

**ЖАН-БАТИСТ
МОЛЬЕР**

THE LEARNED
WOMEN

Жан-Батист Мольер
The Learned Women

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Molière

The Learned Women

PERSONS REPRESENTED

CHRYSALE, *an honest bourgeois*
PHILAMINTE, *wife to CHRYSALE*
ARMANDE & HENRIETTE, *their daughters*
ARISTE, *brother to CHRYSALE*
BÉLISE, *his sister*
CLITANDRE, *lover to HENRIETTE*
TRISSOTIN, *a wit*
VADIUS, *a learned man*
MARTINE, *a kitchen-maid*
LÉPINE, *servant to CHRYSALE*
JULIEN, *servant to VADIUS*
A NOTARY.

ACT I

SCENE I. – ARMANDE, HENRIETTE

ARM. What! Sister, you will give up the sweet and enchanting title of maiden? You can entertain thoughts of marrying! This vulgar wish can enter your head!

HEN. Yes, sister.

ARM. Ah! Who can bear that "yes"? Can anyone hear it without feelings of disgust?

HEN. What is there in marriage which can oblige you, sister, to...

ARM. Ah! Fie!

HEN. What?

ARM. Fie! I tell you. Can you not conceive what offence the very mention of such a word presents to the imagination, and what a repulsive image it offers to the thoughts? Do you not shudder before it? And can you bring yourself to accept all the consequences which this word implies?

HEN. When I consider all the consequences which this word implies, I only have offered to my thoughts a husband, children, and a home; and I see nothing in all this to defile the imagination, or to make one shudder.

ARM. O heavens! Can such ties have charms for you?

HEN. And what at my age can I do better than take a husband who loves me, and whom I love, and through such a tender union secure the delights of an innocent life? If there be conformity of tastes, do you see no attraction in such a bond?

ARM. Ah! heavens! What a grovelling disposition! What a poor part you act in the world, to confine yourself to family affairs, and to think of no more soul-stirring pleasures than those offered by an idol of a husband and by brats of children! Leave these base pleasures to the low and vulgar. Raise your thoughts to more exalted objects; endeavour to cultivate a taste for nobler pursuits; and treating sense and matter with contempt, give yourself, as we do, wholly to the cultivation of your mind. You have for an example our mother, who is everywhere honoured with the name of learned. Try, as we do, to prove yourself her daughter; aspire to the enlightened intellectuality which is found in our family, and acquire a taste for the rapturous pleasures which the love of study brings to the heart and mind. Instead of being in bondage to the will of a man, marry yourself, sister, to philosophy, for it alone raises you above the rest of mankind, gives sovereign empire to reason, and submits to its laws the animal part, with those grovelling desires which lower us to the level of the brute. These are the gentle flames, the sweet ties, which should fill every moment of life. And the cares to which I see so many women given up, appear to me pitiable frivolities.

HEN. Heaven, whose will is supreme, forms us at our birth to fill different spheres; and it is not every mind which is composed of materials fit to make a philosopher. If your mind is created to soar to those heights which are attained by the speculations of learned men, mine is fitted, sister, to take a meaner flight and to centre its weakness on the petty cares of the world. Let us not interfere with the just decrees of Heaven; but let each of us follow our different instincts. You, borne on the wings of a great and noble genius, will inhabit the lofty regions of philosophy; I, remaining here below, will taste the terrestrial charms of matrimony. Thus, in our several paths, we shall still imitate our mother: you, in her mind and its noble longings; I, in her grosser senses and coarser pleasures; you, in the productions of genius and light, and I, sister, in productions more material.

ARM. When we wish to take a person for a model, it is the nobler side we should imitate; and it is not taking our mother for a model, sister, to cough and spit like her.

HEN. But you would not have been what you boast yourself to be if our mother had had only her nobler qualities; and well it is for you that her lofty genius did not always devote itself to philosophy.

Pray, leave me to those littlenesses to which you owe life, and do not, by wishing me to imitate you, deny some little savant entrance into the world.

ARM. I see that you cannot be cured of the foolish infatuation of taking a husband to yourself. But, pray, let us know whom you intend to marry; I suppose that you do not aim at Clitandre?

HEN. And why should I not? Does he lack merit? Is it a low choice I have made?

