

THE IMPOSTOR

(A Comedy after Moliere)

by

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THE CHARACTERS

ROGER NORTH, Head of the North Real Estate Agency, 40s

MRS NORTH, Roger's mother, 60s

ELVIRA NORTH, Roger's wife and an agency employee, 40s

MARIANNE, Their daughter and secretary, 20s

VAL HOBSON, An agency employee, 20s

CHESTER WELLS, Roger's brother-in-law, 30s

TERRY TUPPER, An agency employee, 40s

DORRINE WESTON, An agency employee, 30

MS FLIPOTE, A self-important attorney, 30s

MR MOLIERE, A client of the Real Estate Agency

THE PLACE

The Offices of the North Real Estate Agency

THE TIME

Recently

ACT ONE

The Reception room of the North Advertising Agency: MRS. NORTH enters, in a huff; she is followed by ELVIRA, CHESTER and MARIANNE, who are all quite distressed)

ELVIRA

Mother! Will you please slow down so we can talk to you?

MRS NORTH

I'm getting out of here. I'm not putting any faith in this false politeness, either.

ELVIRA

What has you so upset?

MRS NORTH

You really don't know?

ELVIRA

No.

MRS NORTH

(Hands in the air) That's even *worse*!

ELVIRA

Well, if you think politeness is phony, I don't suppose you want me to apologize.

MRS NORTH

Now I have to deal with rudeness!

CHESTER

(To MRS. NORTH) Will you calm down and explain?

MRS NORTH

You don't seem to realize my late husband began this Agency and made it the largest in the city!

We don't?

ELVIRA

You remind us every day.

CHESTER

That's not what I meant!

ELVIRA

There is no respect!

MRS NORTH

I'm sure Chester meant no disrespect.

ELVIRA

(Mumbling) Don't be so sure.

CHESTER

MRS NORTH
If I thought he did, I'd teach him some. (She threatens him with a fist). I never thought I'd have to—

MAY I say something?

MARIANNE

What is it?

ELVIRA

MRS NORTH
Now you're letting my grand daughter interrupt me!

I wasn't interrupting.

MARIANNE

MRS NORTH
Then she calls me a liar!

(To MARIANNE) Save it, dear.

ELVIRA

MRS NORTH

I can see you haven't learned anything about respect from Mr. Tupper's example.

CHESTER

What some call respect, others might call toadying.

MRS NORTH

That's what I'd expect, based on some of the things I've heard about this office.

ELVIRA

What have you heard?

MRS NORTH

It comes from a very trustworthy source.

CHESTER

You mean that two-faced dragon Margery White?

ELVIRA

Chester, mother is too intelligent to listen to vicious gossip.

MRS NORTH

Of course I am. But Margery wouldn't lie to me. I see her in church *every* Sunday.

CHESTER

She had her fun once, but now that it's over, she begrudges anyone else a little pleasure!

MRS NORTH

(To ELVIRA) There! That's what I'm taking about!

CHESTER

Pfui! And as for your Terry Tupper—

ELVIRA

(To CHESTER) Drop it!

MARIANNE

But I can't drop it. Grandma, Mr. Terry Tupper seems far more interested in mother, than he is in God!

MRS NORTH

Good grief! Now she's spreading rumors about her own mother!

MARIANNE

I'm talking about Terry Tupper!

MRS NORTH

(To ELVIRA) Do you permit her to go on like this all the time?

ELVIRA

(To MARIANNE) You made your point.

MRS NORTH

And a pretty piece of slander it is, too! Libeling a man from whom every one could learn something of profit! I won't listen to any more of it! (She starts off).

ELVIRA

(Follows her off, leaving MARIANNE and CHESTER) Mother, do you really have to go? (They are gone).

CHESTER

(To MARIANNE) You know they say a lot of terrible things about mothers-in-law.

MARIANNE

What are they?

CHESTER

I'll keep an open mind and assume a few of them aren't true.

MARIANNE

I'm sure Grandma *means* well.

CHESTER

Are you? Well, you're still young. But how she goes on about that hypocrite Tupper!

MARIANNE

If you think she's bad, you should hear my father! Father gives him the seat of honor at the dinner table, and now that you've left the agency, I think father's going to give your job to him. Before he showed up, I was certain Val would get the promotion!

