

CYRANO AND MOLIÈRE by George Jubin

Translated and adapted by Frank J. Morlock

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE:

Just as the English occasionally like to write plays about Shakespeare, the French are fond of writing plays about Moliere. Indeed it's been a cottage industry over the years, especially in the 19th century. Unlike their English counterparts, the French do a better job of it, because they do not allow their admiration for Moliere to degenerate into hagiography. Both Moliere and Cyrano de Bergerac studied under the philosopher Gassendi. I do not know what, if any, personal relationship the great soldier swordsman and the comic writer had. That Moliere, was originally Poquelin, a son of the King's upholsterer, is undoubtedly true. That he followed Madeleine Bejart onto the stage, abandoning the law his father destined him for, is historical. The rest is unknown, but cleverly put together by the author George Jubin. About the author or the circumstances under which the play was performed I know nothing. I came across the book one day in the stacks in the McKeldin Library at the University of Maryland. I thought the title was interesting, but didn't have time to read it. When later I decided to look at it again, the book was gone. Several years went by. I couldn't find it. One day I looked it up in the catalogue and found it had been moved to the Rare Book Department.

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CHARACTERS

JEAN-BAPTISTE POQUELIN

CYRANO DE BERGERAC

MADELEINE BEJART

DECEMBER 1643. At the Jeu de Paume des Metayers, cradle of the Illustre Theatre on the eve of its opening.

The stage represents a room adjoining the Jeu de Paume [Tennis Court] on the first floor that serves as a lodging for Madeleine Bejart and Jean-Baptiste Poquelin. In the back a large judas-door giving on the stairway to the street. To the left, a large window giving on the Jeu de Paume. To the right, midstage, a chimney and on each side of it two small doors leading to the Jeu de Paume. A trunk and a table.

Poquelin is walking about in agitation. As the door opens he throws the papers in the trunk and turns ill-humoredly towards Madeline as she enters.

POQUELIN: Where are you coming from?

MADELEINE: (ridding herself of her cloak) What's that to you?

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POQUELIN: Eh!s Madeline as she enters.

POQUELIN: Where are you coming from?

MADELEINE: (ridding herself of her cloak) What's that to you?

POQUELIN: Eh! I mean to know!

MADELEINE: (heading towards the door to the Jeu de Paume) That gallant tone again. Oh, in that case, goodbye!

POQUELIN: Madeleine! (she turns toward him) This game has to end! Because your way of behaving is putting me through torture. Heavens, yesterday again — that rustic with an impertinent manner; that financier came to our Jeu de Paume during rehearsal. You received him like a balm, an exquisite balm. His compliments worthy of a fool.

MADELEINE: Well, I've received them from Poquelin and others even better fashioned.

POQUELIN: Here?

MADELEINE: No, in the street! From a gallant cavalier who, as soon as he'd seen me, said a thousand sweet nothings to me from the New Bridge almost to our lodging.

POQUELIN: You didn't have the cheek, I think, to reply.

MADELEINE: (evasively) Hmmm!

POQUELIN: I feel rage gripping me. To please every one and to try to be displeasing to me alone! Me, who loves you. (more softly) And who's proved it to you.

MADELEINE: (interrupting him) Proved it? There we go. The word's come. Proved it? By your somber and melancholy humor and by your words crabbed with jealous tyranny? Yes, I know. For me you became an actor. The job of an upholsterer no longer called you. Caprice on your part.

POQUELIN: (excitedly) But you were something else than a caprice on my part! You were one of those that one hardly dares contemplate at a distance, that suddenly a happy chance puts in your path, in your life, and then one loves without being loved in return and one is jealous, jealous to the point of rage! You lack a heart to give unconditionally. You've only given me a shadow of love!

MADELEINE: (coquettish) Poquelin, my friend, you are difficult! And I know more than one in this fine town who would be content with that ghost.

POQUELIN: (abruptly) Well, as for me, I demand something more!

