

MOLIÈRE

AMPHITRYON

Molière

Amphitryon

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PROLOGUE

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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.