(ELVIRA then returns to the room, shaking her head in both awe and consternation)

ELVIRA

Are my ears on fire? You missed an incredible lecture out there!

CHESTER

Why does Roger listen to her?

ELVIRA

He's under Tupper's influence, too.

CHESTER

He can't have that much influence over Roger!

ELVIRA

Let me tell you—But it sounds like Roger just pulled in. Ask him yourself. In the meantime, I'd better calm down before I see him. (She exits quickly).

MARIANNE

I should leave, too. Grandmother might have given him an earful, and I could be in hot water. Uncle Chester, please try to feel him out about Val?

CHESTER

Aren't you and Val already engaged?

MARIANNE

I wish I knew what we were! (She exits).

(ROGER enters; He beams cheerfully, in prime health, shaking hands with CHESTER)

ROGER

Chester, my friend, I'm glad to see you. Were you looking after things?

CHESTER

First tell me how *you* are, old man? How was your trip?

ROGER

It was a great success. How were things here? I trust everyone is all right?

CHESTER

As a matter of fact, I hate to be the one to tell you—

ROGER

Oh my God! I hope nothing's happened to Terry!

CHESTER

Terry! No, he's fine.

ROGER

You had me worried!

CHESTER

But your *wife* had an extremely high fever. She was unable to touch a bite of food without getting sick.

ROGER

Oh?

CHESTER

We were really worried about her.

ROGER

How was Terry?

CHESTER

Him! Never better. He ate like a horse while you were gone, and washed everything down with your most expensive wines.

ROGER

Hale fellow!

CHESTER

Oh and since you ask, Marianne developed a migraine and couldn't sleep a wink for two nights.

ROGER

That's too bad.

CHESTER

We considered taking her to the emergency room.

ROGER

How is she now?

CHESTER

She's a *little* better.

ROGER

And how is Terry, man?

CHESTER

He's a picture of health! He rolled into a warm bed and slept like a log!

ROGER

A stout fellow! How's the business?

CHESTER

You lost some clients. They bought with other agencies.

ROGER

No! I hope they weren't Terry's clients, the poor fellow.

CHESTER

(Throws up his arms in dismay) Roger! For heaven's sake, I've been pulling your leg.

ROGER

What? You mean Terry *isn't* fine!

CHESTER

Good grief, man! Have you fallen under that pompous ass's influence so completely you'd neglect your own family!

ROGER

Chester, you don't know the man you speak of.

CHESTER

I know him as much as I want to! As for his influence over you, it's turned you into a laughing-stock!

ROGER

Mind what you say about him!

CHESTER

I'm talking about *you*!

ROGER

Because of his example, I've become a new man! He's taught me to look upon this world as worthless as a pinch of...salt, and as for people, well, we're all miserable sinners, aren't we? Terry has liberated me from human bondage! Why, I could see my wife, my children and all my friends perish tomorrow and not care a snap! (He snaps his fingers).

CHESTER

Those are admirable sentiments!

ROGER

Aren't they? He's taught me to scorn material things.

CHESTER

By his own example?

ROGER

If you'd been there when I first met him, you'd understand my respect for that paragon. He'd only been in town a few days, but he went straight to the church to get acquainted with Pastor English. Do you know at that time the poor man was living in a camper?

CHESTER

What? Pastor English?

ROGER

No! But what if he had been? It might teach him humility. That's another lesson I learned from Terry. You should see how devoutly he behaves at the Sunday service.

CHESTER

Who? Pastor English?

ROGER

Stop that, damn it! Now see what you've made me do! You've made me angry, too! I was speaking of Terry Tupper! His devotion drew the attention of the *entire* congregation, and his voice was the loudest and most powerful, singing the hymns!

CHESTER

It sounds ostentatious!

ROGER

There you go again, criticizing sincere piety!

CHESTER

I can tell the difference between piety and humbug.

ROGER

Well, what do you say to this? On the spot, I offered him any assistance he wanted, and the only thing he'd accept was a job.