MADELEINE: (ironic) Behold! My sweet, the misfortune is I am incapable of offering you anything better! (pause) After all, am I so much at fault? I'm a coquette? Eh, yes! Isn't that our job, the rest of us? To bring men under our rule and to see them all on their knees begging for a smile, and make them delirious for a sweet look? Why that's our job. The profession demands it. We must please. (laughing) And why deny it, we please willingly.

POQUELIN: That's what I deplore. (changing tone) Besides, what's the use of quarreling again? You can go spend your time with all your stupid gallants. As for me, I cannot suffer their insolent remarks. Henceforth they will never come to my ears!

MADELEINE: (uneasy) What are you saying?

POQUELIN: (determined) I am going to leave.

MADELEINE: (excitedly) What? On the eve of the day we are opening this theatre?

POQUELIN: Forthwith! Right now.

MADELEINE: And your part then?

POQUELIN: Someone will learn to replace me soon.

MADELEINE: In an hour?

(aside) He's crazy!

(to Poquelin)

Why, Poquelin, look — you know perfectly well that no one can replace you this way.

POQUELIN: So much the worse for you!

MADELEINE: (persuasively) And for you, too! Because, in the end, aren't you interested in how our Illustre Theatre —?

POQUELIN: Bah! It will be illustrious without me.

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MADELEINE: (desolated) Stubborn! (she sits down in apparent consternation)

POQUELIN: (observing her, bitterly) Ah! How upset you get when it's your interest that's threatened.

MADELEINE: (raising her head) Mercy!

POQUELIN: And, when you see me ready to leave —!

MADELEINE: (rising, conciliatory) Well then, if it angers you so much, I will control this coquetry.

POQUELIN: Get out!

MADELEINE: Honestly.

POQUELIN: (hesitating) Really true? **MADELEINE:** No admirer will come here any more.

POQUELIN: And your admirer of just now — in the street?

MADELEINE: (lying) An invented story! (coaxingly) Come on, don't put on your sad face any more — big jealous. (she is near the window and watches the Jeu de Paume) And wait — Go on, they're waiting for you to rehearse.

POQUELIN: Is the author there?

MADELEINE: Mr. Tristan? Yes, certainly. (she half opens the window and speaking to the wings) He's coming to join you! (to Poquelin who goes toward the door) By the way, your tirade when Crispin says he's dying of fire! Some bravado. (smiling) I'm a good adviser for the profession.

POQUELIN: Thanks! (starts to leave and turns toward Madeleine) But if some gallant were to appear here

MADELEINE: (pushing him out) You will leave. Yes. But get going will you?

POQUELIN: You're coming down?

MADELEINE: No, my scene isn't until the end of the act. (Poquelin leaves) Whew! How much trouble it takes to put this damned Poquelin straight! (thoughtful) Jealous! (laughing) It falls out well. My heart is a mill that turns with every puff of wind. (seriously) The important thing is for him to stay. To leave us abruptly on a day like this! Plague! That would have been nice. (a rap on the street door) Who's that? (looking through the peephole in the door) The stranger I saw on New Bridge today! Not handsome to begin with. A nose of unheard of length. And then — for Poquelin! That would be disaster if it comes to that. (more knocking) No! No! (the rapping gets harder, she considers) But the other one might hear. (deciding) Better to get rid of him. (going to the door)

CYRANO: (outside) Ah, indeed! Are you going to open up for me?

MADELEINE: Hey, there! Will you quiet down! You are making a racket.

CYRANO: (entering) At last, I see you again, my goddess of tender charms. (going to her) A kiss right away. (she refuses her head) No. (stupidly) My name of Cyrano will be ruined! A kiss, quick!

MADELEINE: (her teeth on edge) You were told no!

CYRANO: That's what we shall see. And soon. (striding towards her) A feint, and straight for the enemy —

MADELEINE: (escaping from him and taking shelter behind the table) Who puts herself out of range!

CYRANO: Tricky wench! She intends to whet my appetite. Second assault. (readies to hurl himself on her; she stops him)

MADELEINE: Indeed — Stop! (coming out from her retreat) I surrender, but of my own will. (he tries to embrace her; she recoils) Hold on! Understand that no one can take a kiss. A kiss is given. (blows him a kiss) There!

