

So blinds them that they're never hard to cheat.
Have him come down.
(*To Cleante and Mariane.*)

Please leave us, for a bit.

SCENE FOUR

ELMIRE, ORGON

ELMIRE.

Pull up this table, and get under it.

ORGON.

What?

ELMIRE.

It's essential that you be well-hidden.

ORGON.

Why there?

ELMIRE.

Oh, Heavens! Just do as you are bidden.

I have my plans; we'll soon see how they fare.

Under the table, now; and once you're there,

Take care that you are neither seen nor heard.

ORGON.

Well, I'll indulge you, since I gave my word

To see you through this infantile charade.

ELMIRE.

Once it is over, you'll be glad we played.

(*To her husband, who is now under the table.*)

I'm going to act quite strangely, now, and you

Must not be shocked at anything I do.

Whatever I may say, you must excuse

As part of that deceit I'm forced to use.

I shall employ sweet speeches in the task

Of making that impostor drop his mask;

I'll give encouragement to his bold desires,
And furnish fuel to his amorous fires.
Since it's for your sake, and for his destruction,
That I shall seem to yield to his seduction,
I'll gladly stop whenever you decide
That all your doubts are fully satisfied.
I'll count on you, as soon as you have seen
What sort of man he is, to intervene,
And not expose me to his odious lust
One moment longer than you feel you must.
Remember: you're to save me from my plight
Whenever...He's coming! Hush! Keep out of sight!

SCENE FIVE

TARTUFFE, ELMIRE, ORGON

TARTUFFE.

You wish to have a word with me, I'm told.

ELMIRE.

Yes. I've a little secret to unfold.

Before I speak, however, it would be wise

To close that door, and look about for spies.

(*Tartuffe goes to the door, closes it, and returns.*)

The very last thing that must happen now

Is a repetition of this morning's row.

I've never been so badly caught off guard.

Oh, how I feared for you! You saw how hard

I tried to make that troublesome Damis

Control his dreadful temper, and hold his peace.

In my confusion, I didn't have the sense

Simply to contradict his evidence;

But as it happened, that was for the best,

And all has worked out in our interest.
This storm has only bettered your position;
My husband doesn't have the least suspicion,
And now, in mockery of those who do,
He bids me be continually with you.
And that is why, quite fearless of reproof,
I now can be alone with my Tartuffe,
And why my heart—perhaps too quick to yield—
Feels free to let its passion be revealed.

TARTUFFE.

Madam, your words confuse me. Not long ago,
You spoke in quite a different style, you know.
ELMIRE.

Ah, Sir, if that refusal made you smart,
It's little that you know of woman's heart,
Or what that heart is trying to convey
When it resists in such a feeble way!
Always, at first, our modesty prevents
The frank avowal of tender sentiments;
However high the passion which inflames us,
Still, to confess its power somehow shames us.
Thus we reluct, at first, yet in a tone
Which tells you that our heart is overthrown,
That what our lips deny, our pulse confesses,
And that, in time, all noes will turn to yesses.
I fear my words are all too frank and free,
And a poor proof of woman's modesty;
But since I'm started, tell me, if you will—
Would I have tried to make Damis be still,
Would I have listened, calm and unoffended,
Until your lengthy offer of love was ended,
And been so very mild in my reaction,
Had your sweet words not given me satisfaction?
And when I tried to force you to undo
The marriage-plans my husband has in view,
What did my urgent pleading signify

If not that I admired you, and that I
Deplored the thought that someone else might own
Part of a heart I wished for mine alone?

TARTUFFE.

Madam, no happiness is so complete
As when, from lips we love, come words so sweet;
Their nectar floods my every sense, and drains
In honeyed rivulets through all my veins.
To please you is my joy, my only goal;
Your love is the restorer of my soul;

And yet I must beg leave, now, to confess
Some lingering doubts as to my happiness.
Might this not be a trick? Might not the catch
Be that you wish me to break off the match
With Mariane, and so have feigned to love me?
I shan't quite trust your fond opinion of me
Until the feelings you've expressed so sweetly
Are demonstrated somewhat more concretely,
And you have shown, by certain kind concessions,
That I may put my faith in your professions.

ELMIRE. (*She coughs, to warn her husband.*)

Why be in such a hurry? Must my heart
Exhaust its bounty at the very start?
To make that sweet admission cost me dear,
But you'll not be content, it would appear,
Unless my store of favors is disbursed
To the last farthing, and at the very first.

TARTUFFE.

The less we merit, the less we dare to hope,
And with our doubts, mere words can never cope.
We trust no promised bliss till we receive it;
Not till a joy is ours can we believe it.
I, who so little merit your esteem,
Can't credit this fulfillment of my dream,
And shan't believe it, Madam, until I savor
Some palpable assurance of your favor.

