TARTUFFE

Andrew Hilton & Dominic Power

after Molière

Revised Edition
Introduction

Jean Baptiste Poquelin (Molière) was born in Paris in 1622, the son of one of the royal court’s valets de chambre tapissiers, responsible for the care of the King’s furniture and upholstery. He was educated at the Jesuit Collège de Clermont where the education would have included performing scenes from Latin theatre and instruction in rhetoric.

As the eldest son of the family, his father intended he should follow in his own footsteps, but at the age of 21 Jean Baptiste determined to make a life in the theatre, an enthusiasm that had been innocently encouraged by his maternal grandfather’s own passion for playgoing. It was an extraordinary decision for a middle-class young man with good prospects. Theatre was perhaps even less respectable in seventeenth century Paris than it was in Shakespeare’s London, and may not have thrived at all had it not been for the patronage of the King. The Paris church routinely excommunicated professional actors and was to prove utterly unforgiving to Molière at the end of his life.

But Jean Baptiste had fallen in love with the actress Madeleine Béjart (he later married her daughter – some say her sister – Armande). In 1643, with Madeleine and about a dozen others, he formed the ‘Illustre Théâtre’ – soon changing his name to ‘Molière’, possibly to spare his family embarrassment.

The project was financially disastrous, earning Molière some periods in prison for debt, and in 1645 he and the rump of the company left the capital to work in the provinces, where they remained for over a decade. Out of the Paris spotlight, Molière began to write. His success as a dramatist and the maturing skills of the ensemble encouraged them to try their luck once more in Paris. On October 24th 1658, a performance of Le Docteur Amoureux so impressed the King and Court that the company was granted use of one of Paris’ best theatres and the title of the ‘Troupe de Monsieur’ (‘Monsieur’ being Louis XIV’s brother, the duc d’Orléans).

In 1663 royal patronage saw Molière being granted a pension of 1,000 livres, and in the following year the King agreed to be
godfather to his first child, Louis. In 1665 the company became the ‘Troupe du Roi’, and Molière’s annual pension was raised to 6,000 livres.

On February 17th 1673, the exhausted Molière suffered a haemorrhage while playing the role of the hypochondriac Argan in *Le Malade Imaginaire*. He died later that night at his home on the Rue Richelieu. The local priests refused to take his confession and forbade his burial in holy ground. The King, however, interceded and under the cover of darkness he was buried in the Cemetery Saint Joseph. In 1817 his remains were transferred to a fine tomb in the Père Lachaise Cemetery.

**Tartuffe**, finally publicly performed and published in 1669, portrays a wealthy Parisian citizen, Orgon, being duped by a bogus religious zealot who has inveigled his way into the household as Orgon’s personal ‘directeur de conscience’. Tartuffe prays louder and longer than anyone else in the local church, wears a hair shirt, self-flagellates, requires a female servant to cover her breast with linen, and claims to give what little money he has to the poor. His real object is to acquire all Orgon’s property by alienating him from his son Damis and marrying his daughter Mariane against her will.

Molière presented the play’s first three acts before the King and six hundred guests as part of a royal festival, *Plaisirs de L’Ile Enchantée*, at Versailles on May 12th 1664 – the first recorded performance, though there may have been other private events before this, very probably including one for the King. Certainly the play’s theme was already known in court and church circles because just over a month before the festival the Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement, a secret but powerful Catholic society of churchmen, courtiers and parliamentarians, had met to discuss how they might “procure the suppression of the evil play of Tartuffe”. At this point it seems the play was entitled ‘Tartuffe, or The Hypocrite’, and the actor playing Tartuffe was costumed as a priest, or at least as a minor churchman.

Five days later, whatever his private feelings about the play, and under pressure from the Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement, the Archbishop of Paris and the Parliament, the King banned its public performance. A few weeks later, in a vicious attack, the curé of
Saint-Barthelemy – calling Molière “that demon clad in human flesh” – urged that he be burned at the stake to expiate his crime, a fate that had actually befallen a Parisian lawyer only two years earlier for writing verses found similarly abhorrent. It is unlikely that Molière was in such danger, as he continued to enjoy the protection of the King, whose published reasoning for banning the play excused the dramatist from any malevolent intent.

In his Preface to the published version Molière protested about how hard he had worked to make it clear that his Tartuffe was not a hypocritical churchman, but an out-and-out scoundrel. But the church’s sensitivity was well-grounded; there had been at least one incident – in Caen in 1660 – where members of the Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement themselves had been accused of abusing their privileged access to private households – and numerous other examples of hypocrisy by churchmen, including by Charpy de Sainte-Croix and the Abbé Roquette, who Saint-Simon referred to a century later as the “great beast on whom Molière based his Tartuffe”.

By 1667 Molière had completed the play and retitled it ‘The Imposter’ – a title that carries a rather different message from ‘The Hypocrite’. He had also changed the name of its central character to ‘Panulfe’, and now costumed him not as a cleric, but as a fashionable man in ‘a small hat, a great wig, a large collar, a sword, and lace on everything’. Believing he had met the King’s concerns, Molière opened the play on August 5th, but on the following day, in the absence of the King who was with his army in Flanders, it was banned by order of Parliament; and on the 11th the Archbishop of Paris forbade all people in his diocese from performing the play, or reading or hearing it read, in public or in private, on pain of excommunication.

Molière had to wait until 1669, when it seems the power of the church – and the Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement – had waned, before the King finally granted him the right to produce the play in the public theatre, and to publish it ‘avec privilege du Roy’. Now entitled Tartuffe ou L’Imposteur it opened at the Palais-Royal on February 5th 1669, was published on March 23rd, and contributed largely to the most profitable season for Molière’s company in his
lifetime. It has remained one of the most popular plays in the French classical repertoire.

**Tartuffe in English**

The play was first translated into English by the actor Matthew Medbourne for performance in London in 1670, only months after the public première in Paris. This was also the first English adaptation of the play to meet English social conditions. Medbourne reimagined Molière’s Roman Catholic Tartuffe as a hypocritical Puritan – an easy and no doubt popular target in the anglo-catholic world of Charles II. He also developed a character to whom Molière gave no words – and possibly not even an appearance – Tartuffe’s servant, Laurent. Medbourne’s Laurent falls in love with the maid Dorine and becomes the agency by which the family’s fortunes are saved at the dénouement; the published text declares it “render’d into English with much addition and advantage by M. Medbourne”.

The play was then plundered by the London theatre for both themes and devices, including in a 1689 play by John Crowne which – in a reversal of Medbourne’s purpose – targeted the allegedly fraudulent behaviour of the Roman Catholic priesthood and their lay sympathisers.

There were later translations, including ones by Martin Clare in 1726 and Isaac Bickerstaffe in 1769, and in 1851 a successful production at the Haymarket, featuring the actor-manager Ben Webster as Tartuffe, in a text that claimed to be the first authentic rendering into English of Molière’s 1669 version. During these decades there were also relatively frequent performances in London by visiting French companies.

Nonetheless, a translator of the play in 1898, Thomas Constable, mourned a general lack of enthusiasm for French classical theatre, writing in his Preface: “It is little to say that the masterpieces of the greatest French dramatists are not acted in England; except in schools they are hardly read.”

Change did come to some degree after the 2nd World War, when the Comédie-Française performed *Tartuffe* in London in 1945 and again in 1951; and the Bristol Old Vic then pursued this renewed
interest with a series of Molière plays in versions by Miles Malleson – including a *Tartuffe* in 1950.

Malleson’s prose translations have been followed more recently by verse translations by Richard Wilbur (first produced in the U.K by the National Theatre in 1967); by Christopher Hampton (RSC at the Barbican 1983), Ranjit Bolt (NT 2002), and Roger McGough (Liverpool Playhouse 2008); with versions in Scots dialect by Liz Lochhead (Edinburgh Lyceum 1986) and an Asian version by Tara Arts (NT 1990).

In the U.S. there was an adaptation by Simon Gray at the Kennedy Centre in 1982, and a ‘televangelist’ version by Freyda Thomas – *Tartuffe: Born Again* – at the Circle in the Square in Washington in 1996.

**Reinventing the play for 2017**

*Tartuffe* has fascinated the theatre world, in France and elsewhere, for three and a half centuries, and its portrayal of a pillar of the community being captivated – against all logic and expectation – by a brazen impostor has now acquired an extra resonance.

So, from an initial idea some years ago to attempt a new translation of Molière’s play, grew this bolder notion to reinvent the play for 2017.

Even so, we set out to follow Molière’s pattern closely, speech by speech, and to write in rhyming couplets – not in Molière’s 12 syllable-line Alexandrines, but in the 10 syllable pentameter line more familiar to the English ear. Both intentions became modified as we worked; while retaining the scene structure, we came to see no virtue in sticking to the speech template; and the end-stopped couplet became rarer and rarer, with great use of ‘enjambement’ (the sense flowing on beyond the rhyme into the next line), while internal rhyming even allowed us to break the couplet pattern altogether a number of times. In the end ear and instinct became our main referees.

Molière’s Tartuffe wears a mask of Catholic zealotry and, in this, he is a man for Molière’s time. He is also an enigma; we, and most members of the family he invades, recognise his hypocrisy, his
lechery and his greed from the start, yet we do not know where he comes from or what causes him to be as he is. In our new era of alternative facts, fake news and political uncertainty, Tartuffe would surely find new opportunities for his guile. The mask he presents to his victims may have changed, but the self-invention, the opportunism and the appetites are timeless.

Between 1664 and 2017 there have, of course, been seismic changes in attitudes and family dynamics and we have adapted accordingly, while remaining essentially true to Molière’s narrative. In one instance we have taken a greater liberty; Molière’s deity ex machina is the offstage intervention of King Louis XIV. Since an intervention by our own royal family is even less probable, we indulge in a mild act of lèse majesté by providing our own catalyst for Act 5.

