

GEORGE BAKER

POISON

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Poison / A Farce

CHARACTERS:

Mr. Theophilus Twitters, <i>a retired sugar merchant</i>	E. J. Wendell
Gottlieb Hunker, <i>honorary secretary of the society for the prevention of capital</i>	J. E. Webb.
Dr. Charles Squillcox, <i>an apothecary in love with Clara</i>	F. C. Woodbury.
Clara Twitters	H. C. French.
The Mother of the late Mrs. Twitters	A. Matthews.
Mary Jane	R. T. Babson.
Officer of the Law	H. M. Hubbard.

Scene. – *Breakfast-room of the suburban villa of Mr. Twitters. The mother of the late Mrs. Twitters and Mary Jane are discovered.*

Mary Jane. But I tell you this is Mr. Twitters' breakfast, mum. There's no telling what he'll do if he don't catch the train this morning. He's ordered the horse ready since seven o'clock.

Mother (*breaking an egg*). In the midst of life we are in death. I have left my humble lodgings this morning to attend the interment of the remains of our late pastor, the Rev. Dr. Elijah Paddy – a hot muffin, Mary Jane!

Mary Jane. What will master say, mum? There won't be no breakfast left. He has the alarm-clock set in his hat-bath to wake him at seven, and it made such a noise, mum, that he flung it out the window and went to sleep again. And he's been rampaging round and ordering breakfast on the table for the last hour.

Mother. The carriage will serve me in my sad errand. I have a floral tribute in this box to place upon the grave of the dear departed, – a little more hot toast, Mary Jane, – an anchor, expressive of hope and Christian resignation. It will be but a trifle among the many offerings. The Rev. Mr. Paddy never knew how many friends he had until he was dead (*breaking another egg*).

Mary Jane. You're eating the last egg, mum.

Mother. I grieve that there is no other egg, but this will suffice to support me through the trying ceremony. He was an eminent Christian, – he had three wives. (*Bell rings.*)

Twitters (*without, calling*). Has that thundering shoemaker sent my new boots?

Mary Jane (*calling at door*). Just come, sir.

Mother. Cease this unseemly noise, girl (*rising*), summon the equipage.

Mary Jane. The equipage, mum? I didn't see you come in no carriage.

Mother. My limited earthly resources do not permit me to provide myself with such luxuries. I shall use one of your master's. My poor, dear, departed daughter, did not survive to enjoy his prosperity. I do.

Mary Jane. But he wants the carriage to go to the train, mum.

Mother. Trains go hourly. (*Takes up a box. Exit.*)

Mary Jane (*standing at window*). Well, if the late Mrs. Twitters was like this mother of hers, it ain't no wonder that master's kind of fidgety like. There, – she's got hold of John, now, and she's stepping into the carriage that was going to take master to the train. And she's druv off! Oh, deary me. What vicious things elderly women can be. (*Enter Twitters hastily.*)

Twitters (*Looking at watch*). I shall have a close shave for the 9-20 train, but I think I can manage it. Breakfast's ready of course, of course?

Mary Jane. It *was* ready sir.

Twitters (*approaching table*). Why, what on earth does this mean?

Mary Jane. The mother of the late Mrs. Twitters —

Twitters. The devil!

Mary Jane. No, sir, the mother of —

Twitters. Is she here? (*With feeling.*)

Mary Jane. No, sir, she's gone.

Twitters. Something ghoulish is going on somewhere, then, or she would have stayed. That women is a perfect vulture. If anything horrible happens to anybody, she comes pouncing down to gloat over it. I'm becoming a fiend, myself; I rejoice in the news of any misfortune, for it means temporary deliverance for me from her — has she eaten everything?

Mary Jane. All there was, sir.

Twitters. How soon can you get some more?

Mary Jane. It'll be ten minutes, sir.

Twitters. I shall have to breakfast in town, then. I must be off. John's here, of course?

Mary Jane. No, sir, he's took.

Twitters. Good heavens! A fit?

Mary Jane. No, sir; the mother of the late Mrs. Twitters.

Twitters. Where has she taken him?

Mary Jane. To the funeral obelisk of an Irish gentleman, sir.

Twitters. To Parson Paddy's funeral?

Mary Jane. That's just it, sir.

Twitters. I hated that man, but his death caused me deep sorrow. Her cap was set at him. I must run for the train. Where are my boots? Ah, here! (*Opening a box and producing a funeral wreath*) what in the name of nature is this?

Mary Jane. It's her's, sir; she's been and gone and took the boots to the burying, and she's left nothing behind but Christian resignation.