CHESTER

(Counting on his fingers) And free room and board and the run of your home—

ROGER

But Chester, *I* owe him the gratitude. Why, the first week he worked for me Val Hobson missed an appointment and Terry covered for him, and also clinched the sale!

CHESTER

And no doubt declined the commission?

ROGER

He tried to, but I convinced him to accept it.

CHESTER

Roger, listen, while we're speaking of Val Hobson—

ROGER

That's what I was leading into. Did you know he and Marianne have some kind of understanding?

CHESTER

Well?

ROGER

He's becoming increasingly irresponsible.

CHESTER

You never noticed that before.

ROGER

Could he be on drugs?

CHESTER

Why the devil would you say that?

ROGER

His behavior is becoming erratic, Chester. He's missing appointments, and some days, he never even checks in to the office.

CHESTER

I've always found him very responsible.

ROGER

(Laughs sarcastically) You are naïve, my friend. I see there are people who can pull the wool over your eyes!

CHESTER

I appreciate the warning, Roger. I won't forget where it came from.

(Now DORRINE enters the office, plump but pretty, and with an independent spirit)

DORRINE

Why hello, Mr. Wells. It's nice to see you again, and a very good morning to you, boss. I hope you had a fun trip. (She smiles)

ROGER

Hello, Dorrine—It wasn't meant to be fun!

DORRINE

No? I've heard Atlanta is a *very* fun city. (She winks at CHESTER).

ROGER

I wouldn't know about that.

DORRINE

Of course you had Pastor English keeping an eye on you, eh? (She chuckles, then before ROGER can reply, she adds) Well, I have an appointment in an hour. I only stopped to see if you were back. I'll make some coffee. (She exits).

CHESTER

I'd better be off, too. But Roger, I hope no one has been prejudicing you against Val.

ROGER

I can trust my own judgment.

CHESTER

I'm reassured by that! Good morning. (CHESTER exits).

(After CHESTER exits, MARIANNE returns; she appears happy to see ROGER)

MARIANNE

(Effusively buttering him up) Dad! It's great to have you home!

ROGER

Thanks, dear. Where's your mother?

MARIANNE

She's around somewhere.

ROGER

Then, since we have a few minutes alone, there's something I want to discuss with you.

MARIANNE

What? Have I *already* done something wrong?

ROGER

On the contrary, I've always found you a very sensible daughter.

MARIANNE

I try to be.

ROGER

And you've found my advice worth listening to.

MARIANNE

I'm always willing to listen.

ROGER

So let me ask. How do you find our guest?

MARIANNE

I haven't been looking for him.

ROGER

I mean what do you have to say about him?

(DORINNE now re-enters with coffee for ROGER, but unobserved by him)

MARIANNE

(Trying to be diplomatic) What would you like me to say?

ROGER

Be completely honest, my dear.

MARIANNE

You want my honest opinion?

ROGER

Don't you find him, for instance, an intelligent man?

MARIANNE

I *could* say that—

ROGER

That's what I thought.

MARIANNE

But I'd have to know him much better.

ROGER

And that's exactly what I want!

MARIANNE

Is that *my* honest opinion?

ROGER

I'm sure you'd enjoy going on a date with him.

MARIANNE

I *would*?

ROGER

I know some people are prejudiced against him for their own reasons.

MARIANNE

What if those reasons are justified?

ROGER

Nonsense! I find Terry Tupper a good, upright man.

MARIANNE

Then why don't *you* go on a date with him?

ROGER

I find that insolent!

MARIANNE

Don't ask me to do something I'm against.

ROGER

Now listen, Marianne. Don't you have confidence in my judgment?

MARIANNE

About some things—

ROGER

My knowledge of people is pretty accurate. For instance, I asked your mother to marry me against the criticisms of certain people.

MARIANNE

(Laughs) I'll bet that was grandma.

ROGER

That's beside the point! (Preening a bit) And I've done pretty well building up this agency. I've made improvements in methods, in efficiency—I hope you don't think your father is a fool!

MARIANNE

And I hope he isn't one.

ROGER

Then I think if you'd suspend your prejudice and spend a little time with Mr. Er, with *Terry*, you'd be as impressed by him as I am.

MARIANNE

Well—I'll think it over.

ROGER

That's all I'm asking.

