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A decorative border with a repeating pattern of stylized, symmetrical motifs, possibly representing a classical architectural element like a scroll or a shell, framing the text.

A Doctor in Spite of Himself

By Molière
Adapted by Aurand Harris

One-act Version

A Doctor in Spite of Himself

Sharpened version of a charming French classic, adapted for today's producing groups.

Comedy. Freely adapted by Aurand Harris from Molière. Cast: 6m., 3w. Sganarelle, a shiftless woodcutter, quarrels with his wife, Martine, who vows to get even with him. Her chance comes when she meets two servants in search of a doctor to cure their master's daughter. Martine recommends her husband in the most glowing terms as a doctor who can perform miracles, but warns them that he will have to be beaten into it. Armed with slapsticks, the two men hail Sganarelle as a great doctor, whack him roundly whenever he attempts to deny it, and thus force him into becoming a doctor in spite of himself. Fortunately, the master's daughter is only shamming illness to avoid a distasteful marriage. When Sganarelle is able to unite her with her own true love, she is miraculously cured—and Dr. Sganarelle is richly rewarded. *Three sets. Seventeenth-century French costumes—or modern, if you prefer. Code: DC3.*

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A Doctor in Spite of
Himself (one-act) (Harris)



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MOLIÈRE'S

**A DOCTOR IN SPITE OF
HIMSELF**

Comedy
Adapted by
AURAND HARRIS

One-act Version



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Introduction

Jean Baptiste Poquelin took the name of "Molière" at the age of twenty-one when he became a founder of a theatre group called *Illustre Théâtre*. Molière, the playwright, became a name known in France and throughout the theatre world as the master of modern comedy.

Molière was born January 15, 1622. He studied Latin and Greek and received a law degree in 1642. Forsaking law, he turned to the theatre and became an actor, director, administrator, and one of the great playwrights of France. In 1659 his play, *The Precious Maidens Ridiculed*, established him as the most popular comic playwright of his day. Following that he wrote a succession of acclaimed satiric comedies, including *A Doctor in Spite of Himself* and *Scapin*. He died at the age of fifty-five. Seven years later, the King, uniting Molière's theatre company with a rival company, formed a French National Theatre, *The Comédie Française*, which became known as the House of Molière.

French drama, which led the world in the seventeenth century, was dominated by the formal neoclassical tragedies of Corneille and Racine. Molière introduced social satire, which gave comedy respectability equal to tragedy. This was comedy which appealed to the intellect rather than to the emotions. The characters are less real than the situations, as in *A Doctor in Spite of Himself*, where Sganarelle, a realistic woodcutter, becomes an improbable doctor. Molière's plays evoke, as George Meredith observed, "thoughtful laughter."

Molière's plays have elements of *commedia dell' arte*. He was undoubtedly influenced by an Italian *commedia* troupe, directed by Tiberio Fiorelli, which at one time shared the *Théâtre du Petit Bourbon* with Molière's company. Molière's plays took the form of Roman comedies which he made into great theatrical farces. As Shakespeare did, Molière used other people's plots to which he gave his own unique touch. He endowed stock types with contemporary characterizations, developing a genre often called "character comedy."

Molière's plays were usually written in the formal Alexandrine couplets and adhered to the unities of time, place and action. Plays written

in such graceful poetry are often difficult to translate into English prose.

A Doctor in Spite of Himself was first performed August 6, 1666. The idea for it was suggested by a medieval painting, *The Rascally Apothecary*. The script evolved from an earlier Molière farce, *The Shuttlecock Doctor*. The play, an immediate success, is a joyous comedy, with only an occasional satirical thrust at the medical profession.

In *Scapin*, Molière returned to pure farce. It was first performed in Paris at the *Théâtre du Palais-Royal*, May 24, 1671. Molière himself played the title role, where “on his own stage he was one of the marvels of his time.”

CAST

SGANARELLE, *a woodcutter*
MARTINE, *his wife*
ROBERT, *a neighbor*
VALERE, *a servant of Geronte*
LUCAS, *another servant*
JACQUELINE, *wife of Lucas*
GERONTE, *a rich gentleman*
LUCINDE, *his daughter*
LEANDRE, *a young gentleman*

SCENE: *France, 1600*

A Doctor in Spite of Himself

(The curtain opens. There is a painted cut-out tree standing at R, large enough for an actor to be concealed behind. SGANARELLE, followed by MARTINE enter L. They walk angrily to C, and stop.)