ARM. Certainly not; but it would not be honest to take away the conquest of another; and it is a fact not unknown to the world that Clitandre has publicly sighed for me.

HEN. Yes; but all those sighs are mere vanities for you; you do not share human weaknesses; your mind has for ever renounced matrimony, and philosophy has all your love. Thus, having in your heart no pretensions to Clitandre, what does it matter to you if another has such pretensions?

ARM. The empire which reason holds over the senses does not call upon us to renounce the pleasure of adulation; and we may refuse for a husband a man of merit whom we would willingly see swell the number of our admirers.

HEN. I have not prevented him from continuing his worship, but have only received the homage of his passion when you had rejected it.

ARM. But do you find entire safety, tell me, in the vows of a rejected lover? Do you think his passion for you so great that all love for me can be dead in his heart?

HEN. He tells me so, sister, and I trust him.

ARM. Do not, sister, be so ready to trust him; and be sure that, when he says he gives me up and loves you, he really does not mean it, but deceives himself.

HEN. I cannot say; but if you wish it, it will be easy for us to discover the true state of things. I see him coming, and on this point he will be sure to give us full information.

SCENE II. – CLITANDRE, ARMANDE, HENRIETTE

HEN. Clitandre, deliver me from a doubt my sister has raised in me. Pray open your heart to us; tell us the truth, and let us know which of us has a claim upon your love.

ARM. No, no; I will not force upon your love the hardship of an explanation. I have too much respect for others, and know how perplexing it is to make an open avowal before witnesses.

CLI. No; my heart cannot dissemble, and it is no hardship to me to speak openly. Such a step in no way perplexes me, and I acknowledge before all, freely and openly, that the tender chains which bind me (*pointing to HENRIETTE*), my homage and my love, are all on this side. Such a confession can cause you no surprise, for you wished things to be thus. I was touched by your attractions, and my tender sighs told you enough of my ardent desires; my heart offered you an immortal love, but you did not think the conquest which your eyes had made noble enough. I have suffered many slights, for you reigned over my heart like a tyrant; but weary at last with so much pain, I looked elsewhere for a conqueror more gentle, and for chains less cruel. (*Pointing to HENRIETTE*) I have met with them here, and my bonds will forever be precious to me. These eyes have looked upon me with compassion, and have dried my tears. They have not despised what you had refused. Such kindness has captivated me, and there is nothing which would now break my chains. Therefore I beseech you, Madam, never to make an attempt to regain a heart which has resolved to die in this gentle bondage.

ARM. Bless me, Sir, who told you that I had such a desire, and, in short, that I cared so much for you? I think it tolerably ridiculous that you should imagine such a thing, and very impertinent in you to declare it to me.

HEN. Ah! gently, sister. Where is now that moral sense which has so much power over that which is merely animal in us, and which can restrain the madness of anger?

ARM. And you, who speak to me, what moral sense have you when you respond to a love which is offered to you before you have received leave from those who have given you birth? Know that duty subjects you to their laws, and that you may love only in accordance with their choice; for they have a supreme authority over your heart, and it is criminal in you to dispose of it yourself.

HEN. I thank you for the great kindness you show me in teaching me my duty. My heart intends to follow the line of conduct you have traced; and to show you that I profit by your advice, pray, Clitandre, see that your love is strengthened by the consent of those from whom I have received birth. Acquire thus a right over my wishes, and for me the power of loving you without a crime.

CLI. I will do so with all diligence. I only waited for this kind permission from you.

ARM. You triumph, sister, and seem to fancy that you thereby give me pain.

HEN. I, sister? By no means. I know that the laws of reason will always have full power over your senses, and that, through the lessons you derive from wisdom, you are altogether above such weakness. Far from thinking you moved by any vexation, I believe that you will use your influence to help me, will second his demand of my hand, and will by your approbation hasten the happy day of our marriage. I beseech you to do so; and in order to secure this end...

ARM. Your little mind thinks it grand to resort to raillery, and you seem wonderfully proud of a heart which I abandon to you.

HEN. Abandoned it may be; yet this heart, sister, is not so disliked by you but that, if you could regain it by stooping, you would even condescend to do so.

ARM. I scorn to answer such foolish prating.

HEN. You do well; and you show us inconceivable moderation.

