

The Game of Love and Chance

by

Pierre Carlet de Chamblain de Marivaux

Adapted for the stage by Robert Bethune.

A comedy in three acts

First performed at the Comedie Italien
on January 23, 1730.

Characters

Orgon, father of Silvia and Mario.
Mario, son of Orgon, brother of Silvia.
Silvia, tentatively engaged to Dorante.
Dorante, tentatively engaged to Silvia.
Lisette, Silvia's chambermaid.
Arlequin, Dorante's valet.

The play takes place in Paris.

Note:

The following excerpt is the last two scenes of the play, in which Sylvia's intrigue is finally unwound. The other intrigue, that of her maid and Dorante's manservant Arlequin, has already been exposed, much to the mutual delight of those two lovers. I've left in two text notes that help the reader understand what I've done in the process of rendering Marivaux's French; similar notes occur throughout the full playtext.

At this point Sylvia knows exactly who Dorante is, and is delighted with him; Dorante still thinks this woman is a maid, and feels himself hopelessly in love across the barriers of class. Sylvia has no mercy on him on that account—but also uses the situation to get the measure of the man she loves.

Act III scene viii

Dorante, Silvia

Dorante

(aside)

Just look at her! How adorable! Why did Mario have to get in my way?

Silvia

Where have you been, Monsieur? Since I left Mario, I haven't been able to find you to tell you what I said to Monsieur Orgon.

Dorante

I have not been hard to find. What do you have to say?

Silvia

(aside)

He could make an icicle shiver!

(aloud)

I put your valet in the worst possible light and I showed Monsieur Orgon how worthless he is. I tried to persuade him to at least postpone the marriage, but he wouldn't listen to me. I warn you—they're talking about having the wedding right away! It's high time you came forward!

Dorante

I've made up my mind. I'm going to just stay in disguise and go away. Then I'll write a letter to Monsieur Orgon that will reveal everything.

Silvia

(aside)

Go away! Oh, no, that will never do.

Dorante

You don't like my idea?

Silvia

Well...not very much.

Dorante

Look at the situation I'm in! If there's a better solution, I don't see it. I could speak to him myself, but what good would that do? And—I have other—reasons—for wanting to go. There's nothing more for me to do here.

Silvia

Since I don't know your reasons, I can't agree with them or argue against them, and it's not my place to ask you what they are.

Dorante

You should be able to figure them out, Lisette

Silvia

I suppose, for example, that perhaps you dislike the daughter of Monsieur Orgon.

Dorante

Is that all you can think of?

Silvia

There are certain things that might come to my mind, but I'm neither foolish enough nor vain enough to suppose they might matter.

Dorante

Nor brave enough to talk about them. You have nothing to say that I want to hear. Adieu, Lisette.

Silvia

Hold on. I don't think you're listening. I think there's something I have to say to you.

Dorante

How wonderful! Since whatever it is can hardly be in my favor, just keep it secret until I'm gone.

Silvia

What! Are you really going? Be serious!

Dorante

Your only worry is that I might change my mind.

Silvia

If only you would be so kind as to do just that!

Dorante

Aren't you being a little naïve, Lisette? Adieu.

He goes.

Silvia

(aside)

If he has the nerve to go away, I won't love him any more and I'll never—ever—marry—him...

(watching him go)

Wait—he stopped. He's thinking. He's looking to see if I'll turn my head. How can I call him back? Wouldn't it be strange if he really left, after all I've done? He's gone. It's over. I didn't have as much power over him as I thought. That brother of mine is so clumsy. Stupid too. These careless people spoil everything. Oh, haven't I done well out of this? What an ending! Wait—Dorante's coming back? Yes, it looks as though he's coming back! I take it all back. I love him! I'll just pretend to leave so he can stop me. Making up with me is going to cost him something.

Dorante

(stopping her)

Please don't go—please. I still have something to say to you.

Silvia

To me, Monsieur?

Dorante

I just can't go without making you understand that I'm doing the right thing for both of us.

Silvia

Well, Monsieur, what earthly difference does it make whether you justify yourself to me? It's not worth the trouble. I'm only a servant, as you so often make me feel.

Dorante

What about me, Lisette! How can you complain to me, when you just saw me leave you forever and didn't say a word to me?

Silvia

Hmph. If I wanted to, I could give you a perfectly good answer to that.

Dorante

Then answer me! All I want is to be wrong about all this! But what am I to say? Mario loves you.

Silvia

That's true.¹

Dorante

And you respond to his love. I saw that when you become so very, very emotional just now as I was leaving. You couldn't possibly be in love with me.

Silvia

Me! Responsive to his love? Just who told you that? I couldn't possibly be in love with you? How do you know that? You certainly make up your mind in a hurry.

Dorante

Please, Lisette, by everything you love in this whole world, teach me what this is all about. I beg you.

Silvia

Why should I teach you anything? You're leaving me!

