

# ЖАН-БАТИСТ МОЛЬЕР

THE  
IMPOSTURES  
OF SCAPIN

Жан-Батист Мольер  
**The Impostures of Scapin**

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# Molière

## The Impostures of Scapin

### PERSONS REPRESENTED

ARGANTE, *father to OCTAVE and ZERBINETTE.*  
GÉRONTE, *father to LÉANDRE and HYACINTHA.*  
OCTAVE, *son to ARGANTE, and lover to HYACINTHA.*  
LÉANDRE, *son to GÉRONTE, and lover to ZERBINETTE.*  
ZERBINETTE, *daughter to ARGANTE, believed to be a gypsy girl.*  
HYACINTHA, *daughter to GÉRONTE.*  
SCAPIN, *servant to LÉANDRE.*  
SILVESTRE, *servant to OCTAVE.*  
NÉRINE, *nurse to HYACINTHA.*  
CARLE.  
TWO PORTERS.

*The scene is at NAPLES.*

## ACT I

### SCENE I. – OCTAVE, SILVESTRE

OCT. Ah! what sad news for one in love! What a hard fate to be reduced to! So, Silvestre, you have just heard at the harbour that my father is coming back?

SIL. Yes.

OCT. That he returns this very morning?

SIL. This very morning.

OCT. With the intention of marrying me?

SIL. Of marrying you.

OCT. To a daughter of Mr. G ronte?

SIL. Of Mr. G ronte.

OCT. And that this daughter is on her way from Tarentum for that purpose?

SIL. For that purpose.

OCT. And you have this news from my uncle?

SIL. From your uncle.

OCT. To whom my father has given all these particulars in a letter?

SIL. In a letter.

OCT. And this uncle, you say, knows all about our doings?

SIL. All our doings.

OCT. Oh! speak, I pray you; don't go on in such a way as that, and force me to wrench everything from you, word by word.

SIL. But what is the use of my speaking? You don't forget one single detail, but state everything exactly as it is.

OCT. At least advise me, and tell me what I ought to do in this wretched business.

SIL. I really feel as much perplexed as you, and I myself need the advice of some one to guide me.

OCT. I am undone by this unforeseen return.

SIL. And I no less.

OCT. When my father hears what has taken place, a storm of reprimands will burst upon me.

SIL. Reprimands are not very heavy to bear; would to heaven I were free at that price! But I am very likely to pay dearly for all your wild doings, and I see a storm of blows ready to burst upon my shoulders.

OCT. Heavens! how am I to get clear of all the difficulties that beset my path!

SIL. You should have thought of that before entering upon it.

OCT. Oh, don't come and plague me to death with your unreasonable lectures.

SIL. You plague me much more by your foolish deeds.

OCT. What am I to do? What steps must I take? To what course of action have recourse?

## SCENE II. – OCTAVE, SCAPIN, SILVESTRE

SCA. How now, Mr. Octave? What is the matter with you? What is it? What trouble are you in? You are all upset, I see.

OCT. Ah! my dear Scapin, I am in despair; I am lost; I am the most unfortunate of mortals.

SCA. How is that?

OCT. Don't you know anything of what has happened to me?

SCA. No.

OCT. My father is just returning with Mr. Géronte, and they want to marry me.

SCA. Well, what is there so dreadful about that?

OCT. Alas! you don't know what cause I have to be anxious.

SCA. No; but it only depends on you that I should soon know; and I am a man of consolation, a man who can interest himself in the troubles of young people.

OCT. Ah! Scapin, if you could find some scheme, invent some plot, to get me out of the trouble I am in, I should think myself indebted to you for more than life.

SCA. To tell you the truth, there are few things impossible to me when I once set about them. Heaven has bestowed on me a fair enough share of genius for the making up of all those neat strokes of mother wit, for all those ingenious gallantries to which the ignorant and vulgar give the name of impostures; and I can boast, without vanity, that there have been very few men more skilful than I in expedients and intrigues, and who have acquired a greater reputation in the noble profession. But, to tell the truth, merit is too ill rewarded nowadays, and I have given up everything of the kind since the trouble I had through a certain affair which happened to me.

OCT. How? What affair, Scapin?

SCA. An adventure in which justice and I fell out.

OCT. Justice and you?

SCA. Yes; we had a trifling quarrel.

SIL. You and justice?

SCA. Yes. She used me very badly; and I felt so enraged against the ingratitude of our age that I determined never to do anything for anybody. But never mind; tell me about yourself all the same.

OCT. You know, Scapin, that two months ago Mr. Géronte and my father set out together on a voyage, about a certain business in which they are both interested.