ELMIRE.

My, how tyrannical your love can be,
And how it flusters and perplexes me!
How furiously you take one's heart in hand,
And make your every wish a fierce command!
Come, must you hound and harry me to death?
Will you not give me time to catch my breath?
Can it be right to press me with such force,
Give me no quarter, show me no remorse,
And take advantage, by your stern insistence,
Of the fond feelings which weaken my resistance?

TARTUFFE.

Well, if you look with favor upon my love,
Why, then, begrudge me some clear proof thereof?

ELMIRE.

But how can I consent without offense
To Heaven, toward which you feel such reverence?

TARTUFFE.

If Heaven is all that holds you back, don't worry.
I can remove that hindrance in a hurry.

Nothing of that sort need obstruct our path.

ELMIRE.

Must one not be afraid of Heaven's wrath?

TARTUFFE.

Madam, forget such fears, and be my pupil,
And I shall teach you how to conquer scruple.
Some joys, it's true, are wrong in Heaven's eyes;
Yet Heaven is not averse to compromise;
There is a science, lately formulated,
Whereby one's conscience may be liberated,
And any wrongful act you care to mention
May be redeemed by purity of intention.
I'll teach you, Madam, the secrets of that science;
Meanwhile, just place on me your full reliance.
Assuage my keen desires, and feel no dread:
The sin, if any, shall be on my head.

(Elmire coughs, this time more loudly.)

You've a bad cough.

ELMIRE.

Yes, yes. It's bad indeed.

TARTUFFE. *(Producing a little paper bag.)*

A bit of licorice may be what you need.

ELMIRE.

No, I've a stubborn cold, it seems. I'm sure it
Will take much more than licorice to cure it.

TARTUFFE.

How aggravating.

ELMIRE.

Oh, more than I can say.

TARTUFFE.

If you're still troubled, think of things this way:
No one shall know our joys, save us alone,
And there's no evil till the act is known;
It's scandal, Madam, which makes it an offense,
And it's no sin to sin in confidence.

ELMIRE. *(Having coughed once more.)*

Well, clearly I must do as you require,
And yield to your importunate desire.

It is apparent, now, that nothing less
Will satisfy you, and so I acquiesce.

To go so far is much against my will;
I'm vexed that it should come to this; but still,
Since you are so determined on it, since you
Will not allow mere language to convince you,
And since you ask for concrete evidence, I
See nothing for it, now, but to comply.

If this is sinful, if I'm wrong to do it,
So much the worse for him who drove me to it.
The fault can surely not be charged to me.

TARTUFFE.

Madam, the fault is mine, if fault there be,
And...

ELMIRE.

Open the door a little, and peek out;
I wouldn't want my husband poking about.

TARTUFFE.

Why worry about the man? Each day he grows
More gullible; one can lead him by the nose.
To find us here would fill him with delight,
And if he saw the worst, he'd doubt his sight.

ELMIRE.

Nevertheless, do step out for a minute
Into the hall, and see that no one's in it.

SCENE SIX

ORGON, ELMIRE

ORGON. (*Coming out from under the table.*)
That man's a perfect monster, I must admit!
I'm simply stunned. I can't get over it.

ELMIRE.

What, coming out so soon? How premature!
Get back in hiding, and wait until you're sure.
Stay till the end, and be convinced completely;
We mustn't stop till things are proved concretely.

ORGON.

Hell never harbored anything so vicious!

ELMIRE.

Tut, don't be hasty. Try to be judicious.
Wait, and be certain that there's no mistake.
No jumping to conclusions, for Heaven's sake!
(*She places Orgon behind her, as Tartuffe re-enters.*)

SCENE SEVEN

TARTUFFE, ELMIRE, ORGON

TARTUFFE. (*Not seeing Orgon.*)

Madam, all things have worked out to perfection;
I've given the neighboring rooms a full inspection;
No one's about; and now I may at last...

ORGON. (*Intercepting him.*)

Hold on, my passionate fellow, not so fast!
I should advise a little more restraint.

Well, so you thought you'd fool me, my dear saint!

How soon you wearied of the saintly life—

Wedding my daughter, and coveting my wife!

I've long suspected you, and had a feeling

That soon I'd catch you at your double-dealing.

Just now, you've given me evidence galore;

It's quite enough; I have no wish for more.

ELMIRE. (*To Tartuffe.*)

I'm sorry to have treated you so slyly,

But circumstances forced me to be wily.

TARTUFFE.

Brother, you can't think...

ORGON.

No more talk from you;
Just leave this household, without more ado.