Dorante

I'm staying right here.

Silvia

Let me go, hold me, whichever, but if you love me, don't question me like that! You're afraid I might not care for you. You're overjoyed when I keep quiet. What do my feelings matter to you?

Dorante

Do they matter to me, Lisette? Can you doubt that I worship you?

Silvia

No, especially not when you repeat it so much. But why work so hard to persuade me? What do you want me to do, Monsieur? I'm speaking from the heart. You love me, yes, but loving me isn't a serious matter for you; you have a thousand ways to get rid of me any time you wish! Think of the distance between you and I. Think of the thousands of little obstacles this will put in your path, all the people who will make sure you feel them, the amusements available to a man of your rank—all that will make you fall out of the very love you urge on me so forcefully. It might well make you smile even as you leave here today, and for good reason. But what about me, Monsieur? When I think of all those things, they make me so afraid. What if it happened? What would help me recover from the shock? Who could ever repay me for losing you? Who would you want to fill your place in my heart? Do you understand that if I loved you, no one, not even the noblest man on earth, could ever touch my soul again? Judge for yourself how it would be with me, and have the generosity to hide your love from me. Even as I speak, I shy away from

telling you that I love you in the state I see you in. If I tell your heart how I feel, your heart might overcome your head, and so you see that I hide my feelings from you.

Dorante

Oh! My darling Lisette, I finally understand you. Your words have gone through me like wildfire. I worship you, I honor you; rank, birth and fortune simply disappear before a soul like yours. I would be ashamed of myself if my pride should ever again come between us. My heart and my hand are yours.

Silvia

It's true—you do so very well deserve that I should take them. Shouldn't I be generous enough to hide the pleasure that it gives me? And do you think this can possibly last?

Dorante

Then you do love me?

Silvia

No! No...but if you ask me again, so much the worse for you.

Dorante

I just don't think I'm afraid of your threats any more.

Silvia

And Mario? Aren't you worried about him?

Dorante

No, Lisette; Mario doesn't bother me any more. You certainly aren't in love with him. You can't trick me any more. You have an honest heart, and you can feel my tenderness for you. I couldn't possibly mistake what's come over me, and you couldn't possibly make me doubt it.

Silvia

Oh, don't worry, I won't try. Keep it up! We'll just see what you do about it.

Dorante

Aren't you willing to be mine?

Silvia

What? Would you marry me in spite of who I am, who you are, in spite of your father's anger, in spite of your fortune?

Dorante

My father will forgive me when he sees you; my fortune's good enough for us, and merit is more worthy than birth. No, no, let's not argue about it; I'll never change my mind.

Silvia

And he'll never change! Do you know how charming you are to me, Dorante?

Dorante

Don't hold back your feelings; let them show...

Silvia

Well, I'm coming to that, but you...you'll never change?

Dorante

No, my darling Lisette.

Silvia

So much love!

The final scene

M. Orgon, Silvia, Dorante, Lisette, Arlequin, Mario

Silvia

Ah, father: you wanted me to be married to Dorante: come, see your daughter obey you with a smile on her face and more joy in her heart than anyone else has ever had.

Dorante

What did she say? Are you her father, Monsieur?

Silvia

Yes, Dorante, we both had the same idea about how to get to know each other. Other than that, I have nothing more to say to you. You love me, I couldn't possibly doubt it, and it's up to you to decide what I feel for you, but please, judge the trial I made of your heart by the lengths I went to to get it.

Monsieur Orgon

Dorante, do you know this letter? Now you see how I learned about your little masquerade that would otherwise have been known only to you.

Dorante

I have no idea how to tell you how happy I am, Mademoiselle; but what delights me the most is the proof I've given you of my love.

Mario

Dorante, can you forgive me for making poor Bourguignon so very, very angry?

Dorante

I not only forgive you for it, I thank you for it.

Arlequin

Be happy, Mademoiselle! You've lost your exalted rank, but you have nothing to complain of, since you still have your Arlequin who loves you.

Lisette

Some consolation! You're the only one who gets anything out of that!

Arlequin

Well, I haven't lost a thing! Before I knew who you were, I thought your dowry was worth more than you. Now I know you're worth far more than your dowry! Come on, get up, let's dance!²

Notes

¹ 1920 *Cela est vrai.*

Silvia knows perfectly well that Mario does indeed love her—as a brother should. Poor Dorante has no way of picking up the double meaning that Silvia must so thoroughly enjoy.

² 2024 *Allons, saute, marquis!*

This otherwise somewhat puzzling expression comes from a play written in 1696 by Jean-François Regnard, *Le Joueur* (The Actor) in which the character of the Marquis says it three different times. It became a traditional exclamation for Arlequin, who would use it at the moment he started a dance. Since the play and the expression are utterly unknown to American audiences, it seems simplest to just have him say something very enthusiastic about wanting to dance.