SCENE III. – CLITANDRE, HENRIETTE

HEN. Your frank confession has rather taken her aback.

CLI. She deserves such freedom of speech, and all the haughtiness of her proud folly merits my outspokenness! But since you give me leave, I will go to your father, to...

HEN. The safest thing to do would be to gain my mother over. My father easily consents to everything, but he places little weight on what he himself resolves. He has received from Heaven a certain gentleness which makes him readily submit to the will of his wife. It is she who governs, and who in a dictatorial tone lays down the law whenever she has made up her mind to anything. I wish I could see in you a more pliant spirit towards her and towards my aunt. If you would but fall in with their views, you would secure their favour and their esteem.

CLI. I am so sincere that I can never bring myself to praise, even in your sister, that side of her character which resembles theirs. Female doctors are not to my taste. I like a woman to have some knowledge of everything; but I cannot admire in her the revolting passion of wishing to be clever for the mere sake of being clever. I prefer that she should, at times, affect ignorance of what she really knows. In short, I like her to hide her knowledge, and to be learned without publishing her learning abroad, quoting the authors, making use of pompous words, and being witty under the least provocation. I greatly respect your mother, but I cannot approve her wild fancies, nor make myself an echo of what she says. I cannot support the praises she bestows upon that literary hero of hers, Mr. Trissotin, who vexes and wearies me to death. I cannot bear to see her have any esteem for such a man, and to see her reckon among men of genius a fool whose writings are everywhere hissed; a pedant whose liberal pen furnishes all the markets with wastepaper.

HEN. His writings, his speeches, in short, everything in him is unpleasant to me; and I feel towards him as you do. But as he possesses great ascendancy over my mother, you must force yourself to yield somewhat. A lover should make his court where his heart is engaged; he should win the favour of everyone; and in order to have nobody opposed to his love, try to please even the dog of the house.

CLI. Yes, you are right; but Mr. Trissotin is hateful to me. I cannot consent, in order to win his favour, to dishonour myself by praising his works. It is through them that he was first brought to my notice, and I knew him before I had seen him. I saw in the trash which he writes all that his pedantic person everywhere shows forth; the persistent haughtiness of his presumption, the intrepidity of the good opinion he has of his person, the calm overweening confidence which at all times makes him so satisfied with himself, and with the writings of which he boasts; so that he would not exchange his renown for all the honours of the greatest general.

HEN. You have good eyes to see all that.

CLI. I even guessed what he was like; and by means of the verses with which he deluges us, I saw what the poet must be. So well had I pictured to myself all his features and gait that one day, meeting a man in the galleries of the Palace of Justice [footnote: the resort of the best company in those days.], I laid a wager that it must be Trissotin – and I won my wager.

HEN. What a tale!

CLI. No, I assure you that it is the perfect truth. But I see your aunt coming; allow me, I pray you, to tell her of the longings of my heart, and to gain her kind help with your mother.

SCENE IV. – BÉLISE, CLITANDRE

CLI. Suffer a lover, Madam, to profit by such a propitious moment to reveal to you his sincere devotion...

BEL. Ah! gently! Beware of opening your heart too freely to me; although I have placed you in the list of my lovers, you must use no interpreter but your eyes, and never explain by another language desires which are an insult to me. Love me; sigh for me; burn for my charms; but let me know nothing of it. I can shut my eyes to your secret flame, as long as you keep yourself to dumb interpreters; but if your mouth meddle in the matter, I must for ever banish you from my sight.

CLI. Do not be alarmed at the intentions of my heart. Henriette is, Madam, the object of my love, and I come ardently to conjure you to favour the love I have for her.

BEL. Ah! truly now, the subterfuge shows excellent wit. This subtle evasion deserves praise; and in all the romances I have glanced over, I have never met with anything more ingenious.

CLI. This is no attempt at wit, Madam; it is the avowal of what my heart feels. Heaven has bound me to the beauty of Henriette by the ties of an unchangeable love. Henriette holds me in her lovely chains; and to marry Henriette is the end of all my hopes. You can do much towards it; and what I have come to ask you is that you will condescend to second my addresses.

BEL. I see the end to which your demand would gently head, and I understand whom you mean under that name. The metaphor is clever; and not to depart from it, let me tell you that Henriette rebels against matrimony, and that you must love her without any hope of having your love returned.