DORRINE

(Laughing, bursting to interrupt) Boss, you can't be serious!

ROGER

Have you been eavesdropping—again?

DORRINE

I brought your coffee. I couldn't help over-hearing. (To MARIANNE) And it *was* a good joke! Don't you think so?

ROGER

(To MARIANNE) I'm serious. I know Terry thinks a lot of you.

MARIANNE

How do you know that?

ROGER

I'm not blind.

DORRINE

(Turning MARIANNE to face her) What do *you* think?

ROGER

(Turning MARIANNE back to him) What does she mean by *that*?

DORRINE

(With a wink, turning MARIANNE back) If you ask me, I think his Mr. Tupper is far more interested in someone else.

ROGER

(Turning MARIANNE back) Is anyone asking her?

DORRINE

(Turning MARIANNE back) We could tell him a few things—

MARIANNE

(Spinning away) I'm getting dizzy!

DORRINE

I'm sorry, boss.

ROGER

All right.

DORRINE

I'm sorry I'm supposed to believe this conversation is serious!

ROGER

(To MARIANNE) *I'm* serious!

DORRINE

(To ROGER) You can't think Marianne would be interested in Terry Tupper!

ROGER

Why not!

DORRINE

He's not her type.

ROGER

You mean because he's a few years older than she is?

DORRINE

That's not important. What do twenty or thirty years matter?

ROGER

That's exactly my point!

DORRINE

And he can't help the way he looks.

ROGER

(Now to MARIANNE) I admit he doesn't look like a movie star.

DORRINE

Oh, I don't know. Francis the Talking Mule was a movie star.

ROGER

(Growing angry, To MARIANNE) There are things more important than good looks!

DORRINE

There certainly are—

ROGER

(Turns on her angrily) Stop interrupting me!

DORRINE

I was agreeing with you. There ARE things more important than good looks.

ROGER

Thank you!

DORRINE

But Terry Tupper doesn't have those things, either!

ROGER

I told you I'm not interested in your opinions.

DORRINE

Now, now, boss, can't we discuss this without getting angry?

ROGER

I have no intention of discussing it with you! And I'm *not* angry!

DORRINE

I like you too much to see you get angry and make a fool of yourself.

ROGER

I don't care if you like me or not! (Stamping his foot) And I'm *not* angry!

DORRINE

Besides, Marianne and Val have become serious about each other.

ROGER

(To MARIANNE) I have grave reservations about that young man.

DORRINE

You never had them until Terry Tupper came around!

ROGER

(To MARIANNE, who becomes increasingly uneasy.) He's becoming very irresponsible. He's been missing appointments.

DORRINE

He claims he never made those appointments.

ROGER

(To DORRINE) What would you expect him to say?

DORRINE

That's *just* what I'd expect him to say.

ROGER

(Back to MARIANNE) There!

DORRINE

If he hadn't made them.

ROGER

(Back to DORRINE) Will you stop interrupting me!

DORRINE

I was talking to myself.

ROGER

Well, do it somewhere else. You're a pest, and you're a bad influence on my daughter. I've half a mind to fire *you*!

MARIANNE

Now dad, you shouldn't become so angry.

ROGER

(Stamps his foot) I AM NOT ANGRY! Ouch! (Hops about, holding his foot).

MARIANNE

I'm glad you're not angry.

DORRINE

That's right. Terry Tupper might become critical of you, sir!

ROGER

Anyway, I hope I can expect my daughter to behave more sensibly than—(He nods towards DORRINE) certain other people. I'm only asking you to think about what I said. But now I better go see your mother before I do lose my temper! (ROGER exits angrily).

DORRINE

For a minute I thought you'd lost your voice!

MARIANNE

I thought it was wise to keep my mouth shut.

DORRINE

If you do that, you'll end up spending Saturday nights with Terry Tupper!

MARIANNE

I'm playing for time Dorrine.

DORRINE

Oh, for heavens' sake! Why not just come out and tell the truth! You're old enough to make your own decisions!

MARIANNE

Sometimes dad intimidates me.

DORRINE

What about Val?

MARIANNE

Sometimes he intimidates me, too.

DORRINE

I mean what will *he* say about this? How do you feel about him?