Andrew Hilton & Dominic Power
This version of Molière’s *Tartuffe* was first presented by *Shakespeare at the Tobacco Factory* and *Tobacco Factory Theatres* on April 6th 2017 at the Tobacco Factory, Bristol, with the following cast:

**DAME PAMELA OGDEN**  
Tina Gray

**CHARLES OGDEN**, her son, a Tory Junior Minister  
Christopher Bianchi

**EMMA LAWRENCE**, her daughter-in-law  
Saskia Portway

**MELISSA OGDEN**, Charles’ daughter by his first wife  
Daisy May

**DANIEL OGDEN**, Melissa’s twin  
Joel Macey

**CLEM LAWRENCE**, Emma’s brother, a journalist  
Philip Buck

**DANUTA**, the Ogdens’ Polish live-in housekeeper  
Anna Elijasz

**VAL**, a trainee lawyer, engaged to Melissa  
Kenton Thomas

**TARTUFFE**, author of *Our Kid*  
Mark Meadows

**DES LOYAL**, senior *Sunday Shocker* hack  
Alan Coveney

**Director**  
Andrew Hilton

**Associate Director**  
Dominic Power

**Assistant Director (Attachment)**  
Phoebe Simmonds

**Set & Costume Designer**  
Sarah Warren

**Costume Supervisor**  
Jane Tooze

**Composer & Sound Designer**  
John Telfer

**Lighting Designer**  
Matthew Graham

**Production Photographer**  
Craig Fuller

**Legal Adviser**  
Martin Davey

**Producer**  
Morag Massey

**Production Manager**  
Nic Prior

**Construction Manager**  
Chris Samuels

**Company & Stage Manager**  
Kevin Smith

**Deputy Stage Manager**  
Samantha Mallinson

**Assistant Stage Manager**  
Megan Hastings

**Stage Management Support & Cover**  
Cassie Harrison

**Wardrobe Mistress**  
Francine Gyll
A large reception room in a three-storey house in Hampstead Garden Suburb in North West London. There are doors to the hall and to the kitchen, and French windows to the garden. For three generations the house has been the London base for a busy family with more important things on their mind than domestic style, and their home has never been blessed by a thoroughgoing makeover. Charles Ogden’s second wife, Emma, is content that she has room for her modern Yamaha piano, and the worn, green leather Chesterfield chimes happily with Charles’ three decades on the Commons benches in Westminster.

Copies of Tartuffe’s autobiography ‘Our Kid’ and the most recent edition of ‘Wisden’ are in evidence, as are a part-drunk bottle of Glen Ord whisky and some glasses.

Following Molière’s Classical Theatre practice, the action takes place in this one location and on a single day – a high summer day – in the present.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act One</th>
<th>10.00 am</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Act Two</td>
<td>11.30 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act Three</td>
<td>12.30 pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interval**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act Four</th>
<th>6.00 pm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Act Five</td>
<td>8.00 pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*A forward slash (/) indicates where the following speech should intervene*

*The text reflects U.K. politics as they stood in March 2017, with Theresa May heading a majority Conservative administration and Jeremy Corbyn leading the Labour Opposition. There are interesting possibilities of adaptation to meet changed circumstances – minority governments, coalitions or a Labour majority. But whichever pertains, junior Minister or only ‘shadow’, Charles Ogden remains (in Tartuffe’s words) ‘an old-school Tory’.***
ACT ONE  10.00 am

As the audience enters, the piano is covered with a protective cloth. When the lights build on a sunny summer morning, CLEM is working on a MacBook, a pile of newspapers beside him, and the piano cloth is lying on the floor. DANIEL & MELISSA are at the piano, improvising a duet ...

THE MORAL ASCENDANCY BLUES

DANIEL  Well, I’ve been down but now I’m up,

BOTH    Well, I’ve been down but now I’m up,

MELISSA  Well I been poor but now my cup runneth over. I’m always moral,

DANIEL  Get what I want without a quarrel, just walk and talk and preach like Jesus,

BOTH    Walk and talk and preach like Jesus,

MELISSA  And make myself rich as Croesus. They’re gonna pay up, while I suffer.

DANIEL  I’ve had it tough, they’ll have it tougher. I’m not proud but I’m aloof,

MELISSA  My reputation’s bulletproof,

BOTH    I got those moral ascendancy blues.

DANIEL  (Lord have mercy!)

BOTH    We got those moral ascendancy, co-dependency, stick like chewing gum to your shoes, blues!

DANIEL and MELISSA high-five, and CLEM applauds

CLEM  Shh!

Enter DAME PAMELA and EMMA

DANIEL buries himself in a music score and MELISSA hastily switches to something classical on the piano.
PAMELA  If you won’t get me a cab, I’ll go by bus. The 268.

EMMA  Wait, you can’t be tired of us already, Pam. And Charles is due back soon.

PAMELA  Two whole days! I’m not deaf to the tune you play here, a fugue in acute disdain, in smirks and sideways looks. Oh, look pained you may, you heard that jejune cabaret just now. Just the sort of trick they play. Stop it, children, be quiet if you can!

MELISSA  Ever so sorry.

DANIEL  We’ll be good now, Nan.

PAMELA  ‘Granny’, please. ‘Nan’ is just an affectation. They’ve both received a first class education and yet they try their best to emulate under-achievers from a sink estate.

MELISSA  We apologise.

DANIEL  Sincerely, Grandmamma.

PAMELA  If you’d struggled hard to come as far as I have come, you wouldn’t think to make a joke of it. If your Dad had had to take the dole like mine, you’d walked to school on toast and margarine, you wouldn’t laugh, or boast about a clever lyric sneering at Tartuffe.

EMMA  Please, Pam, it’s just a harmless spoof, no real malice. I really am concerned that you’re offended, please don’t spurn our friendship. Tartuffe’s a presence here, I’ll put it that way, not the easiest thing, but it’s Charles’s choice and we support him. We’ve given Tartuffe space. I’ve given in to his requests that [indicating the piano] I do no practice early in the morning, that we eat at six
instead of eight –

*Upstairs a toilet flushes*

DANUTA He go. Just like the clockwork.

PAMELA Oh, good heavens, girl, must you always lurk? Why must this household always be so lax?

DANUTA Beg your pardon. I order you a taxi. He text just now. He stuck in Cricklewood.

PAMELA Oh, I see. A taxi? Well, that’s good. I can wait, of course. There’s a train at noon, no rush. A coffee, please. Don’t forget the spoon, Danuta.

*Exit DANUTA*

While she’s gone, I must just say
I hope you all can bring yourselves to play a better part towards Tartuffe. You two to treat him with the rich regard he’s due and make him truly welcome in this house.

DANIEL That’s pretty hard. He chucks his weight about like Rasputin with the Romanovs.

PAMELA You see. Remarks like that do so make me cross! Has no-one here the grace to understand – it’s vicious, envious and deeply underhand to carp, snipe and gossip about Tartuffe. He *endured* his sordid childhood. The proof is set out here so movingly in this book. Is it any wonder that the public took it to its bosom? ‘Our Kid’. I grant you the title is a little mawkish, who’d deny it, but this book has taught us all how such a wretched start can be a call to arms. Did he give in, surrender hope? No, he fought his way to literacy, found scope to market mobile phones or some such thing – I’m not *au fait* with all the outs and ins – in the remotest mountains of Nepal, then gave every penny back, gave it all
away to build three schools, to make them free from their dependency on aid. Now here at home he’s brought that clarity of purpose to form a business charity.

CLEM  A charity for business is oxymoronic.

PAMELA  Ah, Clem, just like you to be ironic. ‘Aspiration UK’ will pass on business skills to empower the havenots, to fulfill their dreams. No futile handouts. It’s meant to unlock potential, harness latent talent.

CLEM  Hmm. We’re told about his business acumen but doesn’t it beg the question, when this supposed financial titan stays rent free, a guest, freeloding with impunity? As for ‘Aspiration UK’, I wonder sometimes if it’s not a front for underworld malfeasance. Guns and cocaine traded?

PAMELA  Stop! This house is positively degraded by a sort of inward-looking snobbery. So typical you should sneer and think it robbery.

CLEM  Only joking, Pam.

PAMELA  In the worst of taste. Time you grew up, Clem, if it’s not too late. Your trouble is you couldn’t give a fig about the marginalised. You’re a Whig, but deaf to anyone who doesn’t share your view. As for real experience, you haven’t got a clue about what life is like … up north, or anywhere that’s more than the very cheapest tube fare from Charing Cross. Parliamentary sketches? What for? And for whom? I’m sure it fetches you a comfortable income, but it’s time you listened to other voices, ones that chime with this. Oh yes, you have some common sense and you certainly keep up a good pretence of benign humour, but at heart you’re cynical.
Emotion and compassion are inimical to you. A fact I fear your two ex-wives discovered all too late.

CLEM

Oh, those knives are out as well.

DANIEL

Gran, what drives me round the bend is Tartuffe’s ubiquity. Every time a friend of ours calls round, suddenly he’s there. He’s been listening from his upstairs lair. Then when he’s fixed us with his beady eye we wilt. You hear the conversation die.

PAMELA

I expect he’s being friendly, though I’m sure he finds your friends both glib and immature.

DANIEL

More likely he’s a kind of voyeur, enjoying some secret, filthy joke.

PAMELA

That’s just absurd.

DANIEL

I sometimes have to choke back the desire to punch him in the face –

PAMELA

Daniel!

DANIEL

– just for a chance to have the place to ourselves again. Even worse for Mel.

MELISSA

It’s creepy, Gran. Soon as he hears the bell he’s down the stairs. I’m having girlfriends round, he sits there, he doesn’t make a sound, he just leans forward. Doesn’t seem to matter however private or intimate the chatter, he sticks it out. Sometimes, to make him go, we pitch the chat embarrassingly low – chlamydia, vibrators, hooky dating apps – anything to make his will collapse, but it’s no good. And if we catch his eye he’ll turn away, as if he saw some thigh exposed, or an inch too much of breast.

PAMELA

So, now you blame him for being modest.
He respects women. Isn’t that progressive?

MELISSA  I’d call his modesty passive aggressive.