CYRANO: (nonplussed) That's all?

MADELEINE: (firmly) Now, if you please — out you go!

CYRANO: And if I don't please?

MADELEINE: Then it will always be this way! When Madeleine Bejart puts a plan in her head it's done immediately. Neither God, nor gallant can prevent it. (pointing to the door) What are you waiting for?

CYRANO: I'm waiting until I feel like obeying you. For you've put me in the mood not to leave. It's very nice here, my darling! And can you imagine it's best to retreat on the verge of victory?

MADELEINE: (bursting out) Victory? Ah, really, you deceive yourself with that mocking air, that outfit, that nose!

CYRANO: (vexed) Then why did you open up for me?

MADELEINE: In order to kick you out afterwards.

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CYRANO: And the kiss?

MADELEINE: Given to be sooner rid of you. (very rude) And besides, you must understand by now without such a lengthy discussion that you are in the way.

CYRANO: In the way?

MADELEINE: You couldn't be more so! More than one can be! (a little annoyed and deciding) Wait. Push open that window. — What do you see?

CYRANO: A tennis court.

MADELEINE: And then — nothing else?

CYRANO: (looking on the other side) Ah, over this way I see a theatre.

MADELEINE: (shutting the window on his nose) Mine — which opens tomorrow to the public of the city. From that you will judge that it is very difficult for me, having a thousand tasks today and worries, to meditate long, sir, on your case. And when my troupe isn't even prepared to perform to waste an hour talking about a love affair.

CYRANO: So, you do intend to kick me out?

MADELEINE: I am quite sorry about it. (pushing him toward the door)

CYRANO: (aside) Bah! So much the worse. The bitch is really very attractive. (turning abruptly, aloud) Once Cyrano successfully enters the door of a beauty, it takes a hundred men to make him leave. (flopping in an armchair) I shall not leave!

MADELEINE: (exasperated and going to the window) The devil with this pig headed character! (looking through the window) And Poquelin's finished!

CYRANO: (from his armchair) My very dearest —

MADELEINE: He'll kill himself!

CYRANO: I adore the theatre.

MADELEINE: He's coming up! (pointing to Cyrano) And this one's staying!

CYRANO: You must love it, too?

MADELEINE: Me? As for me, I detest you! (Cyrano shrugs his shoulders, smiling; she rushes to the door, aside) I prefer to be at a distance at the moment of contact! (she leaves)

CYRANO: (alone, hearing the door close) Gone! (uproar at the door of the Jeu de Paume) And someone's coming. (pondering) The lover. If he's tactful, I will spare him. If not —! (touches his sword hilt) He won't have anything to laugh about. (strides about, hand on his sword, with his back to the door through which Poquelin enters)

POQUELIN: (aside) A man here! In her place! (aloud, in a rough voice) Hey! Sir!

CYRANO: (stiffening at the tone but without turning, aside) What's this mean?

POQUELIN: (more nervously) What are you doing around here?

CYRANO: (with a furious air, but without turning) What I please!

POQUELIN: (striding towards Cyrano, insolently) Scoundrel!

CYRANO: Damned insolent cuckold! (turning, drawing his sword)

POQUELIN: (recognizing him, dumbfounded) Cyrano!

CYRANO: (also astounded) Poquelin! A ghost!

POQUELIN: Now then! Hurry, let me embrace you. (embracing him) Dear friend!

CYRANO: Three years without seeing each other face to face. Have I changed since the days at Gassendi's?

POQUELIN: No. Surely.

CYRANO: And neither have you.

POQUELIN: (examining him) First of all, ever bold!

CYRANO: And as for you, with your soft and melancholy air — Have you seen Chapelle again?

POQUELIN: (as if distracted) Rarely.

CYRANO: And Bernier? Indeed — I recall —

POQUELIN: (interrupting him) A word. By what chance —?

CYRANO: Am I here? My dear friend — (stupidly) A woman —

POQUELIN: (violently) And her name?

CYRANO: (astonished) Damnation! With what an air you're speaking to me?