MARIANNE

I told you I'm serious about him.

DORRINE

Then why didn't you tell your father?

MARIANNE

You're right! I'm infuriating! I *do* have a mind of my own, and sometimes I use it, too! But when it comes to this subject I'm a coward! Now don't scold me Dorrine, because, I'm harder on myself than anyone else could ever be. I know I should just come right out and say, 'Dad, I'm in love with Val Hobson!'

DORRINE

How do you think *he* feels?

MARIANNE

Didn't you just hear him?

DORRINE

I mean how does *Val* feel, dodo!

MARIANNE

That's another reason I'm frustrated.

DORRINE

Doesn't Val feel the same way?

MARIANNE

I don't know! Maybe dad has a point. Val *has* been acting strange lately. In fact we haven't been out for two weeks!

DORRINE

I think it's time *everyone* told the truth.

MARIANNE

You're right!

DORRINE

That's the spirit, girl.

MARIANNE

So when are you going to tell them?

DORRINE

Me?

MARIANNE

Well, you know the whole story, and you're not afraid to tell it.

DORRINE

But I am afraid of being fired!

MARIANNE

Dad would never fire you.

DORRINE

Now look, I have a much better plan.

MARIANNE

You do? What is it?

DORRINE

I think you should go along with your father wishes.

MARIANNE

Go out with Terry Tupper?

DORRINE

It's the perfect solution.

MARIANNE

Dorrine! How can you say that?

DORRINE

Well, it will make Val jealous.

MARIANNE

You think that's a *good* idea?

DORRINE

(Sarcastic) Don't you know that a complicated lie is always better than honesty, and more than that you and Terry could have a great evening together. I know he seems stiff and boring, but underneath it, I bet he's a barrel of fun.

MARIANNE

How far underneath?

DORRINE

I'm sure you'd find his pompous affectations amusing. And then, when you've finished enjoying his hypocrisy, you can entertain yourself by contemplating his appearance. Think of the fun you'd have staring at those beady eyes, that purple face, and his bulbous red nose. Why, it's like looking at a Christmas tree!

MARIANNE

I never thought you'd make fun of my problems.

DORRINE

Your attitude is exasperating!

MARIANNE

I thought we were friends.

DORRINE

Oh, let me think about it! Anyway, here comes Val.

(VAL HOBSON now enters. Looking rather angry, he walks straight up to MARIANNE)

VAL

I just heard something I can't believe. Maybe you can tell me if it's true?

MARIANNE

I can't unless you tell me what you heard.

VAL

I heard a rumor that you're going out with Terry Tupper.

MARIANNE

Where did you hear that?

VAL

I asked you if it was true.

MARIANNE

It's my father's idea.

VAL

Then it *is* true!

MARIANNE

I didn't say I would.

VAL

But I think you *should* go out with him, by all means!

MARIANNE

Then that's settled!

DORRINE

Oh for heaven's sake! Both of you stop acting childish.

MARIANNE

I'm only taking his advice.

DORRINE

Oh, all right. What do I care?

VAL

I'm just telling her what she wants to hear.

MARIANNE

(To DORRINE) I told you he was looking for an excuse to break things off.

VAL

(To DORRINE) She blames me, but I'm sure it was her plan all along.

DORRINE

(Covers her ears) I don't want to hear any more of this nonsense!

VAL

(To DORRINE) But she's getting her wish.

MARIANNE

(To DORRINE) I'm giving him what he wants.

DORRINE

Stop! Leave me out of it!

VAL

(To DORRINE) I think it's best if I quit my job, then she'll never see me again. (He starts to exit, turns back) What did you say?

MARIANNE

I didn't say anything.

DORRINE

I can't stand any more! You're both acting ridiculous! I was only waiting to see how far you'd go. Val, come here! (She walks over and grabs him by the hand).

VAL

No! Why stop me from giving her what she wants?

DORRINE

(To MARIANNE) You *want* him to act like a moron?

MARIANNE

Who cares? (She starts off in the other direction).

DORRINE

(She grabs MARIANNE by the wrist) Oh, come back here!

MARIANNE

But he hates the sight of me!

VAL

She can't stand me!