PAMELA  Listen, you two, you’ve had a cosy start. Your father has indulged you, this life apart, brought up here, in Hampstead Garden Suburb, had everything you’ve asked for, no need to curb desire – “Daddy, please I want” a refrain that often made your granny wince in pain – and now you’re back again from college – or ‘Uni’, if one really must acknowledge that cant term – your father’s paid off both your loans. So don’t pretend you’ve made it on your own. What was it, Melissa? History of Art? At Exeter, of course. Is that a start in life? You seem to me to sit about and chat to friends, to preen and sigh and pout –

MELISSA  That’s not fair, Gran. You know I’m going to start my Master’s in a month.

PAMELA  Throwing yet more pointless debt your father’s way?

MELISSA  No, not true. It’s all quite clear. I’ll pay for this. I’m not some stupid airhead, Gran, some dilettante. I’m sorted. When we can, of course, I’d like time with my fiancé, Val, but he’s always in a whirl of work. My pals / make up for that –

PAMELA  A trainee lawyer, am I right? Your Val?

MELISSA  Yes, articulated to a group that expedite the change from not-for-profits into charities. As moral as Tartuffe in anybody’s eyes.

PAMELA  The equation’s not that simple. You’ll learn. And Dan – you’re too young to marry – you’d earn your living as an actor, that’s your aim? I’ve seen you once on stage, forget its name –
that piece of nonsense written by your friend from Oxford, in that pub at the World’s End. The subject matter was positively obscene. Are you too good for Ibsen, or Racine? I suppose your ideas are too advanced for plays that entertain.

CLEM Give the boy a chance. At least he works and tries to pay his way.

PAMELA I’m not against him. All I’m trying to say is given all the pain Tartuffe’s been through they should acknowledge it, give the man his due.

Text message alert from DANUTA’S phone
A little grace, that’s all. [To Emma] And as for you –

EMMA [Aside to Clem] For a moment I thought I’d got off scot-free.

CLEM Oh no, no, you’re caught.

PAMELA Of course you have your professional life as a recitalist, but the best wife for a government minister avoids a big display, has the tact to deploy discretion, keeps in the background, out of sight.

EMMA Pamela! You, who used to lead the fight for women’s rights, you tell me take the veil?

PAMELA Don’t talk rot. But as a feminist curtail your urge to put yourself on show. To spend your days shopping for the bra that will lend you uplift, or the skirt that’s far too short. You’re not a girl, you know, you’re over forty.

EMMA Oh, thank you, Pam.

PAMELA I’m never keen, of course, to make the past an issue, or to force comparisons that may be thought invidious, but their poor mama, despite her hideous taste – she was no domestic goddess –
she did embrace the power of being modest.  
A template for the young to imitate,  
not a dish decked out to tempt inebriate  
Parliamentary colleagues at a fete.

EMMA       I beg your pardon!
CLEM       Come off it, Pam, that’s just not on.
PAMELA     Oh, it’s not just me that cares.  
My friend Claire Frost – [MEL & DAN chime in with this]  
she lives across the Square –  
said to me, in strictest confidence,  
your family seems to have lost all sense  
of decorum, that people in your position  
should be discreet.

DANUTA    Frost like the Inquisition.  
I work for her, I tell you what I know:  
face like old prune, and everything for show.  
Is nicer here, where everyone are friends.
PAMELA     She fired you. You should try to make amends.  
So wrong to attack an old employer.  
Emma, she says you soon may need a lawyer  
to deal with the tabloids. You’re in “their sights.  
There’ll be stories – how you spend your nights.

EMMA       I’d rather you stopped, if it’s all the same  
to you.
PAMELA     Of course the children are to blame.  
Dan’s peculiar friends that come and go.

DANUTA     The cabbie now in Golders Green. He show  
up soon. As for Frost, she tell you lie.  
I not get fired. No, I tell you why  
I leave her house and bang my notice down:  
not bear her “put this so”, her peery frown,  
“in kitchen with your coffee, girl”, “don’t put  
your shoes in hall”, like I was dirty boy in soot  
from out your Dickens books. She is bitter,  
she is what you say a prude, and fitter
for Benedyktynki Sakramentki
House in Warsaw where old maids live and see
no young and punky people having fun.
Though not to say she living like a nun.
What she keep hidden in her knicker drawer,
if you saw you would not call her pure.

**PAMELA**
Ungrateful girl, that’s obviously a lie,
one which I don’t propose to dignify
with a rebuttal. Emma, I’ll wait
outside. One of you might be good and take
my bag. A little kindness every day.

**EMMA**
I’ll see you out.

**PAMELA**
That all you have to say?
Not a word, after all the things I’ve said?
Well, I suppose the family’s made its bed
and now you all must lie upon it.

*PAMELA and EMMA exit. MELISSA and DANIEL follow*

**CLEM**
That’s torn it. There’s going to be a struggle.
My brother-in-law will have to juggle
his misplaced loyalty to that oily fraud
upstairs and his family ties. I applaud
the way you stood up to Dame P. just now.
When in that mood she tends to cow
everyone in her immediate orbit.
We just sit back helpless and absorb it.
Febrile English reticence. Well done you!

**DANUTA**
Well done Mel and Dan and Emma too.
They not lie back flat for her attacks.
She always like that?

**CLEM**
A British battle-axe?
I suppose so, but not always in that way.
She fought the good fight in her day.
Workers’ rights, abortion law reform,
Tory feminist who went against the norm
and made a difference. So depressing
now, to see her give Tartuffe her blessing,
see her increasingly bizarre behaviour.
She really thinks the man some kind of saviour.
I need a drink. Join me in a spot of scotch, Danuta?

DANUTA  Small one. Not drunk on job. Still got big whole house to hoover. And then cook lunch.

CLEM pours the Glen Ord, a very large one for himself
What I think about Tartuffe – my hunch – he hots for anything in skirt. In trousers too, for all I know. Sight of any flesh arouse him. He like to get your sister in the sack maybe, for fun of paying Charlie back for being kind and trusty. Na zdrowie!

CLEM  Na zdrowie! To Anglo-Polish amity!
I fear you could be right, you’re most observant. I wonder if, by chance, you’ve seen The Servant – a black and white sixties classic movie? Pretty dark, not psychedelic or groovy. Dirk Bogarde’s a manservant, name of Barrett, corrupts his boss by means of stick and carrot – or carrot and stick, rather. At first he seems ideal, loyal, flattering, nothing to conceal, but pretty soon he gets to turn the screws in such a way that no one could accuse him of anything in the least suspect, but by the end the master’s life is wreck’d.

DANUTA  Ah, Sluzacy! This I know, is film by Joseph Losey. (Crossing herself) Bogarde is Satan, make himself all cosy inside house of rich young man James Fox. You kick out Bogarde, then you change the locks.

CLEM  Ideally, yes, that’s what they ought to do. But everything you say about Tartuffe’s untrue in Charles’s mind. The wretch knows how to twist the poor man round his finger. He won’t have missed how much he’s hated by the rest of us, but why should he give a tinker’s cuss?
He can wheedle and flatter, he can charm
and play the victim, he’s safe from any harm –

*Enter EMMA, DAN & MELISSA. Exit DANUTA*

**EMMA** [to CLEM] I see you ducked her final, doorstep riff.
It’s put my migraine back on track, that whiff
of cordite in the brain. Say ‘Hi’ for me
to Charles. He’s back. I’ve got to see
this wretched headache off in bed before
I face the day. Sorry to be a bore.

**MELISSA** Come on, Em, I’ll help you get some rest.
As wicked stepmums go, you’re still the best.

**CLEM** I’ll finish my scotch, say a brief ‘hello’.
[Touching her arm] Feel better, Sis.

*Exit EMMA and MELISSA*

**DANIEL** Clem, a private word – you know,
about this date for Mel and Val – their wedding?
Could you maybe stop Dad back-pedalling?
I’m pretty sure – of course I’ve got no proof –
that Dad’s being leant on by the vile Tartuffe
to put the wedding off, maybe even scratch
the whole idea, persuade her Val’s no match
for her. Not ‘entrepreneurial’ enough,
the usual creepy motivational guff
he likes to spout. I see you’re not surprised?

**CLEM** No, I’m afraid rather as I surmised.

**DAN** Could you tackle Dad, try to put
some sense back into him? I’d put my foot
in it. Tartuffe’s poisoned the well
between me and Dad. As far as I can tell
I’m rapidly becoming persona non grata.

**CLEM** I’ll try but I fear it’s a non-starter.

**DAN** Please, Clem.
It’s not just for Mel, but for both of them.
Val is ace, special man. She hardly dares
to bring him home these days. A stony stare is all he gets from you-know-who. What’s happening to us, Clem? Our life’s unravelling. We’ve let that insinuating shit Tartuffe dictate to us, his word is bulletproof where Dad’s concerned. What next? Family mantras on the need for self-reliance, or cant debates against gay sex?

*Clem* It’s complex
with your Dad, you know –

*Danuta* Charles here. In hall.

*DAN* I’ll leave you to it. Please – he must play ball.

Exit *DANIEL*
Enter *CHARLES*

*Clem* Morning, Charles.

*Charles* Hello, Clem. Here for lunch again?

*Clem* Yes, if that’s OK? Like to check on Em, see how she’s doing, you know. Good trip?

*Charles* Don’t go, Danuta . . . *To Clem* With you in a tic. – Danuta, how is everything? The family well? – *Back to Clem* The conference was another empty shell, but how things are back here is my concern. I’m more than ever now compelled to turn my mind to hearth and home *

*Danuta* Your wife, she had headache Thursday, Friday, yes, oh so bad and through last night. I think it still –

*Charles* Tartuffe?

*Danuta* Tartuffe? All Thursday sunbathe on the roof, spend hours in the shower, eat and sleep – he’s well.

*Charles* Poor chap!
DANUTA  Friday worst. No peep from her all day. She sick and eat no food at all.

CHARLES  Tartuffe?