SGANARELLE: Be quiet, quiet, quiet woman. I am the master.

MARTINE: I will not be quiet, quiet, quiet. I will be heard.

SGANARELLE: *(Aside.)* Oh, the misery of married life.

MARTINE: *(Aside.)* Oh, the misery to be married to a stupid husband.

SGANARELLE: How right the great Aristotle was when he said: a wife is the devil in disguise.

MARTINE: What does a woodcutter know about Aristotle?

SGANARELLE: My little wife, I am a husband to be proud of. Six years I served a famous doctor. I learned by heart his Latin grammar.

(Poses and speaks loudly and proudly.)

Cabricius arci thuram, catalamus, singulariter, numerum et casus.

MARTINE: Yes doctor woodcutter . . . doctor blockhead! A curse on the day and on the hour when I went to church with you and said, "I will."

SGANARELLE: And a curse on the Magistrate who made me swear away my freedom.

MARTINE: You should thank heaven every minute of your life that you have me for your wife.

SGANARELLE: Thank you? You were the lucky one when you got me.

MARTINE: Lucky! To marry a man who only works his mouth, a scoundrel who eats me out of house and home.

SCANARELLE: (*Aside.*) Not true. I drink as well as eat.

MARTINE: Who has sold every stick of furniture in the house.

SCANARELLE: That is living on one's means.

MARTINE: Do you think things will go on like this forever and ever and ever?

SCANARELLE: Now little wife, calm yourself—

MARTINE: Do you think I am going to put up with this forever and ever and ever?

SCANARELLE: (*Aside.*) She is slightly annoyed.

MARTINE: Do you think I don't know how to bring you to your senses?

SCANARELLE: I know, my little wife, that you know that I have a strong right arm! (*Holds it up.*)

MARTINE: And so do I! (*Holds it up.*)

SCANARELLE: You are asking for a beating.

MARTINE: Beat me. Beat me! If you dare!

SCANARELLE: Ah, so you force me—

MARTINE: Scoundrel! Beggar! Villain!

SCANARELLE: A switch! (*He goes to side of tree. From behind the tree a green hand is extended and hands him a slap-stick. They shake hands.*)

MARTINE: Rascal! Thief! Doctor Blockhead!

(He beats her with the slap-stick. It is a fast and funny scene. She jumps and yells. He looks at the audience between the whacks and grins. She stands and rubs her hip.)

SCANARELLE: (*Aside.*) That is the way to quiet a wife.

ROBERT: (*Enters from L, an old man.*) Hello . . . Hello? What is all this. Sganarelle beating his wife.

(*Crosses to Sganarelle, stands between husband and wife.*)
Disgraceful behavior. Come. Enough. You are a scoundrel, monsieur, to beat your wife.

MARTINE: What did you call him?

ROBERT: He is a scoundrel, a villain, a rascal—

MARTINE: (*Slaps Robert.*) Don't you call my husband names.

ROBERT: But he beat you—like a rascal— (*She slaps him.*) like a villain— (*She slaps him.*) like a— (*He hides on the other side of Sganarelle.*)

MARTINE: Suppose I want him to beat me?

ROBERT: Ah, then it is his pleasure.

MARTINE: Is it any of your business? (*Aside.*) Imagine if everyone went around stopping husbands from beating wives.

ROBERT: I apologize.

MARTINE: What right have you for butting in?

ROBERT: I won't say another word.

MARTINE: I like being beaten.

ROBERT: (*To Sganarelle.*) I beg your pardon, my friend. Carry on. Hit her! I'll be happy to give you a hand.

SGANARELLE: No. I don't want to now.

ROBERT: Ah, a pity.

SGANARELLE: (*Suddenly angry.*) She's my wife, not yours.

ROBERT: Happily, yes!

SGANARELLE: (*Ready to strike him.*) And I don't need your help.

ROBERT: I was being neighborly.

SGANARELLE: Good neighbors do not interfere in other neighbor's business. Remember what Cicero said: do not put the bark of a tree between the trunk and your finger. (*Starts hitting Robert with slap-stick, as ROBERT runs off L, crying for help.*) Remember! Remember! Remember! (*He gives slap-stick back to "Tree." They touch hands. He smiles at wife.*) Our quarrel is over.