SCA. Yes, I know that.

OCT. And that both Léandre and I were left by our respective fathers, I under the management of Silvestre, and Léandre under your management.

SCA. Yes; I have acquitted myself very well of my charge.

OCT. Some time afterwards Léandre met with a young gipsy girl, with whom he fell in love.

SCA. I know that too.

OCT. As we are great friends, he told me at once of his love, and took me to see this young girl, whom I thought good-looking, it is true, but not so beautiful as he would have had me believe. He never spoke of anything but her; at every opportunity he exaggerated her grace and her beauty, extolled her intelligence, spoke to me with transport of the charms of her conversation, and related to me her most insignificant saying, which he always wanted me to think the cleverest thing in the world. He often found fault with me for not thinking as highly as he imagined I ought to do of the things he related to me, and blamed me again and again for being so insensible to the power of love.

SCA. I do not see what you are aiming at in all this.

OCT. One day, as I was going with him to the people who have charge of the girl with whom he is in love, we heard in a small house on a by-street, lamentations mixed with a good deal of sobbing. We inquired what it was, and were told by a woman that we might see there a most piteous sight,

in the persons of two strangers, and that unless we were quite insensible to pity, we should be sure to be touched with it.

SCA. Where will this lead to?

OCT. Curiosity made me urge Léandre to come in with me. We went into a low room, where we saw an old woman dying, and with her a servant who was uttering lamentations, and a young girl dissolved in tears, the most beautiful, the most touching sight that you ever saw.

SCA. Oh! oh!

OCT. Any other person would have seemed frightful in the condition she was in, for all the dress she had on was a scanty old petticoat, with a night jacket of plain fustian, and turned back at the top of her head a yellow cap, which let her hair fall in disorder on her shoulders; and yet dressed even thus she shone with a thousand attractions, and all her person was most charming and pleasant.

SCA. I begin to understand.

OCT. Had you but seen her, Scapin, as I did, you would have thought her admirable.

SCA. Oh! I have no doubt about it; and without seeing her, I plainly perceive that she must have been altogether charming.

OCT. Her tears were none of those unpleasant tears which spoil the face; she had a most touching grace in weeping, and her sorrow was a most beautiful thing to witness.

SCA. I can see all that.

OCT. All who approached her burst into tears whilst she threw herself, in her loving way, on the body of the dying woman, whom she called her dear mother; and nobody could help being moved to the depths of the heart to see a girl with such a loving disposition.

SCA. Yes, all that is very touching; and I understand that this loving disposition made you love her.

OCT. Ah! Scapin, a savage would have loved her.

SCA. Certainly; how could anyone help doing so?

OCT. After a few words, with which I tried to soothe her grief, we left her; and when I asked Léandre what he thought of her, he answered coldly that she was rather pretty! I was wounded to find how unfeelingly he spoke to me of her, and I would not tell him the effect her beauty had had on my heart.

SIL. (*to* OCTAVE). If you do not abridge your story, we shall have to stop here till to-morrow. Leave it to me to finish it in a few words. (*To* SCAPIN) His heart takes fire from that moment. He cannot live without going to comfort the amiable and sorrowful girl. His frequent visits are forbidden by the servant, who has become her guardian by the death of the mother. Our young man is in despair; he presses, begs, beseeches – all in vain. He is told that the young girl, although without friends and without fortune, is of an honourable family, and that, unless he marries her, he must cease his visits. His love increases with the difficulties. He racks his brains; debates, reasons, ponders, and makes up his mind. And, to cut a long story short, he has been married these three days.

SCA. I see.

SIL. Now, add to this the unforeseen return of the father, who was not to be back before two whole months; the discovery which the uncle has made of the marriage; and that other marriage projected between him and a daughter which Mr. Géronte had by a second wife, whom, they say, he married at Tarentum.

OCT. And, above all, add also the poverty of my beloved, and the impossibility there is for me to do anything for her relief.

SCA. Is that all? You are both of you at a great loss about nothing. Is there any reason to be alarmed? Are you not ashamed, you, Silvestre, to fall short in such a small matter? Deuce take it all! You, big and stout as father and mother put together, you can't find any expedient in your noddle? you can't plan any stratagem, invent any gallant intrigue to put matters straight? Fie! Plague on the

booby! I wish I had had the two old fellows to bamboozle in former times; I should not have thought much of it; and I was no bigger than that, when I had given a hundred delicate proofs of my skill.

SIL. I acknowledge that Heaven has not given me your talent, and that I have not the brains like you to embroil myself with justice.

OCT. Here is my lovely Hyacintha!

