very unhappy if I pretended not to care for them.

Visc. I unhappy? Oh! dear no, I am not so much of a poet for you to think that I ... but here is the Countess of Escarbagnas; I'll go by this door, so as not to meet her, and will see that everything is got ready for the play I have promised you.

SCENE II. – THE COUNTESS, JULIA; ANDRÉE and CRIQUET *in the background*

Coun. What, Madam, are you alone? Ah! what a shame! All alone! I thought my people had told me that the Viscount was here.

Ju. It is true that he came, but it was sufficient for him to know that you were not at home; he would not stop after that.

Coun. What! did he see you?

Ju. Yes.

Coun. And did he not stop to talk with you?

Ju. No, Madam; he wished to show you how very much he is struck by your charms.

Coun. Still, I shall call him to account for that. However much any one may be in love with me, I wish them to pay to our sex the homage that is due to it. I am not one of those unjust women who approve of the rudeness their lovers display towards other fair ones.

Ju. You must in no way be surprised at his conduct. The love he has for you shows itself in all his actions, and prevents him from caring for anybody but you.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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