DANUTA  His appetite as rude as starving lion that corner antelope. He started with the paté, then he cope alone with double dover sole – his own and Mrs. Ogden’s too – then he moan no enough profiterole. His hunger never stop.

CHARLES  Poor chap!

DANUTA  I give her pill but only flop on sofa, stare at ceiling in the dark.

CHARLES  And Tartuffe?

DANUTA  At ten past twelve he park his body like a shiny limousine in bed and never wake until I clean the floor real loud outside his room.

CHARLES  Poor chap.

DANUTA  At last at four or five she gets to nap – the pill it work at last – but still her head is sore, she –

CHARLES  Tartuffe, he’s still in bed?

DANUTA  No. Like Phoenix he rise at bang of ten, bathe in pools of light and eat for men of army starving in the trench.

CHARLES  Poor chap!

DANUTA  So now they both are on the mend I’ll tap my blind man’s stick [the mop] up to her room and say you give your wife a loving kiss another day. 

She exits

CLEM  Charles, she’s laughing in your face, can’t you see?
ACT 1

And if I didn’t think I’d rather weep
I’d do the same. You’re like a teenage girl
trying to touch the feet of some world-
famous cokehead playing the O2.
What is it, Charles? What has got into you?
Emma’s waiting for the outcome of a scan –
her constant headaches. You do understand
the seriousness –?

CHARLES Don’t fret at that. Tartuffe
insists it’ll lend his diagnosis proof:
the cause is merely psychosomatic.

CLEM Oh yes, and when did he take the Hippocratic
Oath?

CHARLES There’s evidence these so called ‘experts’
do little good, it’s the bank account that hurts.
Imagine what that private doctor’s fee
could have done in an underfunded charity!
Learn from him, Clem, from Tartuffe. The power
of positive thinking, not more hours
spent with quacks at some outrageous price.

CLEM [Aside] Thank God she didn’t take Tartuffe’s advice. –
Though I hope I’m never quick to condemn
a man –

CHARLES What have you got against him, Clem?

CLEM I’ll tell you what – this ghastly, ghastly book.
The wretched thing is everywhere you look
these days. The ‘misery memoir’ par
excellence. Raised in a broken-down car –

CHARLES A caravan, a stationary caravan.

CLEM OK. A caravan. In North Wales? Llan –
something, was it? They all begin with Llan,
don’t they?

CHARLES Prestatyn. A caravan below
the sea wall in Prestatyn. You know
the North Wales coast of course?

CLEM

OK, point taken, I don’t. But is the place of special import? Just the clichéd slum, rank with damp. And, of course a harlot Mum and violent Dad. I’d give it credence, some at least, if I’d picked up any sense he’d ever lived a moment north or west of Hatton Cross. You might do well to test him on Welsh resorts, what he really knows.

CHARLES

Stop it! I will not tolerate these low jibes about a man who’s endured so much and had the courage to reach out and touch the world, to make them understand –

CLEM

For God’s sake, Charles, misfortune is his brand, his USP. His struggle out from under his parents’ grip – where are they now, I wonder? I’d love to hear their version of the story.

CHARLES

Clem –!

CLEM

Can’t you see, it’s all a calculation designed to tug the heartstrings of the nation, perfectly calibrated on every mawkish page to satisfy a superficial age with titillating, hardcore misery porn, while he sits back and lets the punters fawn. By the way, this is a decent drop of scotch.

CHARLES


CLEM

In that case I’ll polish this last drop off. Since when did you begin to cough up such vast amounts of cash on booze?

CHARLES

May I not spend my money how I choose? The fact is, Tartuffe is so ascetic he rarely drinks, it acts as an emetic. Yet this is one tipple he can tolerate.
CLEM  I’d no idea he was so delicate. Where is he now?
CHARLES On Saturdays he keeps to his room sometimes, his working weeks are so demanding. And perhaps – don’t smile – he finds the climate here growing hostile?
CLEM  No wonder. I gather he’s not paying rent in spite of all his royalties?
CHARLES Every cent he earns that way contributes to the cause.
CLEM  Oh, of course, the cause, how could I forget?
CHARLES Clem, do you have to see goodness as a threat? Is there no-one you see worthy of respect, whose motives you haven’t found suspect, that, living or dead, you actually admire?
CLEM  Well, if you held my feet to the fire – Attlee, Orwell, maybe Otis Redding … No, definitely Otis.
CHARLES Don’t think I don’t notice how you accuse Tartuffe of feather bedding while you are happy to make free with my involuntary hospitality. If Tartuffe is culpable, so are you.
CLEM  I suppose that may be partly true. But have you checked him out, Charles? A fortune selling mobiles in the mountains of Nepal? Does that make sense? And those schools he paid for? You’ve phoned a Sherpa, have you, made a call or two to wish them well and ask them to corroborate that noble task?
CHARLES That’s ridiculous, and it’s insulting.
CLEM  Maybe so. But this ‘cause’ you’re funding here – ‘AspirationUK.com’? An outfit he says he’s converting to a charity.
You’ve proof of that? You’ve lawyers on the case?

CHARLES Clem, these things take time. Must you debase every honest man’s attempt to change the world? Your lip – there – so perpetually curled. Take someone principled, idealistic, they’re ‘dishonest’, at best ‘unrealistic’. Your parliamentary sketches, in their way they’re witty, but you actually say what? That peer’s a crook, that MP a creep, and the Speaker smirks like Uriah Heep?

CLEM I’m holding them to account. It’s the job of the parliamentary sketch to dob in any member behaving like an arse.

CHARLES Even me, I know.

CLEM No-one deserves a pass, friend or foe, in power. I claim carte blanche to excoriate you when I get the chance / and that –

CHARLES Not everything, everyone is rotten to the core. And have you forgotten – Tartuffe’s outside the Westminster bubble. He’s experienced the kind of trouble real people face. You think this book is ghastly? Well let me tell you that you vastly underestimate its power to motivate, to speak to that great but voiceless estate of folk who know they’ve been taken for a ride. I was astonished, I almost cried at what he’d written here. He’d laid bare the manifest failure of the welfare state. I wanted it in print, he demurred. Eventually, he let me put a word in in the right place. I must confess, the fact that ‘Our Kid’ ’s a roaring success has given me the greatest satisfaction. And what is more, it’s stung me into action.
The new way we’ve designed is being assessed. Such ambition! Even the PM’s impressed.

CLEM Why does ‘new way’ somehow make me shiver?

CHARLES Perhaps because your type would never give another voice a shout?

CLEM Well, maybe not. Oh, Charles, let’s not both of us get hot about all this. There’s – well, Mel’s engagement to Val. What sort of arrangement have you made?

CHARLES Need you really interfere?

CLEM I’m doing it for Mel, she wants you there. There’s been a strain between you two of late, but that’s no reason why she has to wait to be happy. There’s no need to frown, it needn’t turn your schedules upside down, just name a date that suits. Mel will do the rest. She’ll be happy if you’re just there to bless her union.

CHARLES I may have plans that I’ll commune to her in time.

CLEM Well, they’re going to do it soon, and she’d like her family to attend. Focus for a moment and tell them when.

CHARLES You accept, I hope, this isn’t your affair? Comprehend, perhaps, my children’s welfare is above the pay scale of a brother-in-law? ‘Wait to be happy’? What a ridiculous thought. Mel and Dan have never had to suffer. My wealth has always been there as a buffer. While poor Tartuffe, despite his wretched start –

CLEM Oh God, please, Charles!

CHARLES – has shown he has the heart, the character and strength to rise above
violence, cruelty and the absence of love
to seize success, become a moral force.
I know that amuses you. Of course
people like you, sophisticated, clever,
despise Tartuffe. You see his endeavour
as a trick. There’s nothing more to say.
We’ve just come to see things in a different way.
I’ve admired you, no, seen you as a friend,
but this difference could truly spell the end
of our friendship, for what it’s worth.

*From above comes a low droning vocal sound*

**CLEM**
This is too much! What now? What on earth – ?

**CHARLES**
You wouldn’t understand. A spiritual exercise.
He does it for an hour to help him rise,
to focus on the task in hand, banish fears.
It’s self-reliant, unlike the selfish prayers
you offer up in church. It’s admirable, I think.

**CHARLES exits**

**CLEM**
This place is mad. I need another drink.

*As CLEM helps himself generously from the bottle, the droning continues
Fortunately, it is soon topped by the sound of Dan & Mel singing at the piano.*
CHARLES       Melissa, my dear, we … we need a chat.
MELISSA        Of course, Dad. Is something the matter?
CHARLES        I wouldn’t like us to be overheard.
MELISSA        Ooh, that sounds serious. Mum’s the word! It’s not Emma, is it? She’s not really ill?
CHARLES        Emma? No, all in the mind. Er … you will be wondering about your wedding. A date.
MELISSA        Oh, thanks, Dad! You know how much I hate to bother you, you’ve so much on.
CHARLES        That’s not –
MELISSA        What?
CHARLES        Our family, Mel, It’s always been a unit, so … so well in tune. Fought its battles all together. Such a strength that is, you know, to weather every storm –
MELISSA        What is it, Dad? You’re nervous, that’s not you. What’s wrong? You always taught us to be bold.
CHARLES        Mel, there’s things that I’ve been told … I know you think you love your Val, and he’s well and good in some respects. I’m pleased to have got to know him; other cultures popping in here, keeps the tabloid vultures in their cage where race and our own record is concerned.
MELISSA        Dad?
CHARLES        Virile, too, no doubt? Affords you all a healthy, modern girl requires?
MELISSA    What? You can’t say that! What on earth inspires all this? That’s racist, Dad!

CHARLES  Yes, I take that back, slipped out from God knows where.

MEL [Aside] I know where.

CHARLES  The truth, the fact is I want you not to marry Val.

MELISSA What?

CHARLES  He’s not for you, Mel. OK for a pal – and, as I say, he’s always welcome here – but, sources tell me, since he came down last year he’s ‘played the field’, if that’s the phrase you use. While you were revising hard, eschewing all temptations, thinking of career, oh he was having fun. Oh yes, it’s not gone unnoticed here. Tartuffe could fill you in.