### SCENE III. – HYACINTHA, OCTAVE, SCAPIN, SILVESTRE

HYA. Ah! Octave, is what Silvestre has just told Nérine really true? Is your father back, and is he bent upon marrying you?

OCT. Yes, it is so, dear Hyacintha; and these tidings have given me a cruel shock. But what do I see? You are weeping? Why those tears? Do you suspect me of unfaithfulness, and have you no assurance of the love I feel for you?

HYA. Yes, Octave, I am sure that you love me now; but can I be sure that you will love me always?

OCT. Ah! could anyone love you once without loving you for ever?

HYA. I have heard say, Octave, that your sex does not love so long as ours, and that the ardour men show is a fire which dies out as easily as it is kindled.

OCT. Then, my dear Hyacintha, my heart is not like that of other men, and I feel certain that I shall love you till I die.

HYA. I want to believe what you say, and I have no doubt that you are sincere; but I fear a power which will oppose in your heart the tender feelings you have for me. You depend on a father who would marry you to another, and I am sure it would kill me if such a thing happened.

OCT. No, lovely Hyacintha, there is no father who can force me to break my faith to you, and I could resolve to leave my country, and even to die, rather than be separated from you. Without having seen her, I have already conceived a horrible aversion to her whom they want me to marry; and although I am not cruel, I wish the sea would swallow her up, or drive her hence forever. Do not weep, then, dear Hyacintha, for your tears kill me, and I cannot see them without feeling pierced to the heart.

HYA. Since you wish it, I will dry my tears, and I will wait without fear for what Heaven shall decide.

OCT. Heaven will be favourable to us.

HYA. It cannot be against us if you are faithful.

OCT. I certainly shall be so.

HYA. Then I shall be happy.

SCA. (*aside*). She is not so bad, after all, and I think her pretty enough.

OCT. (*showing SCAPIN*). Here is a man who, if he would, could be of the greatest help to us in all our trouble.

SCA. I have sworn with many oaths never more to meddle with anything. But if you both entreat me very much, I might...

OCT. Ah! if entreaties will obtain your help, I beseech you with all my heart to steer our bark.

SCA. (*to HYACINTHA*). And you, have you anything to say?

HYA. Like him, I beseech you, by all that is most dear to you upon earth, to assist us in our love.

SCA. I must have a little humanity, and give way. There, don't be afraid; I will do all I can for you.

OCT. Be sure that...

SCA. (*to OCTAVE*). Hush! (*To HYACINTHA*) Go, and make yourself easy.

## SCENE IV. – OCTAVE, SCAPIN, SILVESTRE

SCA. (*to* OCTAVE). You must prepare yourself to receive your father with firmness.

OCT. I confess that this meeting frightens me before hand, for with him I have a natural shyness that I cannot conquer.

SCA. Yes; you must be firm from the first, for fear that he should take advantage of your weakness, and lead you like a child. Now, come, try to school yourself into some amount of firmness, and be ready to answer boldly all he can say to you.

OCT. I will do the best I can.

SCA. Well! let us try a little, just to see. Rehearse your part, and let us see how you will manage. Come, a look of decision, your head erect, a bold face.

OCT. Like this.

SCA. A little more.

OCT. So?

SCA. That will do. Now, fancy that I am your father, just arrived; answer me boldly as if it were he himself. – "What! you scoundrel, you good-for-nothing fellow, you infamous rascal, unworthy son of such a father as I, dare you appear before me after what you have done, and after the infamous trick you have played me during my absence? Is this, you rascal, the reward of all my care? Is this the fruit of all my devotion? Is this the respect due to me? Is this the respect you retain for me?" – Now then, now then. – "You are insolent enough, scoundrel, to go and engage yourself without the consent of your father, and contract a clandestine marriage! Answer me, you villain! Answer me. Let me hear your fine reasons" ... – Why, the deuce, you seem quite lost.

OCT. It is because I imagine I hear my father speaking.

SCA. Why, yes; and it is for this reason that you must try not to look like an idiot.

OCT. I will be more resolute, and will answer more firmly.

SCA. Quite sure?

SIL. Here is your father coming.

OCT. Oh heavens! I am lost.

## **SCENE V. – SCAPIN, SILVESTRE**

SCA. Stop, Octave; stop. He's off. What a poor specimen it is! Let's wait for the old man all the same.

SIL. What shall I tell him?

SCA. Leave him to me; only follow me.

## SCENE VI. – ARGANTE, SCAPIN, SILVESTRE

(at the further part of the stage).

ARG. (*thinking himself alone*). Did anyone ever hear of such an action?