CLI. But, Madam, what is the use of such a perplexing debate? Why will you persist in believing what is not?

BEL. Dear me! Do not trouble yourself so much. Leave off denying what your looks have often made me understand. Let it suffice that I am content with the subterfuge your love has so skilfully adopted, and that under the figure to which respect has limited it, I am willing to suffer its homage; always provided that its transports, guided by honour, offer only pure vows on my altars.

CLI. But...

BEL. Farewell. This ought really to satisfy you, and I have said more than I wished to say.

CLI. But your error...

BEL. Leave me. I am blushing now; and my modesty has had much to bear.

CLI. May I be hanged if I love you; and... [Footnote: Molière ends this line with *sage*, with, apparently, no other motive than to find a rhyme to *davantage*.]

BEL. No, no. I will hear nothing more.

SCENE V. – CLITANDRE (*alone*)

Deuce take the foolish woman with her dreams! Was anything so preposterous ever heard of?
I must go and ask the help of a person of more sense.

ACT II

SCENE I. – ARISTE (*leaving CLITANDRE, and still speaking to him*)

Yes; I will bring you an answer as soon as I can. I will press, insist, do all that should be done. How many things a lover has to say when one would suffice; and how impatient he is for all that he desires! Never...

SCENE II. – CHRYSALE, ARISTE

ARI. Good day to you, brother.

CHRY. And to you also, brother.

ARI. Do you know what brings me here?

CHRY. No, I do not; but I am ready to hear it, if it pleases you to tell me.

ARI. You have known Clitandre for some time now?

CHRY. Certainly; and he often comes to our house.

ARI. And what do you think of him?

CHRY. I think him to be a man of honour, wit, courage, and uprightness, and I know very few people who have more merit.

ARI. A certain wish of his has brought me here; and I am glad to see the esteem you have for him.

CHRY. I became acquainted with his late father when I was in Rome.

ARI. Ah!

CHRY. He was a perfect gentleman.

ARI. So it is said.

CHRY. We were only about twenty-eight years of age, and, upon my word, we were, both of us, very gay young fellows.

ARI. I believe it.

CHRY. We greatly affected the Roman ladies, and everybody there spoke of our pranks. We made many people jealous, I can tell you.

ARI. Excellent; but let us come to what brings me here.

SCENE III. – BÉLISE (*entering softly and listening*), CHRYSALE, ARISTE

ARI. Clitandre has chosen me to be his interpreter to you; he has fallen in love with Henriette.

CHRY. What! with my daughter?

ARI. Yes. Clitandre is delighted with her, and you never saw a lover so smitten!

BEL. (*to ARISTE*). No, no; you are mistaken. You do not know the story, and the thing is not as you imagine.

ARI. How so, sister?

BEL. Clitandre deceives you; it is with another that he is in love.

ARI. It is not with Henriette that he is in love? You are joking.

BEL. No; I am telling the perfect truth.

ARI. He told me so himself.

BEL. Doubtless.

ARI. You see me here, sister, commissioned by him to ask her of her father.

BEL. Yes, I know.

ARI. And he besought me, in the name of his love, to hasten the time of an alliance so desired by him.

BEL. Better and better. No more gallant subterfuge could have been employed. But let me tell you that Henriette is an excuse, an ingenious veil, a pretext, brother, to cover another flame, the mystery of which I know; and most willingly will I enlighten you both.

ARI. Since you know so much, sister, pray tell us whom he loves.

BEL. You wish to know?

ARI. Yes; who is it? BEL. Me!

ARI. You!

BEL. Myself.

ARI. Come, I say! sister!

BEL. What do you mean by this "Come, I say"? And what is there so wonderful in what I tell you? I am handsome enough, I should think, to have more than one heart in subjection to my empire; and Dorante, Damis, Cléonte, and Lycidas show well enough the power of my charms.

ARI. Do those men love you?

BEL. Yes; with all their might.

ARI. They have told you so?

BEL. No one would take such a liberty; they have, up to the present time, respected me so much that they have never spoken to me of their love. But the dumb interpreters have done their office in offering their hearts and lives to me.

ARI. I hardly ever see Damis here.

BEL. It is to show me a more respectful submission.