MELISSA I’m sure he could. No doubt list me every sin furnished by his warped imagination. How dare he interfere? Indignation’s not the word, Dad –

CHARLES  Mel –

MELISSA And who I choose to spend my life with? What’s next? Refuse your blessing, like some antiquated, red-faced Presbyterian who’d rather see me dead than married to a Catholic? Isn’t it for me –?

CHARLES  Tartuffe. Tell me what you think, what you see?

MELISSA What?

CHARLES  Tartuffe. He’s been with us now all year. You’ve had time to size him up, get a clear impression of the man he is.

MELISSA  Well, I know how much he means to you. Honestly though –
CHARLES: He’s changed my whole perspective, Mel, he’s … rebooted me. I sometimes can’t conceive the man I was. Career MP, flying high for sure, but yet no thought of asking why, or what it is that we believe. Only self-esteem, ambition for the ermined shelf to snooze on when we’re old. Now we’ve purpose with a heart and soul. Evangelists would call us ‘born again’. That’s how I feel, though deities don’t figure in the mix. We are the laity’s renewal force, and we must bond as one, Melissa. Crusaders, if you like, bang the drum for a life of self-reliance, hope and moral truth.

DANUTA enters unnoticed, again with mop and bucket
That’s why you should think about Tartuffe.

MELISSA: Think about him how?
CHARLES: Marry him my dear.
MELISSA: What?
CHARLES: Well?
MELISSA: I’m sorry, Dad, but did I hear … ?
CHARLES: What?
MELISSA: Did I … ? Who d’you think I should marry?
CHARLES: Tartuffe.
MELISSA: Tartuffe!
CHARLES: Tartuffe. Into our family. Just imagine it – a permanent place with us in this house. Together, in a space consecrated to our great mission. Oh I know he may seem far above you – no, no! He has noticed you, admired you, Mel, let me assure – What the …? Where the hell did you spring from? This is a private chat.
DANUTA I hear the strange thing in this house but – tak! – this, how you say, take the cracker.

MELISSA Danuta –

CHARLES It’s strange, is it, to your ragbag of a mind that I should wish my only daughter find a soul-mate with whom to share her life?

DANUTA So strange I not believe you say it. Wife to man who run us all around the house, who eat your food and drink your wine and shout for more till cupboard bare? It must be joke or you have senior minute, or you smoke something that make your head go –

CHARLES Will you be quiet! Ignore her, Mel. I tell you who –

DANUTA Or you be drunk. I’m not believing it. This is midsummer crazy. He must have fit. Mind gone mad like rushing train off rail gone bendy in bad kind of sun. I fail believe a word.

CHARLES What you believe is neither here nor there. Please go.

DANUTA I have to mop.

CHARLES Either mop another room or take some breakfast to Tartuffe. You know how he is steadfast in his need to eat on time and well. We mustn’t see him lose his strength or sell him short, the man’s so precious to us all. So go on, jump to it, leave us. Leave us! Go!

Danuta affects to exit

Melissa, look at this with different eyes. Tartuffe renews our purpose, defies the flabby-souled passivity we’ve inhaled. From that damp and sordid caravan in Wales
he’s brought us faith, new thinking –

DANUTA It must be drinking. He talk
like teenage dream or senile man that walk
in cloud with fairy friend and not see shit
collecting on his shoe.

CHARLES What? What is it
you cannot understand? Find a tray and take
some food upstairs. Break some eggs and make
an omelette, brew some coffee, squeeze an orange,
just leave us here to talk in peace!

DANUTA I arrange
all that two hours ago. He eat like horse,
throw me back the tray (he spill the sauce),
then tell me come downstairs and mop the floor
like he was boss man here.

CHARLES Well, you can be sure
he only wanted to be certain you
were using time I pay for – generously – to
the best advantage. Now please mop or sweep
another room.

DANUTA I done them all. I keep
my earphones in, not hear your funny chat.
Ignore Danuta. Pretend I only cat
asleep on sofa while you persuade your Mel
to marry with the creepy guest from hell.

She plugs her earphones in

CHARLES How dare you – ! Mel, it’s very hard to … She
really gets my goat, that girl, she’s
like a limpet, no a limpet mine, clinging
to this fantastic ship we’re sailing
into new and undiscovered waters.

MELISSA Dad –

CHARLES Ignore her, Mel, let’s both ignore her.
Oh, for God’s sake!

DANUTA [Loud over song in her ears] A lovely, soppy song!
Young pair make love and run away, along
from home a hundred mile. I shut up now.

CHARLES I – ! Can she hear us, Mel? It’s this, it’s how
we live, we reconceive and reconstruct
our mode of life. Tartuffe, you know, has plucked
us out of nowhere. Yes, I know I’m known –
perhaps a rising star, waiting for a phone-
call from the PM – don’t put that about,
may come to nothing – but there’s no doubt,
I’ve been chosen!

MELISSA By the PM?

CHARLES By Tartuffe!
His commitment here, his love. The proof
is in the sacrifice he’s made to live
with us and share what he can give
the nation, Mel. Tartuffe will be the lead, tease
us from our slack dependencies, release
our full potential, make us citizens
of a world in which –

DANUTA You live in caravan
or in cardboard box below the bridge
while man on second floor he raid your fridge
and laugh all way to bank. He fraud that man!

CHARLES I am exercising patience here, Danuta,
but I will not very long. Tartuffe is
humble and sincere, a victim of misfortune
that might have made him what you say / but –

DANUTA You blind? You mad? I take him food, I lay
his clothes out nice on bed, I pick his rubbish
off the floor (he pinch my bum like I his dish,
you say, or whore?). Never he say thanks for it
or make –

CHARLES I warn you, I will not permit –
DANUTA No, you listen me. You think Tarfuffe is what you call ‘a gentleman’? Is proof he always take his shower when I clean and let his towel slip, make sure I seen his private part he wave about I think for me to blush while he make smile and wink me like he have the biggest prick in town? You good man, Charles, Tartuffe he bring you down, he, how you say, take you for a riding, live here, spend your money, you providing everything he need like he a starving beggar from Mumbai! He make my blood boil and you want your daughter Mel to spoil her life –

CHARLES Oh, can’t you rant! A Polish peasant with a Mickey Mouse degree in patent ways to read the stars!

DANUTA In *astrophysics* my degree, from Cracow / University.

CHARLES How dare you stick your oar in all the time! You’re paid to cook and clean, not grace us with your thoughts or vent your spleen. And for your *work* – I’ll tell you now – we hate the stink of bleach that greets us at the gate and tracks us round the house like broken wind. And for your cooking, an undisciplined infant could construct a better menu to sustain hard-working people through a busy week. Fish on *every* Friday – God, the Pope himself, I’m sure, has missed the odd one in his life! And if I hear you mangle English grammar one more time I might just strangle you at dawn! Get out, get out, get out!

MELISSA Dad –!

CHARLES You be quiet, too! This woman makes me mad! If it wouldn’t be tabloid food and drink I’d sack
her on the spot and see her hurried back to Poland!

MELISSA I can’t believe I’m hearing this!

CHARLES Then listen harder. Perhaps you’ll get the gist. Wed your Val, if you must. On any date you choose. I won’t be there, nor Emma, nor anyone who’s respect for me or for this house. Think on Tartuffe, Melissa, or pack your bags, begone.

He exits

DANUTA I think I time my entrance very bad.

MELISSA Danuta, did my Dad say all that? Am I awake? Bad enough to chuck me out, but all that crazy stuff he said to you. I’m sorry, I’m ashamed.


MELISSA Shit, can’t you ever get it right – the floor?

DANUTA Sorry, what?

MELISSA Ground floor, first floor! Tartuffe’s apartment’s on the first. The bloody roof’s where he belongs. No, tethered in the cellar, the troglodyte from hell who’s never ever going to leave us. Oh God, I’m sorry, sorry ...

DANUTA Okay, Mel. This bad time for all you people in this house, like it been – [offering cloth] here, only dust a bit with it, it clean – like it not your own, like foreign army try to turn it into barracks. But no need you cry.

MELISSA Easy to say that. But what am I to do?

DANUTA Your life your own. Not marry to please fool you call your Dad. Tell him he should marry with Tartuffe, pick him up and carry him through door like love’s young dream. You marry Val.
My parents poor. They want me marry well, not go to university, not think ‘career’. And maybe they were right. I end up here and with degree – my PhD – in astrophysic cook and clean and sometime make you sick with stink of bleach. You love him well, I guess.

MELISSA  My Dad? Of course.
DANUTA  I mean your Val.
MELISSA  Oh. Oh yes, I love him very much.
DANUTA  And he loves you?
MELISSA  He does. No doubt at all for nearly two years on either side. Not fashionable I know to be quite so keen on stable twosome at young age. God, I start talk like Polish girl who get by well in English, ’spite she never learn her past from present tense.

DANUTA  My tenses never stop me seeing sense. So you in love with Val. What problem is there?
MELISSA  I think I’m in a state of shock. I never thought I’d hear my father talk like that, or think like that, or be like that. I rather think I’d like to kill myself.
DANUTA  Oh, good! You solve it well. This little elf, this tiny, peasant brain not think of that. Just die, and Val and Tartuffe fight like cat together on your grave. Like Hamlet and the other one – forget his name – the man who poison sword at end of play. Good Polish film in that, big hole in ground, soulish wind –
MELISSA  Oh, do shut up! Or tell me what to do!
DANUTA  [Shrugging] You marry Val.
MELISSA About my Dad! Don’t tell me you can’t see I have a problem here? My Dad’s besotted with these daft ideas, these mad, completely insubstantial dreams that fraud Tartuffe has – God, I’d like a poisoned sword to stick up his fat arse! My Dad’s a minister of state! It’s weird, Danuta, it’s sinister the way Tartuffe is making him a fool.