SCA. (*to SILVESTRE*). He has already heard of the affair, and is so struck by it that, although alone, he speaks aloud about it.

ARG. (*thinking himself alone*). Such a bold thing to do.

SCA. (*to SILVESTRE*). Let us listen to him.

ARG. (*thinking himself alone*). I should like to know what they can say to me about this fine marriage.

SCA. (*aside*). We have it all ready.

ARG. (*thinking himself alone*). Will they try to deny it?

SCA. (*aside*). No: we have no thought of doing so.

ARG. (*thinking himself alone*). Or will they undertake to excuse it?

SCA. (*aside*). That may be.

ARG. (*thinking himself alone*). Do they intend to deceive me with impertinent stories?

SCA. (*aside*). May be.

ARG. (*thinking himself alone*). All they can say will be useless.

SCA. We shall see.

ARG. (*thinking himself alone*). They will not take me in.

SCA. (*aside*). I don't know that.

ARG. (*thinking himself alone*). I shall know how to put my rascal of a son in a safe place.

SCA. (*aside*). We shall see about that.

ARG. (*thinking himself alone*). And as for that rascal Silvestre, I will cudgel him soundly.

SIL. (*to SCAPIN*). I should have been very much astonished if he had forgotten me.

ARG. (*seeing SILVESTRE*). Ah, ah! here you are, most wise governor of a family, fine director of young people!

SCA. Sir, I am delighted to see you back.

ARG. Good morning, Scapin. (*To SILVESTRE*) You have really followed my orders in a fine manner, and my son has behaved splendidly.

SCA. You are quite well, I see.

ARG. Pretty well. (*To SILVESTRE*) You don't say a word, you rascal!

SCA. Have you had a pleasant journey?

ARG. Yes, yes, very good. Leave me alone a little to scold this villain!

SCA. You want to scold?

ARG. Yes, I wish to scold.

SCA. But whom, Sir?

ARG. (*Pointing to SILVESTRE*). This scoundrel!

SCA. Why?

ARG. Have you not heard what has taken place during my absence?

SCA. Yes, I have heard some trifling thing.

ARG. How! Some trifling thing! Such an action as this?

SCA. You are about right.

ARG. Such a daring thing to do!

SCA. That's quite true.

ARG. To marry without his father's consent!

SCA. Yes, there is something to be said against it, but my opinion is that you should make no fuss about it.

ARG. This is your opinion, but not mine; and I will make as much fuss as I please. What! do you not think that I have every reason to be angry?

SCA. Quite so. I was angry myself when I first heard it; and I so far felt interested in your behalf that I rated your son well. Just ask him the fine sermons I gave him, and how I lectured him about the little respect he showed his father, whose very footsteps he ought to kiss. You could not yourself talk better to him. But what of that? I submitted to reason, and considered that, after all, he had done nothing so dreadful.

ARG. What are you telling me? He has done nothing so dreadful? When he goes and marries straight off a perfect stranger?

SCA. What can one do? he was urged to it by his destiny.

ARG. Oh, oh! You give me there a fine reason. One has nothing better to do now than to commit the greatest crime imaginable – to cheat, steal, and murder – and give for an excuse that we were urged to it by destiny.

SCA. Ah me! You take my words too much like a philosopher. I mean to say that he was fatally engaged in this affair.

ARG. And why did he engage in it?

SCA. Do you expect him to be as wise as you are? Can you put an old head on young shoulders, and expect young people to have all the prudence necessary to do nothing but what is reasonable? Just look at our Léandre, who, in spite of all my lessons, has done even worse than that. I should like to know whether you yourself were not young once, and have not played as many pranks as others? I have heard say that you were a sad fellow in your time, that you played the gallant among the most gallant of those days, and that you never gave in until you had gained your point.

ARG. It is true, I grant it; but I always confined myself to gallantry, and never went so far as to do what he has done.

SCA. But what was he to do? He sees a young person who wishes him well; for he inherits it from you that all women love him. He thinks her charming, goes to see her, makes love to her, sighs as lovers sigh, and does the passionate swain. She yields to his pressing visits; he pushes his fortune. But her relations catch him with her, and oblige him to marry her by main force.

SIL. (*aside*). What a clever cheat!

SCA. Would you have him suffer them to murder him? It is still better to be married than to be dead.

ARG. I was not told that the thing had happened in that way.

SCA. (*showing SILVESTRE*). Ask him, if you like; he will tell you the same thing.

ARG. (*to SILVESTRE*). Was he married against his wish?

SIL. Yes, Sir.

SCA. Do you think I would tell you an untruth?

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