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POQUELIN: (very passionately) Her name, Cyrano, I beg you!

CYRANO: (hesitating now) It's that —

POQUELIN: (frigidly) Be discreet if you wish. I bet I know that name — La Bejart!

CYRANO: (betraying himself) Who told you?

POQUELIN: (crushed, with sorrow) It's her!

CYRANO: (running to him) Ah! Poquelin. I'm only a cursed fool. You love her?

POQUELIN: Alas!

CYRANO: And you are suffering through her?

POQUELIN: (raging) Infernal coquette!

CYRANO: (involuntarily approving) Ah, indeed! The young lady can boast of being one! (returning to the situation) All the same, calm down. This is the first time I've entered her roof — on honor!

POQUELIN: Eh! What do I care!

CYRANO: And what's more, I must tell you. She kicked me out.

POQUELIN: (with sad irony) So I see!

CYRANO: Everything conspires to wrong me. And, truly, I had these wrongs for myself alone.

POQUELIN: (stopping him) Useless friend, all your efforts are superfluous. I see that she is incorrigible. And that she lied to me. It's no longer possible for me to live here any longer, I'm leaving.

CYRANO: I am in despair.

POQUELIN: Why — you found yourself there without knowing. You or some one else. It's the same score. She no longer loves me — and I'm leaving.

CYRANO: But they tell about these things — Nothing happened.

POQUELIN: (very grave) I'm still leaving.

CYRANO: (also grave) It's serious —?

POQUELIN: Yes, certainly. (a pause)

CYRANO: Perhaps it's better. After all — A wise proverb says "Far from the eyes, far from the heart". By being courageous today, friend, your pain will sooner flee. I am certain of it. And one fine morning, I bet you will awake content, free and cured. On that — time's wasting. At the Pine Cone they must be making a feast. Come! (Through the window an uproar from the rehearsal. Poquelin, about to follow Cyrano, suddenly stops.)

POQUELIN: One moment.

CYRANO: What for?

POQUELIN: (in an emotional voice) That applause!

CYRANO: What are those bravos to you? (more applause)

POQUELIN: (aside) Again! At every moment! (dragging Cyrano towards the window) Look. Bejart's playing. And everyone in the hall's applauding. Indeed, the scene is without equal! (carried away, applauding in his turn) Ah! Bravo! Comrade!

CYRANO: (watching him, astonished) Huh? Comrade? Eh, what! Comrades — these folk?

POQUELIN: They are what I am — It's true. To follow Madeleine, I became an actor.

CYRANO: You go on the stage? **POQUELIN:** (with melancholy) I won't do it any more. My dream's destroyed — That applause! Those bravos! Ah! that uproar — (passionately, with increasing excitement) No! You cannot know, Cyrano, what intoxication one feels when: ceaselessly bursting on the ear, growling like thunder and gripping you by the heart this uproar teaches you that you are the conqueror in the battle joined for the soul of men. That this is ours, small as we are, for, according to how it pleased us to transfigure it, we've made it smile or we've made it weep! To see, at a short distance away, like a big dark hole, all those human creatures who appear numberless, living in a lightning flash the life we determine, impassioned with our passion, burning with our fires, pained with our pain and mad with our joy. Moulding them at our whim, made into our prey. And then to hear them, like a wave on the sea whose murmur rises and increases in the air. To bless with both their hands the magic gift, which revealed for one instant, ravishes them for their life. This great and exquisite time, that I, yes, I have known that escapes you. Alas I will never see it again!

CYRANO: What passion defending a situation that has, I admit, its pleasures and its pride. But when one acts, mustn't you reckon with bad days?

POQUELIN: If Paris greets me ill, the provinces always remain to me.

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CYRANO: Wandering from village to village!

POQUELIN: And what do I care about that long pilgrimage if I see endlessly appearing at the end of the road, after the somber present, a bright tomorrow! (becoming heated again) And even if this dawn never shines, even in despair I would still hope. Because I would have in my heart a divine cordial warming my misery with the fire of the ideal! (pause, falling back into a reverie) But, at present — (remaining pensive, he goes toward the trunk into which he threw his books)

CYRANO: (aside) And still nothing about his mistress. It's abandoning his art that causes his distress. He must remain! (watching Poquelin rummaging in the trunk) But — What are you looking for in there?

