

from
TARTUFFE
by Molière
Translated by Peter Holdway

Act I Scene i lines 1-102

- MADAME PERNELLE Come along, Flipote, come, hurry, chop chop, let's go.
- ELMIRE We'd keep up if you walked a bit slower, you know.
- MADAME PERNELLE Well, dear daughter-in-law, stop, just stay where you are:
Polite games such as keep-up are one step too far.
- ELMIRE It's no game, it's respect; please don't be so prickly;
But, mother dear, how come you're leaving so quickly?
- MADAME PERNELLE I can't watch any more what goes on around here,
And that no-one cares two hoots for me is quite clear.
Oh yes, I leave your household quite poorly instructed:
Any lesson I offer's opposed or obstructed,
No respect, no decorum, and everyone shouts;
It's bedlam, quite frankly, a right royal mad-house.
- DORINE If –
- MADAME PERNELLE You are, my dear girl, only one of the staff,
Yet you mouth off unasked, you're too cheeky by half;
You blithely plough in, give your counsel for free.
- DAMIS But –
- MADAME PERNELLE And you, in five letters: I-D-I-O-T.
And who's saying that? Me, your grandma, that's who;
Umpteen times have I told, warned, your dad, about you:
You'd turn out to become a complete ne'er-do-well,
And do nothing for him except make his life hell.
- MARIANE I think –

MADAME PERNELLE My God, his sister, Too-Good-To-Be-True,
Stop the sweetness and light act – it just isn't you.
But you know the saying: Still waters run deep;
And beneath that sweet surface you're wicked and cheap.

ELMIRE But mother –

MADAME PERNELLE Dear daughter-in-law, with respect,
Your conduct is far worse than one should expect:
You should set an example of proper decorum,
Their late mother, God bless her, was much better for 'em.
You're extravagant and it gives me such distress
To see you go around dolled up like a princess.
If you want to please only your partner in life,
You don't need such displays – you're already his wife.

CLEANTE But after all, Madam –

MADAME PERNELLE You're her brother, dear sir,
I admire you, I'm glad you're related to her;
But if I were her husband, that's my son, her spouse,
I'd request that you stop coming round to our house.
You hold forth on how we should all live, that's your mission,
Respectable people have no need to listen.
I speak frankly and straight, nature made me that way,
And I don't mince my words when I've something to say.

DAMIS Your friend Mister Tartuffe must be happy no doubt ...

MADAME PERNELLE He's a man of great worth and one must hear him out;
And I cannot stand by without turning quite blue
Watching him altercation with a madman like you.

DAMIS What? And I'll just stand by while a bigoted prat
Comes in here to take despotic power just like that,
And we can do nothing for our divertissement
Till His Nibs says yes – he's our Pleasure Policeman.

DORINE If we have to listen and follow his lesson,
We can't do a thing here for fear of transgression;
'Cos he runs the shop, this fanatical bully.

MADAME PERNELLE Pipe down: *think* before you put your mouth into gear.
It is not only him who hates visitors here.
The whirlwind that swirls in the trail of your friends,
The endless procession of cars never ends;
And with servants in tow this cacophonous crowd
Turns this into a market, for crying out loud.
I'd like to believe all goes on as it should,
But the gossips are talking and that can't be good.

CLEANTE Ha! Do you really want, madam, to stop idle chat?
What a dull life we'd live if you could do that;
If, because of a few daft comments about us,
We fired our best friends, sent them packing without us.
And even if we were so weak as to do it,
D'you think gossip would stop, that that's all there is to it?
You just can't fight the nasty things people might say,
So let's turn a deaf ear to their crap come what may;
We should all try to live free of guilt, rise above it.
Leave gossips to gossip, let's face it, they love it.

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