Act Three

Damis: May I be struck dead on the spot – call me the most miserable blackguard alive if I let either fear or favor prevent me – if I don’t’ think out some master stroke!

Tartuffe or The Imposter

Dorine: For goodness sake, don’t get so excited? Your father has only just mentioned it. People don’t do everything they intend to. There’s a deal of difference between talking about a thin and doing it.

Damis: I must put a stop to the dot’s machinations! I’ll have something to say to him!

Dorine: Oh, go easy! Leave your stepmother to deal with both him and your father. She has some influence with Tartuffe. He takes notice of her. I’m not sure that he isn’t sweet on her. I wish to Heaven he were! That would be a lark! As a matter of fact it’s on your account that she’s sent for him: she intends to sound him about this marriage you are so worried about: she means to find out what he has in mind and make him see what trouble it would cause in th family if he encouraged that idea. His servant said he was at prayers so I wasn’t able to see him, but he said he’d be coming down soon. So please go away and leave me to wait for him.

Damis: I’ll be present at the interview.

Dorine: No. They must be alone.

Damis: I won’t say a word.

Dorine: That is what you think! We all know how excitable you are and that’s just the way to spoil everything. Off you go.

Damis: No. I must see it, I won’t lose my temper.

Dorine: How tiresome you are. Here he comes. Do go.

[Enter Tartuffe]

Tartuffe: [seeing Dorine]. Laurent, put away my hair shirt and my scourge and continue to pray Heaven to send you grace. If anyone asks for me I’ll be with the prisoners distributing alms.

Dorine: The impudent hypocrite!

Tartuffe: What do you want?

Dorine: I’m to tell you…

Tartuffe: For Heaven’s sake! Before you speak, I pray you take this handerchief. [Takes handkerchief from his pocket.]

Dorine: Whatever do you mean?

Tartuffe: Cover your bosom. I can’t bear to see it. Such pernicious sights give rise to sinful thoughts.

Dorine: You’re mighty susceptible to temptation then! The flesh must make a great impression on you! I really don’t know why you should get so excited. I can’t say that I’m so easily roused. I could see you naked from head to foot and your whole carcass wouldn’t tempt me in the least.

Tartuffe: Pray, speak a little more modestly or I shall have to leave the room.

Dorine: No, no. I’m leaving you. All I have to say is that the mistress is coming down and would like a word with you.

Tartuffe: Ah! Most willingly.

Dorine: [aside] That changes his tune. Upon my word I’m convinced there is something in what I said.

Tartuffe: Will she be long?

Dorine: I think I hear her now. Yes, here she comes. I’ll leave you together.

[Exit Dorine. Enter Elmire]

Tartuffe: May the bounty of Heaven ever bestow on you health of body and of mind, and extend you blessings commensurate with the prayers of the most humble of its devotees!

Elmire: I’m very grateful for these pious wishes. Let us sit down. We shall be more comfortable.

Tartuffe: do you feel better of your indisposition?

Elmire: Very much. The feverishness soon left me.

Tartuffe: My prayers have too little merit to have obtained this favor from on high; yet all the petitions I have addressed to Heaven have been concerned with your recovery.

Elmire: You are too solicitous on my behalf.

Tartuffe: one cannot be too solicitous for your precious health. I would have sacrificed my own life for the sake of yours.

Elmire: That is carrying Christian charity rather far but I’m truly grateful for your kindness.

Tartuffe: I do far less for you than you deserve.

Elmire: I wanted to speak to you in private on a certain matter. I’m please that no one can overhear us.

Tartuffe: I too am delighted. I need hardly say how pleased I am to find myself alone with you. It’s an opportunity which I have besought Heaven to accord me – vainly until this moment.

Elmire: What I want is that you should speak frankly and conceal nothing from me.

Tartuffe. And my sole desire is that you should accord me that singular favor of allowing me to express all that is in my heart and assure you that anything I have said against those who were paying homage to your charms was not spoken in malice against you but rather that the intensity of my pious zeal and pure…

Elmire: I take it in that sense and believe that it arises from your concern for my salvation.

Tartuffe: That is indeed so, madam, and such is the fervor of my… [squeezing her fingers]

Elmire: Oh! You are hurting me!

Tartuffe: It comes from excess of devotion. I never intended to hurt you. [Putting his hand upon her knee.] I would rather…

Elmire: What is your hand doing there?

Tartuffe: I’m feeling your dress. How soft the material is!

Elmire: Please don’t. I’m dreadfully ticklish. [she pushes back her chair. Tartuffe brings his chair closer]

Tartuffe: what marvelous lace! They do wonderful work nowadays. Things are so much better made than they used to be.

Elmire: Very true, but let us return to our business. They say my husband intends to break his promise to Valere and give his daughter to you. Tell me, is it true?

Tartuffe: He did mention something about it, but to tell the truth, madam, that isn’t the happiness I aspire to. All my hopes of felicity lie in another direction.

Elmire: That’s because you have no interest in temporal things.

Tartuffe: My breast does not enclose a heart of flint!

Elmire: I’m sure your thoughts are all turned Heavenward. Your desires are not concerned with anything here below.

Tartuffe: A passion for the beauties which are eternal does not preclude a temporal love. Our senses can and do respond to those most perfect works of Heaven’s creation, whose charms are exemplified in beings such as your and embodied in rarest measure in yourself. Heaven has lavished upon you a beauty that dazzles the eyes and moves the hearts of men. I never look upon your flawless perfections without adoring in you the great Author of all nature and feeling my heart filled with ardent love for that fair form in which He has portrayed Himself. At first I feared lest this secret passion which consumes me might be some subtle snare of the accursed one. I even resolved to avoid your sight, believing you to be an obstacle to my salvation; but at length I came to realize, O fairest among women, that there need be nothing culpable in my passion and that I could reconcile it with virtue. Since then I have surrendered to it heart and soul. It is, I admit, no small presumption on my part to address to you this offer of my love, but I rely upon your generosity and in no wise upon my own unworthy self: my hopes, my happiness, my peace are in your keeping: on you my bliss or future misery depends; my future hangs on your decree; make me for every happy if such me your will, wretched if you would have it so.

Elmire: A very gallant declaration but a little surprising, I must confess! It seems to me you ought to steel yourself more firmly against temptation and consider more deeply what you are about. A pious man like you, a holy man whom everyone…

Tartuffe: Ah! But I’m not less a man for being devout! Confronted by your celestial beauty one can but let love have its way and make no demur. I realize that such a declaration coming from me may well seem str4ange but, after all, madam, I’m not an angel. If you condemn this declaration of mine you must lay the blame on your own misinterpretation.