

Excerpt from Act III of **THE MISANTHROPE**  
by Molière, translated by David Whiteley

Acaste: They say Arsinoé is remarkably chaste,  
Of exceptional purity—

Célimène: She's so two-faced!  
Underneath all that innocence, she's full of lust  
But she hides her desires with a veil of disgust.  
She pretends to be pure and religiously zealous  
When in fact every peck on the cheek makes her jealous.  
If she had what it takes to land herself a man  
He would loosen her up ten times faster than bran.  
She's so desperate, she'd even hook up with Alceste.  
When she sees him with me, she throws fits. She's obsessed  
With the man. She's so envious, all over *Paris*  
She's been spreading these filthy rumours about me!  
It's obscene what she saying. She's viscious and spiteful.  
She's an absolute ars—

**Act III, scene iv: Arsinoé, Célimène [Alceste for last line only]**

Célimène: —inoé! How delightful!  
What brings you here?

Arsinoé: Célimène, you reek of cologne!

Célimène: It's those fops...

Arsinoé: Well, I'm glad that they've left us alone.  
What I came here to say is no business of theirs.

Célimène: Shall we sit?

Arsinoé: No, I'll stand. I'm allergic to chairs.  
Here's the thing (please take this as a friendly suggestion):  
You must not let your honour be brought into question.  
I spent yesterday with the respectable crowd.  
When I brought your name up, I was hardly allowed  
Two good words in before a consensus was reached  
That your conduct's so bad you ought to be impeached.  
The very same people that come visit you here  
Condemned you, using terms even I found severe.  
Of course you understand that I rushed to your aid,  
Did the best that I could to attempt to persuade  
Them that all of your failings were quite unintentional—  
Though your ethics might not be perceived as conventional.  
But when push comes to shove, some behaviour is sin  
And then no one can give it a positive spin.  
I was forced by my faith and my deep sense of piety  
To agree that your conduct reeks of impropriety:

The soirées that you host cast doubt on your sobriety,  
 And the way you chase men has achieved notoriety.  
 Now I don't mean to say that we doubt your virginity;  
 No, on that point we all were in strict unanimity  
 In believing nothing had breached your femininity,  
 But we think you keep men in too close a vicinity.  
 You must not just act well but be seen to be good  
 To keep your behaviour from being misunderstood.  
 Célimène, you're too smart to mistake this advice  
 For a personal assault. I just want to be nice.  
 As a good Christian woman it's my obligation  
 To point out people's faults, to achieve their salvation.

Célimène: Dear Arsinoé, I am indebted to you,  
 And to show you my gratitude, here's what I'll do:  
 I'll return your favour with advice of my own.  
 Like it says in the Bible: "You'll reap what you've sown."  
 Since you've shown me such kindness to keep me alert  
 To the ways that my name has been dragged through the dirt,  
 I shall follow your lead for my own exposé  
 And tell you what they're saying of Arsinoé.  
 I was hosting a group from my parish just now  
 On the subject of how to be holier than thou.  
 In discussing the theme, you were mentioned a lot  
 But a model of goodness they said you were not.  
 It was felt by the group that your pious façade  
 Was in fact affectation—in short, a charade.  
 They considered your reverent outward appearance,  
 Your meddlesome tendencies towards interference,  
 Your sermons about how the world's grown so depraved  
 And how anything modern's too vile to be saved,  
 Not to mention your highly inflated self-worth  
 And the way you look down on the rest of the earth,  
 Your non-stop moralizing, the way you're cocksure  
 That one's motives are sinful when really they're pure;  
 All these things, if you'll let me be perfectly frank,  
 Led my prayer group to call you a self-righteous skank.  
 "What's the use," they declared, "of outward religiosity  
 When it's obvious her insides are pure monstrosity?  
 Sure, she spouts all these prayers and this sacred claptrap  
 But she still beats her servants and pays them like crap.  
 She's always seen at mass and you can't overlook her  
 'Cause she goes tarted-up like a fifty-franc hooker.  
 She deplores sex in art like a good stoic prude  
 But she'd love to see real live men in the nude."  
 Of course I defended you against their aspersions  
 And insisted that all these alleged perversions  
 Were just slander and fiction, but they wouldn't budge.  
 They insisted that you need to learn not to judge  
 Other people, and deal with your own flaws instead:  
 "Judge not lest ye be judged," as the Good Lord once said,  
 "For the one without sin gets to cast the first stone

But you sinners should just leave each other alone.”  
 Arsinoé, you’re too smart to mistake this advice  
 For a personal assault. I just want to be nice.  
 As a good Christian woman it’s my obligation  
 To point out people’s faults, to achieve their salvation.