DANUTA Your Dad is good man, Mel, I know you’ll see him, how you say, himself again in week or two. Don’t fret the things he say to me. He kind to me when I arrive from frosty woman cross the square, he pleased with how I speak and cook. I like him, only he not laugh at life no more, and only see Tartuffe. Soon he shut the door on him and like your Val again.

MELISSA You’re sure of that?

DANUTA I stake my PhD. Eat up my hat. Go, make yourself look nice, call up Val, have lunch somewhere, tell him he have rival in Tartuffe.

VAL [Off] Melissa!

DANUTA He here. Go give him kiss. He clever boy, he laugh like sink at this.

Exit DANUTA. Enter VAL

MELISSA Val, thank God, thank God you’re here!

VAL Really? That’s strange. I’m surplus, so I hear, to your requirements. Learnt it from the cat, I think, or was it a post-it note on that fat Buddha in the hall? The means is immaterial –

MELISSA Val, what’s this?

VAL – It’s like some trashy serial, the cheapest kind of soap, credits rolling
even now, but there’s no breathless waiting for the sequel if you’re me. Bloody hell, how could you be so devious, Mel?

**MELISSA** Val?

**VAL** I thought you were the real McCoy, heart, integrity, on top of looks. A joy-filled inventory of all that’s good. It’s certain is it, this?

**MELISSA** Val, I – I can see you’re hurt but tell me, what – ?

**VAL** Oh, don’t go all artless now. Your marriage to Tartuffe, you cow!

**MELISSA** Marriage – ! Well, since you mention it, though I won’t pretend I like your tone –

**VAL** My tone? You don’t –

**MELISSA** My father has conveyed the feelings of his friend that he, Tartuffe, was reticent to send to me himself –

**VAL** Reticent – Tartuffe? He wouldn’t shrink from telling Jesus when to pee! More front than José Mourinho. But fine, go on, count up his value against mine. His book, that’s making millions, his fame, his entrée to the smartest set, his game of *spot the sitting duck*. I’m a swimmer, not a bad one, but so what? I’ve a glimmer that my rented, one bed flat in Kilburn Park’s not good enough for the daughter of the patriarch of new-world shit. You’re set on this?

**MELissa** Not quite. What would you advise?

**VAL** What, me?

**MELISSA** Yes. What would you suggest?

**VAL** Why ask me?
MELISSA Because you’re here, I guess. And seem to have a lot to say. So on, help me to decide, there’s no forgone conclusion here. Give me the best of your brilliant legal mind. Should I tie the knot?

VAL Then yes, indeed. Go marry him, why not?

MELISSA You mean that?

VAL I do! Tartuffe? Phew, a catch! Grab him before some better options hatch in his sordid, grasping mind, he thinks again.

MELISSA OK, I will.

VAL Good!

MELISSA Good!

VAL That’s sorted then. I’ll have that ring if that’s OK. Worth a few more games from ebay. The dearth of other things to do, you know, to while away the evenings on your own. Don’t smile, you snake! You underhand, you sly and grasping shit, you never loved me, I should have known it couldn’t be for real. How could it be?

MELISSA Well, think that if you like! Go on, feel free to say some more. This bile’s been boiling, I’m in awe! I don’t remember ‘snake’ taking part in foreplay – not that you’d much time for that, too keen to make me squeak ‘Ooh Val!’ – or ‘sly’, or ‘shit’, or ‘underhand’. Are there any other insults you would like to air to show how much you really hated me, held me in contempt while you parked your perky little vehicle up my street?

VAL Don’t turn this all on me! You’re the one who’s worming out of this, who’s showing me the door.
MELISSA I’m not! I’m … Oh, this is stupid, Val. I’m sure I’ve no idea how … Please, Val, please we can’t …

VAL Go on like this? No, Mel, we bloody can’t. I’ve never been so humiliated. Are you so thick-skinned you fail to – no, you’ll never know it, will you, the Ogden silver spoon! – to see what this is like, what it feels like for me?

MELISSA I was trying to say, Val, trying to say …

VAL Not trying hard enough. Trust a blasé child of Ogden, fat cat, snob and just-born again disciple of Tartuffe’s tawdry sideshow –

MELISSA Right, that’s it. Get out! I never want to see you here again! Not ever, Val!

VAL You mean that?

MELISSA Yes!

VAL Really?

MELISSA Yes. Yes. I – Oh, go, go, please go, now Val, please, goodbye!

MEL collapses on the sofa, head in hands

VAL stares at her for a second and then leaves

The sound of Dan & Mel singing again as the lights go down.
ACT THREE 12.30

Charles’ annotated copy of ‘Our Kid’ sits on the piano or a table. Sound of hoovering off. Enter TARTUFFE from the garden, carrying two bottles of water. After a few moments, a puffing CHARLES enters in lycra jogging kit. TARTUFFE gives him a water bottle, but before he can enjoy it …

TARTUFFE Wait Charles, complete the celebration of our purpose. Let’s make the salutation in saying our mantra. Inner strength and calm.

TARTUFFE stands straight, raises his hands in prayer. CHARLES follows his example

(Chanting) Vahaan ek har minat ka janm.

CHARLES (Chanting) Vahaan ek har minat ka janm.

TARTUFFE stretches out his arms and waggles his fingers

TARTUFFE Now let your energy forth into the strata

(Chanting) Chutiya, chutiya.

CHARLES (Chanting) Chutiya, chutiya.

They bow to each other. CHARLES at last gets a drink

Thank you, my friend. I feel so full of vigour.

TARTUFFE Of course. You’re match fit for the bigger challenge now. I see a natural leader, swimming above the average bottom feeder or political plankton. You’re the pilot whale, the master of the ocean, showing us the way.

CHARLES Well, yes, I feel … it could be as you say.

That martial art you were teaching me, I wonder –

TARTUFFE I’m glad you asked. ‘Hap Chi’.

I learnt it in those mountains in Nepal, from a Hap Chi master. Some precious crumbs of wisdom from his table.

CHARLES I’m all-thumbs.

TARTUFFE Forget your hands and learn to use your feet.
The well-judged kick that aims to meet your foe’s *upastha*, seat of reproduction, will achieve the complete destruction of the essence of the wildest opponent.

CHARLES That seems, you know, somehow rather violent.

TARTUFFE What? Oh no. It’s a form of respect. You understand, and thereby deflect the negative impulse of your foe. To make him helpless is to truly know him. In business, more than self-defence, it’s communication, focused, pure, intense. But the main thing, Charles, you must remember, whales and bottom-feeders, we two number among the whales. That’s the *aspirational* way, that’s the selfish and the selfless, *moral* way to go. Whales –

CHARLES – and bottom-feeders.

Yes, that’s so profound. Though I may just need a clearer steer on it, a preciser line perhaps … ?

TARTUFFE No, no, you’re there. I know you’re fine. Charles, don’t let the plankton undermine your inner strength. Alone on a mountain in Nepal – I’d made a fortune, and given it all away, I had nothing – but in that golden hour I knew for certain: we are our own higher power.

CHARLES Gosh, I remember *[picking up ‘Our Kid’]* – page 94 was it? Maybe 93. Your epiphany …

TARTUFFE Giving everything away sets us free.

CHARLES I understand – I think. So much I have to learn.

TARTUFFE Charles, it’s me that learns from you. I discern an inner drive in you, a will of ice.

CHARLES Oh, well …
TARTUFFE: But did you follow my advice 
in abstaining from all intimacy – 
the indulgence of sambhoga with your wife?

CHARLES: As a matter of fact these days my life 
is so hectic, there’s little opportunity, 
but it’s hard –

TARTUFFE: You haven’t learned immunity 
from the pull of sex? The castrati 
in their condition produced the purest art.

CHARLES: Good God, Tartuffe, you’re not suggesting –

TARTUFFE: No, no, I just don’t want you investing 
vital energy in physical desire.

CHARLES: I love her, you see. I can’t put out the fire 
just like that.

TARTUFFE: I’m not an autocrat 
and not a saint, yet I’ve been celibate 
for five long years. But I won’t dictate 
what you should or shouldn’t do. 
You must only do what seems right to you.

CHARLES: Yes, that’s right, yes, I do understand. 
I’ll make more effort, use more self-command. 
God, that conference in Scotland was maddening, 
I see things so clearly now, so saddening 
to hear the same, unexamined shibboleths 
banded back and forth, no will to test 
assumptions or to think anew. Thank God 
for ‘Our Kid’. I read it in every odd 
moment I could find – the fourth time now – 
in breaks, then on the sleeper coming down 
from Perth. In every read it shows me more, 
so rich, so subtle, and at the same time raw. 
This time, just coming through Carlisle, 
I turned again to that bruising though beguiling 
afternoon in Widnes, that Damascene 
moment when you saw that hapless teen-
age child so savagely assaulted
by its Mum. Distressed but then exalted
– it’s here – page sixty-one, I made
a note …

TARTUFFE
That’s kind.

CHARLES
Yes, you were quite remade
by that event. At only fifteen years of age
you saw your way! I admit I shed a tear.
It affected me so much I almost couldn’t bear
to carry on. I nearly shut the book,
sat there, an idiot, while my shoulders shook.

TARTUFFE
Charles, listen, you must never be afraid
to cry in public. If your grief’s displayed
it’s just more honest. Everyone can see
and share the moment. That’s what set me free.

CHARLES
That’s very wise.

TARTUFFE
My journey’s been incredible, it’s true,
though there were things that I was made to do
I don’t think I could even now make known.
A part of me forever just my own,
a private well filled up with guilt and fear.

CHARLES
Not help to share the burden – let me hear … ?

TARTUFFE
You may be right. [Pause] So many painful times,
humiliations, and petty crimes.
I wonder if you could understand the shame.
Once when my mam was out there on the game
I caught my Dad dolled up in one of her frocks.

CHARLES
My God!

TARTUFFE
He knocked me down and dragged me to the docks.

CHARLES
You walked like that, him en déshabillé?

TARTUFFE
You what?

CHARLES
I mean with him got up that way.
TARTUFFE Oh no. He stole a car. He made me steal it.
The shame of that. Even now I feel it.