ARI. Dorante, with sharp words, abuses you everywhere.

BEL. It is the transport of a jealous passion.

ARI. Cléonte and Lycidas are both married.

BEL. It was the despair to which I had reduced their love.

ARI. Upon my word, sister, these are mere visions.

CHRY. (*to BÉLISE*). You had better get rid of these idle fancies.

BEL. Ah! idle fancies! They are idle fancies, you think. I have idle fancies! Really, "idle fancies" is excellent. I greatly rejoice at those idle fancies, brothers, and I did not know that I was addicted to idle fancies.

SCENE IV. – CHRYSALE, ARISTE

CHRY. Our sister is decidedly crazy.

ARI. It grows upon her every day. But let us resume the subject that brings me here. Clitandre asks you to give him Henriette in marriage. Tell me what answer we can make to his love.

CHRY. Do you ask it? I consent to it with all my heart; and I consider his alliance a great honour.

ARI. You know that he is not wealthy, that...

CHRY. That is a thing of no consequence. He is rich in virtue, and that is better than wealth. Moreover, his father and I were but one mind in two bodies.

ARI. Let us speak to your wife, and try to render her favourable to...

CHRY. It is enough. I accept him for my son-in-law.

ARI. Yes; but to support your consent, it will not be amiss to have her agree to it also. Let us go...

CHRY. You are joking? There is no need of this. I answer for my wife, and take the business upon myself.

ARI. But...

CHRY. Leave it to me, I say, and fear nothing. I will go, and prepare her this moment.

ARI. Let it be so. I will go and see Henriette on the subject, and will return to know...

CHRY. It is a settled thing, and I will go without delay and talk to my wife about it.

SCENE V. – CHRYSALE, MARTINE

MAR. Just like my luck! Alas! they be true sayings, they be – "Give a dog a bad name and hang him," and – "One doesn't get fat in other folk's service." [Footnote: Or, more literally, "Service is no inheritance;" but this does not sound familiar enough in English.]

CHRY. What is it? What is the matter with you, Martine?

MAR. What is the matter?

CHRY. Yes.

MAR. The matter is that I am sent away, Sir.

CHRY. Sent away?

MAR. Yes; mistress has turned me out.

CHRY. I don't understand; why has she?

MAR. I am threatened with a sound beating if I don't go.

CHRY. No; you will stop here. I am quite satisfied with you. My wife is a little hasty at times, and I will not, no...

SCENE VI. – PHILAMINTE, BÉLISE, CHRYSALE, MARTINE

PHI. (*seeing* MARTINE). What! I see you here, you hussy! Quick, leave this place, and never let me set my eyes upon you again.

CHRY. Gently.

PHI. No; I will have it so.

CHRY. What?

PHI. I insist upon her going.

CHRY. But what has she done wrong, that you wish her in this way to...?

PHI. What! you take her part?

CHRY. Certainly not.

PHI. You side with her against me?

CHRY. Oh! dear me, no; I only ask what she is guilty of.

PHI. Am I one to send her away without just cause?

CHRY. I do not say that; but we must, with servants...

PHI. No; she must leave this place, I tell you.

CHRY. Let it be so; who says anything to the contrary?

PHI. I will have no opposition to my will.

CHRY. Agreed.

PHI. And like a reasonable husband, you should take my part against her, and share my anger.

CHRY. So I do. (*Turning towards* MARTINE.) Yes; my wife is right in sending you away, baggage that you are; your crime cannot be forgiven.

MAR. What is it I have done, then?

CHRY. (*aside*). Upon my word, I don't know.

PHI. She is capable even now of looking upon it as nothing.

CHRY. Has she caused your anger by breaking some looking-glass or some china?

PHI. Do you think that I would send her away for that? And do you fancy that I should get angry for so little?

CHRY. (*to* MARTINE). What is the meaning of this? (*To*

PHILAMINTE) The thing is of great importance, then?

PHI. Certainly; did you ever find me unreasonable?

CHRY. Has she, through carelessness, allowed some ewer or silver dish to be stolen from us?

PHI. That would be of little moment.

CHRY. (*to* MARTINE). Oh! oh! I say, Miss! (*To* PHILAMINTE)

What! has she shown herself dishonest?

PHI. It is worse than that.

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