Arsinoé: While I’m always quite open to being subjected  
 To criticism, this is more than I expected.  
 If you weren’t a lady I would call you a prick.  
 It would seem my advice has cut you to the quick.

Célimène: On the contrary, darling, in fact your critique  
 Was so useful, I think we should meet once a week  
 To exchange observations. We would finally learn  
 What they’re saying of us when we feel our ears burn.  
 All we have to do to achieve illumination  
 Is keep sharing this character assassination.

Arsinoé: Oh, no, I hear nothing bad about you, my dear.  
 It’s just me they reproach, or so it would appear.

Célimène: Aw, come on, we’re all subject to judgements by fools  
 And every stage of life has its own set of rules.  
 There’s a time to be popular, chic, cool and fab  
 And a time to complain like a dried up old crab.  
 When one’s best years are past, being sour is fitting  
 And it goes well with rocking chairs, prune juice and knitting.  
 There might well come a time when my breasts start to sag  
 And I’ll follow your lead, and turn into a hag.

Arsinoé: It’s a pretty small margin you’re boasting about;  
 It’s not like I’m arthritic or suffering from gout.  
 Well, I might be a year or two older than you are  
 But you make me sound like—Ah! You’re full of manure!  
 I don’t know what makes you such a mean little vixen  
 To abuse me and say I’m the one that needs fixing.

Célimène: As for myself, I don’t know why you can’t admit  
 That it’s you who’s been dragging my name through the—grit.  
 Just ’cause your life may suck, do you have to wreck mine?  
 No matter what I do, you always yelp and whine.  
 If men find me attractive, and keep dropping by  
 To declare that they love me, how is it that I  
 Am supposed to react? Is it my fault that men  
 Don’t choose you as their favourite *Parisienné*?  
 Have your pick of the lot. Don’t blame me if you’re lonely:  
 If men hate you it’s ’cause you’re so priggish and homely.

Arsinoé: How dare you! Do you think that I envy you for  
 The horny little boys that come knock at your door?  
 And you don’t think I’ve got every right to assume  
 They’re worked up over more than just smiles and perfume?

That the burning they feel is not just in their hearts  
 But in fact an infection of naughtier parts?  
 The world's not as blind as you seem to believe:  
 We know perfectly well what you've got up your sleeve.  
 There are lots of cute girls who don't get hoards of suitors  
 So the fact that you do proves it's more than your hooters  
 That is leading these men to think you're such a dish.  
 It takes big juicy bait to land so many fish.  
 I mean, it takes more than just a tip of the hat  
 It takes payment for service, a tit for a tat.  
 So don't act all superior, like you've won the fight  
 When your conquest shows you in a very bad light.  
 Ease up on the pride. Don't look down your nose at me,  
 And don't say I'm inspired by petty jealousy.  
 If I wanted your worshippers kissing my butt  
 I'd just sink to your level and take them, you—

Célimène: Shut  
 Your cake hole. Put your money where your mouth is. Take  
 Them from me? I'd like to see you try, you old snake!  
 The only thing that you'll take from me is a beating.  
 Come on, Arsinoé—

Arsinoé: Let's call a halt to this meeting.  
 It's stressing us both out. If my carriage were here  
 I'd already be gone.

Célimène: It's as you wish, my dear.  
 Please feel free to stop by any time that you choose.  
 You're always welcome here. Now if you will excuse  
 Me, I'll find you some company you'll enjoy more  
 Than myself.

*[Alceste enters]*

*[To Alceste]* Alceste! Just the man I'm looking for.  
 Arsinoé's just leaving, but she strongly implied  
 She'd like to be with you as she waits for her ride.  
*[To Arsinoé]* Please forgive me for handing you off, but I've tried  
 To please you with the substitute that I've supplied.