CHARLES Dreadful. How on earth did you survive?

TARTUFFE At last we found some filthy back street dive.
I had to watch him lispe and mince and croon –
drunk, maudlin, madly out of tune –
yelled “‘Ere, our kid, pass around the hat
for contributions!” It never came to that.
I remember the song – (Crooning) “How are things in
Glocca Morra”.

CHARLES From Brigadoon?

TARTUFFE Mmm.
The men were brutes but felt some moral horror.
They beat him up and threw him on the street.

CHARLES My poor friend, how could they cheat
you of your childhood so?

TARTUFFE I don’t know.
[Choking] Imagine, my sole role model
lying in a stupor in a puddle.
Charles, you’re like the father I never had.

CHARLES Oh, dear boy.

TARTUFFE [Crying out] Dad!

CHARLES Whatever life threw at you, you were equal
to it.

TARTUFFE I suppose it could go in a sequel,
that story. Alone it’s worth a chapter.

CHARLES I’ve had a thought, with the right adapter
‘Our Kid’ would translate brilliantly to the screen.
Remember that remarkably haunting scene –
your mam in bed with her latest so called beau?
You describe – quite beautifully – how a glow
suffused the caravan, caused by the static
from the nylon sheets. It’s really cinematic.

TARTUFFE Only if the director really understood my journey. Perhaps Jude Law could play me as an adult – if the rights were sold?

CHARLES Brilliant casting!

TARTUFFE Maybe. Not too old?

CHARLES Oh for heaven’s sake – Danuta!

DANUTA [Off] I come!

CHARLES That noise! Surely it should be done by now!

*The hoovering stops. Enter DANUTA. Open shirt, knotted below her bra, low-cut jeans*

Tartuffe and I are trying to talk. Could you kindly move your hoovering elsewhere?

DANUTA OK. I empty bins instead.

*She bends down to reach one*

CHARLES And – oh I say – this really must be said – I’m sure, Tartuffe here would agree – your dress?

TARTUFFE Oh, yes.

CHARLES A little more discretion, just a little less *on show?* The dignity of womanhood is a thing we must restore, we should perhaps rewind the spool to a more austere age, agree?

DANUTA Perhaps you like me here to cover badly with a towel instead?

CHARLES I’m at a loss to grasp your point. Not *shed* your clothes, but cover up, be more discreet.

TARTUFFE In language too, Danuta. Don’t compete for a distinguished man’s attention by simply showing off.
CHARLES Perhaps you could apply yourself to lunch? I think I heard Val leave which makes the party – um – six, I believe. Just a salad and some cold meats, no wine. My children drink far too much, combine beer and wine with God knows what. Danuta, please?

DANUTA OK, I go. Your distinguished guest, he’s happy with salad lunch, no booze? I see no lick his lips.

CHARLES That’s quite enough, Danuta. Go.  

Danuta exits

That girl’s a trial to us all. Got no shred of sense of when to speak, when to hold her tongue.

The hoover starts up again – a quick blast

Danut – ! Why, only an hour ago she butted in when I was – actually, that’s a thing we must discuss, because the fat’s in the fire where Melissa is concerned. My approach on your behalf was spurned with some – well, vigour, you might say – and there’s no doubt your work’s cut out if you’re to fare much better on your own behalf.

TARTUFFE My feelings for Melissa, though they’re deepening every hour – her suppleness of mind, her music, that modesty we so rarely find, affect me so that I could almost lose my sense of purpose – Charles, do not abuse the delicacy of her feelings, that uniquely calibrated fabric of desire we call the heart to foist an unwelcome, unattractive, harsh-voiced man like me upon her.

CHARLES Dear chap, you cannot –

TARTUFFE No, Charles, no. I will extinguish, quite blot
out unreciprocated love. My overwhelming wish is that ‘Casanova Val’ she sees for what he is. I recoil from criticising character, or spoiling any woman’s thoughts of any man, but Val – the stories I have heard I doubt if I shall ever fail to shudder when I think of Mel, our dear, dear Mel, succumbing to the spell of such a dissolute, dissimulating rogue.

CHARLES Dear boy, of course I know your thinking is typically unselfish and apposite. I know no jealousies or shrill, dishonest motive ever moves you. I will use what influence I have. My debt to you I’ll not attempt to weigh. Every day it grows more great. Lunch is soon, but first I’ll go upstairs with this, start again at chapter one, ‘Beginnings’. Could any title now be apter?

Exit CHARLES. TARTUFFE reflects a moment and then exits by another door.

DANUTA [Off] Keep hands yourself, dirty man! Od pieprz się!

A note or two from the piano for a brief time-lapse

Enter DANIEL and CLEM

DANIEL This is the bloody limit, Clem. I swear I’ll cut his bollocks off, fry them, ram the pair of them down his throat until he chokes. Marry Mel? She’d rather sell herself to blokes at twenty quid a time than hit the sack with that disgusting heap of monomatic, self-advertising / oily –

CLEM Dan, take a breath. You know damn well that Mel would never dream of such a thing. This is just another madness promising to derail your Dad’s career. You won’t help him by getting all steamed up and threatening
medieval quarterings.

DANIEL Well, maybe not, but a punch in the nose or a mighty swat across his arse might do the trick and make him sling his hook.

CLEM Oh Dan, please, for God’s sake talk like a grown-up. Great story for the hacks – “son of junior Minister attacks celebrated business guru”. Anyway, fisticuffs, believe me, isn’t you. Stay out of this, my sister can allay all fears, I know, and knock this nonsense on the head, this ridiculous pretence that Mel will fall into Tartuffe’s arms after fatherly advice. You’d hear the laughter from here to Notting Hill. Em is coming down, she’s going to tackle Tartuffe now, so let’s both hop it and allow her space to operate.

DANIEL Not me, I’m staying to face the viper down, lend Em some steel and grit. A silent backup if you like, poised to land a hit –

CLEM Dan, no! Trust Em to use her charms. I hear them on the stairs. Try not to appear an avenging angel. Go and get some air!

rell watches as DANIEL heads for the French windows, then exits. DANIEL turns back and hides behind the Chesterfield

EMMA [Off] This room will be quiet. I’d like to have a

Enter EMMA and TARTUFFE

private word with you, Tartuffe, about a rather delicate matter …

TARTUFFE I obey your every wish. You know in what regard I hold you, Emma.
EMMA  
Thanks. I have been hard
on you on one or two occasions. Peace
is difficult to maintain, I find, at least
in a busy household, young things returning
to the nest from Uni, both scattering
chaos around the house, the strain is prone
to show. I’m sorry if I’ve seemed a stony-

tfaced hostess to you, perhaps, at times.

TARTUFFE  
Not a shadow of that thought has crossed my mind.
I see an ironic smile when over dinner
I insist we must reveal our inner-
most ambitions for the cause, break free
from inhibition. You smile now, you see!
I amuse you. For you it’s just a game.

EMMA  
It’s just – I can’t take seriously your name.
Why on earth ‘Tartuffe’? Where’s that come from?
What’s wrong with Reg or Kevin, Mike or Tom?

TARTUFFE  
You don’t know that, you haven’t read ‘Our Kid’.

EMMA  
That’s not fair, I meant to, well I did,
or rather if I’m truthful, dipped in and out.
I do know that your father was a lout
but, to be honest, the rest was heavy going.

TARTUFFE  
I respect you, Emma, for showing
such honesty. I’ll tell you why I call myself
‘Tartuffe’. I saw one, standing on a shelf
in a cake shop.

EMMA  
Really?

TARTUFFE  
Yes. Mam and I
had gone to Bangor, a place she often plied
her trade, dolled up in PVC and lycra.
She went off with a rep in his Nissan Micra,
dumped me by this shop to keep me occupied.
You can’t know how hunger gnaws at your inside
when you see food that’s just out of reach.
And there was that tartuffe, chocolate and peach
and topped with cream. Asked if I could have it. “Two quid” she said. “Oh, I hoped you’d give it”, I said as sweetly as I could, “I’ve no money.” “Clear off before I belt you! Think you’re funny, sonny?” I vowed one day I’d go back to Bangor, claim that cake to make up for my anger about everything in my childhood.

EMMA Under the circumstances I suppose you would.

TARTUFFE From that day on I’d only answer to ‘Tartuffe’. Of course nobody but me knew why I chose that name and what it meant. For me it was a symbol of attainment. It set me free.

EMMA Isn’t a ‘tartuffe’ a fungus?

TARTUFFE [Distracted] Sorry?

EMMA Anyway, here you are – among us – and while you’re here, I need your advice. It seems Melissa may have to pay the price for her doting father’s new-found zeal.

TARTUFFE First, Emma, let me tell you that I feel your sickness – your migraines – as my own. And while I’m here, know – you’re not alone.

EMMA Well, I’ve seen a specialist, as you know. I’ve had the scans. We’ll see what they show.

TARTUFFE If you’ll forgive me, I think that your mistake is to put your faith in experts. The ache you feel is more of the spirit than the head.

EMMA I don’t want to talk about this. As I said my concern at this moment is with Mel.

TARTUFFE Emma, Emma, let a dear friend tell you, western medicine has failed to comprehend the many different routes that healing lends. There’s something so much finer I would love to try if you’ll permit my practised touch?
EMMA
Not my scene,
no thanks.

TARTUFFE
Dear Emma, seemingly serene
yet so up-tight. Let me enlighten you.
Close your eyes, imagine you’re a speck, drifting –

EMMA
[Breaking away] I have migraines, not a stiff neck.
About Mel, this absurd idea you marry her.

TARTUFFE
Don’t you feel marriage is, deep down, a barrier
to true communication? On some deeper plane
we are all married to each other. Let me explain
about inhibition: your migraines may be caused
by frustration, now that Charles has paused
performance of conjugal duties.

EMMA
What?

TARTUFFE
It’s my understanding that you’re not
getting any physical satisfaction
from poor Charles. A distinct lack of action,
in bed, no Ogden-style seduction.