MARTINE: (*Smiles.*) Over.

MARTINE: Say you are sorry.

SGANARELLE: I'm sorry!

MARTINE: I forgive you. (*They hold hands. She aside.*) But I'll pay him back for hitting me—(*Rubs hip*) so hard.

SGANARELLE: (*Aside.*) A few blows between husband and wife—now and then—prove that it is a happy marriage. (*To wife.*) Now, little wife, I'm off to bundle firewood, and I promise you I shall return with a hundred sticks and more. (*Sings, as he exits L.*)

See me lift my little bottle
Hear the gurgle in my throttle . . .

MARTINE: (*Looks after him.*) Be off with you. And I'm not forgetting—no matter what happy face I wear—how I feel. (*Aside.*) Oh, if I could find some means of paying him back for the beating he gave me, I'd do it! Now what could I do to make him know I—(*Savagely.*) Truly—(*Tenderly.*) love him (*Sits and thinks.*)

(*VALERE and LUCAS enter from L. Both are servants. Valere affects a grand manner and Lucas is a country bumpkin.*)

VALERE: We will rest here and catch our breath.

LUCAS: It's a fool's errand we're sent on. What are you and I going to get out of it? Nothing . . . nothing . . . nothing.

VALERE: We must obey the master. He has sent us. And I am deeply concerned for the health of the master's daughter.

LUCAS: Now there's a strange sickness.

VALERE: But don't you see—if her sickness can be cured, she will marry Horace— and Horace is very rich— so if you and I can fetch a doctor who can cure the master's daughter— Our errand will be worth a great deal to us.

LUCAS: That's just what I said! We'll get something out of it. Something . . . something . . . something.

MARTINE: (*To herself.*) Think . . . think how he beat you. Think how to get even with him.

VALERE: Of course the master's daughter has a fancy to marry another— young Leandre.

LUCAS: And if she marries him, we'll get nothing . . . nothing . . . nothing.

VALERE: The master will never consent for her to marry young— poor— Leandre.

LUCAS: Ah, how wise is our good master.

VALERE: So now we will find a wondrous doctor who can cure the master's daughter.

LUCAS: So she can marry Horace.

VALERE: And they will live richly ever after.

LUCAS: And so will we!

MARTINE: (*Rises. To herself.*) There must be some way I can make him feel a good whack. (*Curtsies to her imaginary husband, while VALERE and LUCAS bow to each other.*) To show my dear husband my tender love. (*She and VALERE, bowing, back into each other.*) Oh, I beg your pardon, gentlemen. I was thinking—how I could find— what I'm looking for.

VALERE: (*Bowing grandly to her.*) Ah, madame, we too are looking— for what we are trying to find.

MARTINE: If I can be of help, gentlemen, in your search—

LUCAS: We are looking for a doctor.

MARTINE: A doctor?

VALERE: A most clever doctor who can cure our master's daughter. She has been affected with a strange malady which has suddenly made her speechless. All the doctors nearby have tried – and failed.

LUCAS: They've run out of physic and rhubarb. They've even run out of Latin.

MARTINE: (*Looks off L.*) Latin . . .

VALERE: One hears sometimes of an obscure doctor who has his own remarkable secrets –

MARTINE: (*Nods.*) A doctor . . . Who speaks Latin . . . Gentlemen, your search is over! (*Aside.*) I have thought of a way that my husband will feel the sting of a stick!

VALERE: Where shall we find him!

MARTINE: He is there – (*Points R. They look.*) cutting wood.

LUCAS: A doctor – cutting wood?

MARTINE: Oh, I must warn you, he is a very extraordinary man. In fact, he will tell you he is *not* a doctor.

VALERE: Odd. But often the greater the man the more fool he is with little quirks.

MARTINE: Oh, he is a great fool all right. As great as he is a doctor.

VALERE: We shall find him. (*They nod and start.*)

MARTINE: (*Stops them.*) First, I must tell you there is only one way in which you can make him say he is a doctor. He will not admit he is a doctor – unless –

VALERE: Unless –

LUCAS: Unless –

MARTINE: Unless you take a stick – and whack him! (*Goes to tree.*) Beat him – beat him until he admits in the end what he denied in the beginning. (*"Tree" hands her a slap-stick.*)