POQUELIN: Don't bother me. (going to the chimney)

CYRANO: But I want to see that. Those papers — are you going to burn them?

POQUELIN: (evasively) Absurd gibberish.

CYRANO: (jestingly) Carefully hidden in the depths of a closet? Then, you're an author? May one see your work? (extending his hand) Give it to me.

POQUELIN: Why, no.

CYRANO: Very fine! (grabs them by surprise) I've got it — We'll read this in detail. (putting it in his pocket)

POQUELIN: They're only formless essays. Return them to me.

CYRANO: (pulling them out of his pocket) Then let's have a look at this enormous stupidity. (leafing through them and reading the titles) Gorgibus in the bag. The amorous doctor. The Fagot-makers — good — good — The Pedant — (stopping) Nice title. (negligently) As for me, I used that title for a comedy that I wrote in verse about philosophy.

POQUELIN: (smiling) I remember it quite well. The story of Granger. An excellent morsel that I dared to copy. (showing him a page) There!

CYRANO: (looking) That's right! (reading) "What's he come to do in this gallery?" (threatening him as a joke) Behold this author who pillages his colleagues.

POQUELIN: (most serious) Yes, I was a born pillager.

CYRANO: (excitedly) But I'm not angry with you for having taken a grain of salt from my poor meal!

POQUELIN: (pensively) To pillage. (to Cyrano) Open these notes at random. Take the trouble to view these fragments carved out by the handful from the homes of these times and from antiquity, and amongst the French, on the one hand, and Spain and Italy on the other. (leafing himself) Here — this is from Terence; that's from Plautus. A character trait here, this from the Florentine farces — further on, this is an extract from an old Medieval tale. On this other page a word culled from our stage. Did I plunder enough of them all in the course of reading? And I have no remorse, I assure you for having pillaged wherever my treasure was to be found!

CYRANO: (smiling) Your "treasure" — Since —

POQUELIN: Since I make it mine! Because whatever is old rejuvenates quickly through contact with another soul and casts out a new flame. Because all my larcenies in their turn become law! Because under the borrowed mask I am ME!

CYRANO: But to be original is a difficult thing. Everything's been done down here. You must be docile and follow the scent on every track to the end. Or— do like me. When I have enough of this old world, I will seek my fortune in the Sun and find talent in the Moon!

POQUELIN: To my way of thinking, Cyrano, no one needs to seek talent either so high or so low. And one need only cast his eyes on this earth to find subjects to know what to make of them. Life is a great book in which one has only to peer and there you can see everything, then use it later.

CYRANO: But one sees so little —

MOLIERE: The whole trick is to observe the little one sees. And then to hold it in reserve. These accumulated nothings later form a body, a living body.

CYRANO: (doubtfully) Living? Through the power of art!

POQUELIN: (firmly) Living because made from life. All that I perceive about me. I feel inclined to engrave in my head — swiftly, like a thief hiding gold under his cloak. Vice, virtue, despair, joy. It must all be stolen from passersby who one jostles. Coquettes scorning in whispers behind a fan; those whose too frank love is a scandal; the miser loving his money almost to a frenzy; false devotees trapped in their hypocrisy. In the end, all that you, I,

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or anyone can see. And must have seen; and clearly seen to know in what direction the world turns and who peoples it. Tomorrow as today; it's human baseness. And do you think that by pursuing that; by fixing all these characteristics without being pedantic, without passing sentence, doing nothing except revealing Mankind to the credulous theatre what is in life, either vile or ridiculous, you haven't done something better than being original because one has done good by pointing out what is bad! (a pause, then sadly) Ah, Cyrano, doubtless you laugh and that's justice! To hear these big words on the subject of a rough draft or two of no importance, one or two sketches of farces, Gorgibus, The Fagot-makers! You are going to take me for a dummy who's done nothing, in short, and talks to you in the manner of an oracle and as a great man. You'll say to yourself —