Twitters. Damn Christian resignation. (*Pitches box across stage; a letter falls out; he picks it up and opens it during speech.*) Call Miss Clara and tell her I'll breakfast with her. I can't get to town till eleven, now. And get something uncommonly good to eat, mind you. A bad temper needs good food.

Mary Jane. Yes, sir; I noticed, sir, how the old lady had a fine appetite.

Twitters (*severely*). Speak civilly of members of my family, if you expect to keep your place. (*Glancing at paper, which he has taken from envelope.*) Why, the damned old harridan.

Mary Jane. Yes, sir. (*Exit.*)

Twitters (*reading*). "Theophilus Twitters, Esq., to Grimsby & Weeper, florists. Funeral orders attended with despatch in the latest and tastiest styles. To one Christian resignation, roses, immortelles, etc., \$15. A prompt payment is requested." Then in pencil: "For the sake of our departed Sarah you will please meet this little account." This is the last straw. I'm a strong camel but my back breaks at this. I'll give orders that she shan't be let into the house. And as for this bill, here goes (*goes to table and writes*): "Grimsby & Weeper; sirs: I won't pay this rascally, swindling bill, or any other. T. Twitters." (*Rings bell, then sealing letter.*) That will settle Christian resignation, I reckon. (*Enter Charles.*)

Charles (*standing in door with handful of letters, timidly*). Mr. T-Twitters —

Twitters (*not looking up*). Come here.

Charles (*approaching timidly*). Yes, Mr. T-Twitters.

Twitters. Take this to the post and look sharp.

Charles. But I've just come from the post, sir.

Twitters. What's that to me? (*Looking up.*) Dear me, Charles, I thought you were my man. Seen the paper?

Charles. I've brought it in, sir.

Twitters (*seizing it*). How's Harshaw this morning?

Charles. Why, I never thought of looking, sir. If it had occurred to me that you'd have liked to know —

Twitters. 38 7-8! Three per cent. rise! I'm six thousand in pocket! (*With a sigh.*) You're a lucky dog, Charles; you don't tremble whenever you look at a stock-list.

Charles. No, sir; I don't seem to look at one, often. (*Nervous.*) You're surprised to see me at this hour, I suppose?

Twitters. Hadn't been — but now you mention it, I am.

Charles. You see, I happened in at the post-office, and I saw your mail, and I thought that you might like to have me leave it at your house on my way home.

Twitters (*laughing*). You're a sly dog, Charles. What time do I go to town?

Charles. Why, 9-20 I 'spose, sir.

Twitters (*pointing to watch*). At this moment it's 9-25, you young rascal, and you have the impudence to say that you came to see me. (*Enter Mary Jane.*)

Mary Jane. Did you ring, sir?

Twitters. Yes. Take this letter to the post, and look sharp (*handing letter which he has written*); and, I say, tell Miss Clara that there's a gentleman here that wants to see her. (*Exit Mary Jane.*)

Charles. Here are your letters, Mr. Twitters. I assure you —

Twitters. I like your little game, Charles, I like it. Perhaps Clara'll like it, too, you young Machiavelli. Now don't pretend you didn't come to see her. Six thousand in, by Jove. I must sell out Harshaw as soon as I get to town. Bottom's sure to fall out of it. (*Enter Clara with watering pot.*)

Clara. Good morning, papa dear, (*kisses him.*) Why, Dr. Squillcox, are you here?

Twitters. As if you didn't expect him.

Clara. How can you say such things, papa?

Charles. Yes, Mr. Twitters, it's most unjust —

Clara. If I had expected anybody, should I have brought in this great, heavy watering-pot?

Charles. Can't I hold it Miss Clara? (*takes it.*)

Clara. I was going to water my flowers in the garden.

Twitters. Go along, my dear: and go along with her, you rascal. (*Laughs. Exeunt Charles and Clara laughing.*)

Twitters (*rubbing his hands*). There they go. It does my heart good to think that my little Clara has such a good fellow to look after her; and that I can act as the ways and means committee. I'll take care that their love shan't fly out of the window. (*Opens letter.*) Here's the plumber's bill. Old Faucet will be rolling in his carriage soon. If Charles gets tired of medicine I'll set him up as a plumber. (*Opens another letter.*) Clara's milliner's bill. Egad! how Charles' eyes would open, if they tried love in a cottage on his professional outcome. Hollo! What's this? Shabby looking letter addressed in a shabby hand. Another bill, I suppose. No. What's this? (*Reads.*)

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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