CLASSICS LIBRARY · STORY MAP

The Mistress of the Inn (La Locandiera)

Carlo Goldoni · *1753 · Merle Pierson translation (1912)*

In a Florentine inn the clever hostess Mirandolina is courted by a count and a marquis, and she is scorned by a knight who hates women. She sets out to win him, and she does too well. Goldoni's comedy turns the old stock figures of Italian theater into a sharp study of vanity, money, and a woman's skill at handling men.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Who holds the power in a comedy of courtship: the nobles who offer titles and gifts, or the woman who runs the inn and knows what each guest wants?

Mirandolina wins by watching. She flatters the Count and the Marquis just enough to keep them coming, and she sees that the Knight's scorn for women is a weakness she can use. Her victory is complete, but it is tinged with a danger she has not foreseen. In the end she chooses the steady waiter Fabrizio, a sensible, class-equal marriage, and the play makes clear that the choice is hers.

KEY CHARACTERS

Mirandolina
The hostess, shrewd, charming, and the author of the whole game.

The Knight of Ripafratta
A nobleman who despises women, and so is the easiest to catch.

The Marquis of Forlipopoli
An impoverished noble who trades on his title.

The Count of Albafiorita
A rich man with a new title, who buys attention.

Fabrizio
The head waiter, honest, practical, and finally her husband.

Ortensia and Dejanira
Two traveling actresses who recognize a performance when they see one.

Grades 10–12

Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

The Inn and Its Suitors

ACT I, OPENING

The Marquis of Forlipopoli, poor but proud, and the Count of Albafiorita, rich and new to his title, quarrel over who has the better claim on the mistress of the inn.

- The Marquis pays in protection and pride; the Count pays in gifts.
- Mirandolina knows how to flatter each without promising anything.
- Fabrizio the waiter, who has her late father's wish for a husband, watches in jealousy.

02

The Woman-Hater

ACT I

The Knight of Ripafratta arrives and scorns the men's attentions. He declares himself an enemy of women, and he is rude to Mirandolina.

- His insults are a challenge she cannot ignore.
- The other men laugh at him.
- Mirandolina quietly decides she will make him change.

03

The Campaign

ACT II

Mirandolina plays on the Knight's pride. She is gentle where he is rude, and she serves him in person. He starts to look for her.

- She seems to agree with his views of women.
- Her little services are calculated and pleasant.
- He begins to be angry at his own feelings.

04

The Trap Closes

ACT III

The Knight confesses he is in love, and Mirandolina feeds his jealousy. She plays him against the Count.

- The Knight's anger turns on himself.
- The Count and Marquis, meanwhile, lose patience.
- Mirandolina's success begins to feel dangerous.

05

Fabrizio and the Wedding

ACT III, ENDING

The Knight storms out, and Mirandolina, now a little shaken, accepts Fabrizio as her husband, to the surprise of the nobles.

- Her choice is a practical one, and she names her reasons.
- She resolves to give up flirting once she is married.
- The play ends with a word to the audience on the risks of toying with feelings.

Wit and Vanity | Class and Money | Courtship | The Inn

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 10–12

1. Notice how each suitor pays for Mirandolina's attention in a different currency.
2. Mirandolina speaks to the audience. Ask what she wants them to think of her.
3. The Knight's fall is comic, but Goldoni lets him be hurt. Decide how you feel about Mirandolina's conduct.
4. Look at the last speech. Does the play punish her, approve her, or neither?

Summaries are original to Classics Library. Read the Merle Pierson translation (1912) (The Chief European Dramatists, edited by Brander Matthews (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1916), pp. 503–530: Carlo Goldoni, The Mistress of the Inn (La Locandiera), translated by Merle Pierson (translation copyright 1912); Internet Archive scan chiefeuropeandra00matt), the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/goldoni-the-mistress-of-the-inn/.