CYRANO: I was saying to myself that to count on the future is a useless worry. A world may end because of an errant atom off its course. But that if one must triumph over this doubt, if one can predict to someone that that person will be great some day, and thereafter will belong to us first and that afterwards the thoughts he reveals and the words he speaks and through the new soul that one feels hatching within — it will surely be to you that, forgetting that chance rules, one will say "I am certain of your future glory. You will be great. Your name is one of those that the voice of great destinies already murmurs and that humanity will repeat morning and night —" (slowly) Now that was my thought. (a short pause) I was also thinking that your soul, injured by a pain of love will receive its cure without your being forced to leave the house where I feel the voice of the future is calling you.

POQUELIN: (excitedly) No. The deception was far too cruel. To love without being loved. I want to leave forever, without delay. I am thirsty to escape from this love.

CYRANO: You have only that dream in the world?

POQUELIN: Yes, I am capable of desiring glory without playing second fiddle. What you were promising me just now. Tonight, when everyone slept, that deceitful dream was able to boast to me, as sweetly as when one emerges from childhood; when one is full of noble confidences — to become one day — who knows? A great actor and who knows — even? — who knows? more, much more an author! That was too beautiful. Let's be, like Papa Poquelin an upholsterer, but not as good. This is the end of Moliere, a poor and costly adopted name!

CYRANO: Moliere. A perfect name and one that must protect you.

POQUELIN: The sacrifice has been made. (going toward the street door) Are you coming?

CYRANO: (searching for a way to retain him) To leave! To leave! (finding one) But first of all, I think — have you the right to leave so carelessly? I would think it ill done to leave so emotionlessly these folks, these fine people who, all of them, are counting on you.

POQUELIN: (shaken) My comrades —

CYRANO: Yes. After promising to be with them, in fortune or in distress, the leader who protects them, the friend who sustains them, the one who doesn't flee when misfortune occurs?

POQUELIN: (in a very low voice) That was me!

CYRANO: You see!

POQUELIN: (pondering) Yes, yes — It would be cowardly to leave them with the work. (coming to himself) But this love affair is still odious to me.

CYRANO: Ingrate! Your love? When it's she — yes, she, who wants you to be great. And this Madeleine that you curse — it's the perfume of her breath, and the gold of her hair, and the luster of her complexion, which wants an illustrious destiny for you, since she culled you as you followed your obscure path, to throw you into the arms of your future glory, and she was the good luck, the holy opportunity who conquered your vocation for you, ingrate!

POQUELIN: Did she have to uproot me like a weed?

CYRANO: Suffering is at times a leaven of hope. And when one wants, as you do, to depict misfortunes, which are from earthly kings to serfs in hamlets, humanity's eternal pasturage — it's not enough to see them on the page of a book, and to have observed suffering in the abstract. It's better they are felt in the flesh. And that the dying heart can say of itself to others, "These ills were mine before being yours."

POQUELIN: You say the truth. As for this love, indeed, either I'll cure myself of it or I must suffer from it. Well, I will suffer, but I will remain here, friend. (extending his hand to him)

MADELEINE: (reentering quietly, aside) Good friends! What a piece of luck! As for me, I was expecting to see them butcher each other. (as she comes forward the two men notice her)

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POQUELIN: Madeleine, your invented admirer has almost converted me.

MADELEINE: (delighted) Really? Not jealous any more?

POQUELIN: (with a sad smile) At least I haven't left!

MADELEINE: In that case, no longer lovers — huh? But good comrades. (she offers her hand to Poquelin who takes it)

POQUELIN: (to Cyrano) This ends all the rows. (pointing to himself) The lover — (carefully seeking for his word) Unlucky, beaten, but content!

MADELEINE: Hell! Tomorrow there will be a dazzling success. (to Cyrano) Indeed, sir, since you are his crony, — (pointing to Poquelin) you will come to applaud Poquelin?

CYRANO: (gravely, raising his hat) No — Moliere!

CURTAIN