DORRINE

(She takes each of them by the arm and pulls them together) Well, *I* can't stand either one of you! You deserve each other! Now give me your hands.

MARIANNE

(Readily giving her hand to DORRINE) What for?

VAL

(Also speedily yields) What good can it do?

DORRINE

(Joining their hands) You're not kids any longer! Stop acting like it!

MARIANNE

(To DORRINE) You're right. (To VAL) But it was cruel of you to say what you did.

VAL

But I had reason complain!

DORRINE

Leave it! You owe each other an apology.

MARIANNE

Oh, you're right, Dorrine. (To VAL) I'm sorry.

VAL

So am I.

MARIANNE

It was really my fault.

VAL

No, it was mine.

MARIANNE

But I started the whole thing. I should have told my dad I wouldn't go out with Terry Tupper.

VAL

But I provoked you. Can you forgive me?

MARIANNE

I hope *you* can forgive *me*.

VAL

I don't deserve to be forgiven—

DORRINE

All right, all right! Someone's coming, and unless I miss my guess, it's the cause of this mess, so why don't you two lovebirds get lost!

VAL

She's right. (Exiting, To MARIANNE) Marianne, I think you're wonderful.

MARIANNE

You are.

DORRINE

Get lost! (They exit).

(As they exit, TERRY TUPPER enters; over-weight and with a self-satisfied air)

TERRY

Good morning, Dorrine—I didn't see you in church this morning.

DORRINE

Your prayer time must have been wasted if you spent it looking for me.

TERRY

(Irk) How right you are. I feel ashamed of myself.

DORRINE

You'll get over it.

TERRY

I'm going to improve. Incidentally, that's a very attractive outfit you're wearing.

DORRINE

I'm surprised you noticed.

TERRY

I can't help noticing it's a little revealing, a bit provocative, don't you think?

DORRINE

I think you're too easily provoked. I could see you standing there, naked from head to toe and not be tempted in the least.

TERRY

Your language is quite frank for a young woman.

DORRINE

Unlike some people, I tell the truth.

TERRY

(Outdone again) I noticed Roger's car. Has he returned from his trip?

DORRINE

Yes, and he's brought some pretty strange ideas back with him.

TERRY

(Mildly alarmed) What do you mean by that?

DORRINE

He seems to think you're interested in dating Marianne.

TERRY

(Relieved) What put that idea in his head?

DORRINE

Don't you mean *who* put that idea in his head?

(ELVIRA now re-enters the room; TERRY sees her and assumes a friendlier mien)

TERRY

That's the furthest thing from my mind.

DORRINE

(Now noticing ELVIRA) Uh-huh. I think I understand you.

ELVIRA

Hello, Dorrine—Good morning, Terry.

DORRINE

Hello, *Mrs* North—

TERRY

(To ELVIRA) You look much better this morning. I'm so relieved.

ELVIRA

Thank you. Dorrine, I'd like to speak with Terry.

DORRINE

You would? (She looks skeptically at her) Well, if you say so. (She exits).

TERRY

I was terribly concerned about you. Are you sure you're feeling better?

ELVIRA

Oh yes, I always feel better when my husband comes home. Anyway, it was only a cold.

TERRY

If I thought it would have made you better, I'd have taken your fever on myself.

ELVIRA

Suppose we sit down for a minute. (She sits in a chair)

TERRY

That's what I had in mind! (He pulls a chair right beside her).

ELVIRA

(Moves hers away slightly) Terry, I'm going to be honest with you. There are people who think all your piety is simply a front.

TERRY

Being misunderstood is a cross I have to bear.

ELVIRA

(Doubtfully) Well, I'm willing to give you the benefit of the doubt.

TERRY

I hope you'll let me prove how sincere I am. (He takes her hand).

ELVIRA

I'll be honest with you.

TERRY

That's what I want! (He squeezes her hand).

ELVIRA

Ouch! That hurt. (She pulls her hand away).

TERRY

I'm sorry! Can I make it better? (He tries to kiss her hand)

ELVIRA

Let's get to the point. My husband wants to bring you and Marianne together.

TERRY

He said that to me, too. I told him I wasn't interested.

ELVIRA

So you're not interested in dating Marianne?

TERRY

If I were, would that upset you?