EMMA
Exactly how did you make that deduction?

TARTUFFE
I sense it. The vibrations that emanate
from you –

EMMA
For fuck’s sake, what?

TARTUFFE
They’re palpable. Don’t deny them, Em, don’t wait.
I could cure your illness more effectively in bed,
ditch your inhibitions, tear out every shred
of guilt, repression. The sex you’ve missed
should be right at the top of your bucket list.

EMMA
Good God! Is this the sordid sequel
to your book? Another new departure, equal
in depravity to the sheerest
saintliness your teenage mind professed
to find on – when was it now – a wet
and windy day in Widnes? I read
that bit. What happened to Mr. Compassion?
TARTUFFE Out of fashion, replaced by a Tantric master of the carnal arts. The fact is I see the way you clock Mel’s virile friends when Charles is not around, the looks you lend across the room. You’re gagging for it, Emma. Charles hasn’t got the will, or the stamina, so let me show you true erotic power, show you I can keep it up for hours.

A brief pause

EMMA May I correct one detail in this scenario, interject one tiny cavil? Charles propped up in bed, reading Wisden in his flannel pyjamas is more erotic than this trashy drama you’ve got up, this tacky Soho farce.

TARTUFFE You bitch! Think you can sneer because you’re rich? You’re just a frigid snob.

EMMA And you’re a knob. Now, ‘Tartuffe’, I could I suppose speak of this to Charles direct, or let it leak out slowly somehow, how you’ve behaved, but I think the news you’re so depraved he might find humiliating, given the passion with which he’s fallen for your fashionable, mystic-motivational crap. So here’s a deal. Say some ‘family mishap’ requires you back in Wales, leave no address, and I swear I’ll never / breathe a word –

DANIEL [Emerging] Em, don’t mess with any thought but this – expose him now. We’ve got him!

EMMA Daniel?

DANIEL Can you believe all that? Every word I heard. Seduce my Dad’s beloved wife, would you, you slimy groper, you misogynistic creep?
EMMA  Daniel –

DANIEL  Don’t let him off the hook. Don’t sweep this under the carpet. Every syllable I’ve committed to my memory. I’m able, being an actor, to deploy mnemonic skill. 

[Aside] The fact the bastard spoke in rhyme will help.

EMMA  Daniel, no! Don’t put your father through this. And shame on you for spying like that on us. If the puffball here agrees my terms, we draw a line, put him, ‘Our Kid’, and any nonsense more out of sight and out of mind.

DANIEL  What? He’s tried to ruin my sister’s life – and yours. He’s lied to Dad –

EMMA  You’ll make us all a laughing-stock unless you get a grip, see sense and knock your indignation on the head.

DANIEL  I see the situation clearly, Em, that he – this hypocrite who’s hoodwinked not just us but half the British public – that he must be exposed. Our solemn duty, no debate. Here comes Dad.

Enter CHARLES

EMMA  Oh, God!

CHARLES  Hullo. I almost ate alone. What’s going on?

EMMA  Sorry, dear, I can’t –

EMMA exits

CHARLES  Emma, what’s up, my dear? It’s clear that something is. Tartuffe, please fill me in.

DANIEL  I think it might be best if I begin? Dad, your guest, this creature here you style
a secular saint I’ve witnessed try
to get your wife, dear Emma, into bed!
No blush, no trace of shame, some threadbare bullshit to begin, then this quite obscene, creepy claim that he’s a sex machine, as if this were some cruddy singles venue, stiff with lonely housewives craving any man who’d give them time of day. She put him bang to rights, I’ll give her that – I never dreamt she could be so frank! I managed to pre-empt her offer to the snake to hush the whole thing up. Dad, we’ve – now his cover’s blown – we’ve got to publish his hypocrisy, dish him in the tabloids, and the Telegraph, get Clem –

CHARLES  Stop! Now! Be quiet! Tartuffe, can there be any truth in this, contemplate an affair … ?

TARTUFFE  Charles, unhappily every word that Daniel’s said is true. I might protest that ‘getting into bed’ does misrepresent the completeness of my passion for your wife, but confess to it, I must. I have been helpless, Charles. Her purity, so foreign to my heart – you know my experience of womanhood’s so damaged, so debased it’s never stood me well – she’s, completely uninvited, and innocently too, of course, lighted up my soul. What can I say? I must go, of course, and I deserve every show of shame, every front page exposé that Dan desires. My dream – Aspiration UK – well, it’s bust, and I must reconcile myself to humbler work. High profile stuff, I guess it’s not for me –

CHARLES  Wait, Tartuffe.
Are you completely blind? Daniel, is the truth of this so obscure to you?

DANIEL  What on earth – ?
CHARLES  Don’t interrupt. How dare you vilify this good-hearted man?

DANIEL  Good-hearted? I – I can’t believe you’re saying that. He’s taken you for a fool, Dad. Will you never waken up and see –

CHARLES  Dan, be careful what you say. I won’t be called a fool or disobeyed by an immature young boy who thinks he’s morally superior –

TARTUFFE  Charles, listen, please! Let Daniel speak. He’s right. Call Clem, tell him every sordid detail, he’ll pen it well and yet see that you and Em come through with dignity intact. He’ll stem all whiff of foolishness, naïveté. Only I should pay the price.

CHARLES  [To Daniel] Now, you say … ?

DANIEL  Dad, he’s bluffing, you can’t believe this stuff!

CHARLES  Oh for God’s sake Daniel, that’s enough! Yes, Tartuffe’s addresses to your mother are – well, inappropriate, of course, and hardly what one expects of an honoured guest, but a momentary lapse, prompted by a quest for love, the kind of which you know so well he’s missed throughout his life, doesn’t spell betrayal –

TARTUFFE  Charles –

CHARLES  No, let me speak my mind. See it as a compliment to Emma, a recognition of her warmth, her array of talents, her integrity, her beauty, Dan. Dear boy, we must see clearly, understand just how important it is now to cut our friend a little slack, not try to gut him
like a fish you’ve landed in your net.

DANIEL I’m speechless. Was I on another planet? I didn’t hear ‘our friend’ declare your Emma ‘gagging for it’ or that you, Dad, you lacked the ‘stamina’ to – well, so caught in your career you couldn’t –

CHARLES That’s enough! I will not hear another word. You want him out, you’re jealous, want to alienate, drive a wedge between us. Well, you won’t. Tartuffe and I, we have plans against which all this petty sniping ranks as odious as any parliamentary back-stabbing I recall. You haven’t any more to say, I trust. You’ve friends whose floors will welcome you, no doubt, because these doors are shut on you, Daniel, pack your things –

TARTUFFE Charles, this is harsh –

CHARLES Don’t interfere. Managing my family is my prerogative. Apologise without condition or live elsewhere until you’ve seen the shaming error –

DANIEL Apologise, can you be kidding? To this manipulative creep? I’d rather stick my hand in puss, spit blood, or smother my head in diesel oil.

CHARLES For God’s sake, out! Not another idiotic word, I’ll clout you, I swear I will, if you speak again.

DANIEL Jesus Christ!

TARTUFFE Charles, I am completely mortified by this. This rupture in your family, this pain is down to me, my presence here at least.
I must leave. If I can duck Dan’s tabloid feast of righteous indignation I’ll pursue our plans alone, if not I’ll find some new way to survive.

CHARLES My dearest friend, don’t dream of giving up the cause. It’s the theme I’ve looked for all my political life. And your place is here.

TARTUFFE But they hate me. Wife son, daughter, all despise me and look to rubbish all my work, ‘Our Kid’ – the book you so generously encouraged me to write. And can I really stay here out of sight of Emma? You could hardly wish that I had contact with her now, the writing’s surely on the wall in that respect.

CHARLES No, no, that’s not my way at all. We strike a blow for truth and openness, defy all scandal, live on as we do, that’s the way to handle the sullen look, the meretricious slur. Don’t avoid my wife. Spend time with her, dine with her, be seen with her around, that’s the proper – and the clever – way to drown suspicion.

TARTUFFE Charles, your wisdom, and compassion, they’re beyond praise. In a spirit of contrition I’ll do exactly as you wish. I – I – I can’t, I don’t know how …

CHARLES Don’t be afraid to cry, you told me that yourself. Here’s a napkin, filched, I’m afraid, from the buffet chap in first class on the train from Perth. Not quite a duck house, is it, but I daresay not right in the eyes of Branson. Should I bribe him with a Commons teaspoon, or cup, d’you think?
TARTUFFE That’s very funny, Charles, good chap you are.

CHARLES Well, maybe. But through this silly – hoohah – I’ve begun to see my way. While Daniel made me wild I’m so much cooler now. You’ll find that my commitment to our cause will be redoubled, there’ll be no further pause in forward planning. I’m going to give – give Aspiration UK – this house. We can live, have all we need, Em and I, in the flat that comes with my constituency. That’s the way to go, downsize, let the cause enjoy a house here in the Suburb. Annoy the Residents Association I’ve no doubt but we lay down a signal marker, set out our stall by this – this petty sacrifice.

It would have gone to Dan and Mel, suffice to set them up for life, but they’ve no need of feather-bedding, they’ve the means to feed and clothe themselves – talents, education, all the things the poorest kids in our nation have been so wanting.

TARTUFFE Charles, you’ve struck me dumb.
A gift of so magnificent a sum –

CHARLES Don’t speak. No words, the gift is for the cause. [Phoning] I’ll call my lawyer, Frank at Hawse & Hawse, get this done right now. [Dialling] If this puts the skids under my relations with my own two kids, if that’s the price I pay – no, no thanks, Tartuffe, this has to be the way. Ah, Frank –

The sound of Mel & Dan singing again as CHARLES begins to exit

it’s Charles. Trust you’re well, old chap? Look, I need a speedy bit of legal footwork. A deed of gift. I’m giving up my Hampstead house, donating it in fact. Oh, not a shred of doubt, never been more sure of anything in my life ...

and CHARLES has gone. TARTUFFE pockets the Glen Ord and follows.