ELVIRA

Very much so—

TERRY

My desires... lie elsewhere.

ELVIRA

That's all I want to know.

TERRY

And since you're so honest with me, let me return the favor. Elvira, I find you charming! I find you lusciously desirable! I find you perfect in every way—(He leans over to kiss her, as she is abruptly rising, and he falls off his chair).

ELVIRA

And I find you out of line! You surprise me, considering your principles.

TERRY

Maybe it seems strange hearing these sentiments from me, but I'm also a man, Elvira! So it's not my fault.

ELVIRA

What does that mean?

TERRY

(Comes at her again) Blame it on your beauty, your charm, your irresistibility!

ELVIRA

(Moves away) Suppose I told my husband what you just said?

TERRY

Wouldn't he agree with me? I'm sure you'll forgive me for being mere flesh and blood. (He moves closer to her).

ELVIRA

Naturally, I can be discreet. (She moves away from him).

TERRY

That's what I'm hoping. (He approaches closer).

ELVIRA

I won't say a word to my husband if I have your word you won't pursue Marianne.

TERRY

(Ecstatically tries to embrace her) Absolutely!

(Then VAL bursts into the room from behind a door where he's been hiding)

VAL

Perfect! You phony!

ELVIRA

Val? What are you doing here?

VAL

I've been looking for proof that he's a fraud. I heard everything, and now Mr. North will hear it, too.

ELVIRA

Val, I've given my word.

VAL

I haven't!

ELVIRA

Let me handle this in my own way.

TERRY

(Regaining his composure with what he believes is ELVIRA'S tacit support) I don't know what he thinks he heard, but I'm sure he has personal reasons for trying to blacken my reputation.

VAL

What damned nonsense! (He attacks TERRY).

TERRY

Help!

(At the moment of attack, ROGER suddenly re-enters the room. He looks startled)

ROGER

What the devil is going on here?

VAL

(Letting go of TERRY) Mr. North, you're getting a nice reward for your kindness to this tramp! I caught him making love to your wife! She'd tell you herself, but she promised not to say anything!

ELVIRA

A wife shouldn't bother her husband with such nonsense. I really wish you hadn't said anything. (She exits).

ROGER

(Amazed, to TERRY) Is this true?

TERRY

(Appearing incredibly contrite) What's the use? Whatever he charges me with, I'm guilty of worse things. I deserve to be thrown out of your house. No! I deserve worse than that! I should be whipped! It would be unforgivably vain of me to ask your forgiveness! (He suddenly falls to his knees, either in prayer or supplication).

ROGER

(Suddenly turns on VAL) How *dare* you!

VAL

Me?

ROGER

How dare you make false accusations against this good man!

VAL

I can't believe his act!

ROGER

You're making me angry.

VAL

But he's putting you on!

TERRY

(To ROGER) Don't be angry with him. I'm sure he has reasons for what he's saying.

ROGER

You mean my daughter?

TERRY

(Feigns shock) I never said that.

ROGER

(To VAL) Well, what *are* your reasons?

VAL

I'm telling the truth!

TERRY

(To ROGER, ignoring VAL) This just shows how much he must care for her.

VAL

(Now becoming annoyed with ROGER) Can't you see what an impostor he is?

TERRY

He's right! I'm guilty of everything!

ROGER

(Tries to pull TERRY to his feet) Please, get up. (To VAL) Not another word, I'm warning you!

VAL

But you're making a terrible mistake!

ROGER

(To VAL, as he finally manages to pull TERRY to his feet) Enough!

TERRY

He means well.

ROGER

(To VAL) You see how he's defending you!

VAL

(End of his rope) I sure do! But if I could get my hands on him, he'd have to defend himself! (He tries to grab TERRY again).

ROGER

That's it! Out of my house!

TERRY

No, no! I'm the one who should leave.

ROGER

(To VAL) And I expect you to leave my daughter alone.

VAL

Look, I think we should all calm down.

ROGER

I'M PERFECTLY CALM! NOW LEAVE MY HOUSE AND MY BUSINESS IMMEDIATELY!

VAL

All right. (He exits).

TERRY

The poor fellow! I'm really the one who caused all the trouble!

