

MRS. INCHBALD, LOUIS SÉBASTIEN
MERCIER, DESTOUCHES
NÉRICAULT

**NEXT DOOR
NEIGHBOURS: A
COMEDY; IN THREE
ACTS**

Louis Mercier

**Next Door Neighbours: A
Comedy; In Three Acts**

«Public Domain»

Mercier L. S.

Next Door Neighbours: A Comedy; In Three Acts / L. S. Mercier —
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Содержание

PROLOGUE,	5
DRAMATIS PERSONÆ	7
ACT I	8
SCENE I. An Antichamber at Sir George Splendorville's, adjoining a Ball-room	8
SCENE II. An Apartment, which denotes the Poverty of the Inhabitants. Henry and Eleanor discovered	17
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	23

Elizabeth Inchbald Next Door Neighbours: A Comedy; In Three Acts

PROLOGUE,

By T. VAUGHAN, Esq

SPOKEN BY MR. BANNISTER, JUN

To Puff, or not to Puff – that is the Question —
Puff by all means, say I, it helps digestion.
To prove my maxim true, pray read the Papers —
From *Quacks of State*, to those who cure the Vapours.

You'll find them, one and all, puff high their skill,
Tho' nine in ten, are oft'ner found to kill. —
Yet Puff's the word, which gives at least a name,
And oftener gains the *undeserving* Fame:
Or wherefore read we of *Lord Fanny's* Taste,
Of *me*— an Actor —*wonderfully chaste!*
And yet so squeamish is our Lady elf,
She'd rather die – than paragraph herself;
So fix'd on me – the *Prologue speaking Hack*,
To stop, with *Puff-direct*, the Critic Pack,

Who yelp, and foaming, bark from morn to night,
And when run hard—turn tail—then snap and bite;
Putting the timid Hare-like-Bard to flight. }
To such, the best and only Puff to hit, }
Is that which honest CANDOUR must admit,
A Female Scribbler is an harmless Wit;

And who so harmless as our present Bard,
Claiming no greater or distinct reward,
Than what from free Translation is her due,
Which here in fullest trust she leaves to you:
With this remark – Who own their Debts with pride,
Are well entitled to the Credit Side.
And as for those with whom she makes so free
They'll ne'er complain of English Liberty;
But glory to behold their Tinsel shine,
Through the rich Bullion of the English Line.

Fear then avaunt! Trust to a British Jury —
With them, an honest Verdict I'll ensure you:
Let Echo catch the sound – 'Tis Pratte¹ enacts,
You're *Judges of the Law, as well as Facts*.
On this she rests her Cause, and hopes to find,
As Friends, and *Next Door Neighbours*, you'll be kind;
At least, this only punishment ensue,
A Frown— and that's severe enough, from you.
Thus puff'd— I freely to the Court commit her,
Not doubting, as a Woman, you'll acquit her —

And now join issue, Sirs, without delay—
Judging from *written Evidence* our Play,
And—*send her a good Deliverance*, I pray.

}

¹ Vide, Earl Camden's celebrated and Constitutional Speech and Opinion on the subject of Libels.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

<i>MEN.</i>	
Sir George Splendorville	Mr. Palmer.
Mr. Manly	Mr. Kemble.
Mr. Blackman	Mr. Baddeley.
Mr. Lucre	Mr. R. Palmer.
Lord Hazard	Mr. Evatt.
Willford	Mr. Aickin.
Henry	Mr. Palmer, Jun.
Burly	Mr. Bannister, Jun.
<i>WOMEN.</i>	
Lady Caroline Seymour	Mrs. Brooks.
Lady Bridget Squander	Miss Heard.
Evans	Mrs. Edwards.
Eleanor	Mrs. Kemble.
Other Ladies, Gentlemen, Servants, &c.	
SCENE — London.	

ACT I

SCENE I. *An Antichamber at Sir George Splendorville's, adjoining a Ball-room*

Enter Bluntly, meeting a Servant in Livery

BLUNTLY

Come, come, is not every thing ready? Is not the ball-room prepared yet? It is past ten o'clock.

SERVANT

We have only to fix up the new chandelier.

BLUNTLY

I'll have no new chandelier.

SERVANT

My master said the last ball he gave, the company were in the dark.

BLUNTLY

And if you blind them with too much light, they will be in the dark still.

SERVANT

The musicians, sir, wish for some wine.

BLUNTLY

What, before the ball begins? No, tell them if they are tipsy at the end of it, it will be quite soon enough.

SERVANT

You are always so cross, Mr. Bluntly, when my master is going to have company.

BLUNTLY

Have not I a right to be cross? For while the whole house is in good humour, if there was not one person cross enough to take a little care, every thing would be wasted and ruined through extreme good temper. (*A man crosses the stage.*) Here, you – Mister – Pray are you the person who was sent with the chandelier?

SHOPMAN

Yes, sir.

BLUNTLY

Then please to take it back again – We don't want it.

SHOPMAN

What is your objection to it, sir?

BLUNTLY

It will cost too much.

SHOPMAN

Mr. Bluntly, all the trades-people are more frightened at you than at your master. – Sir George, Heaven bless him! never cares how much a thing costs.

BLUNTLY

That is, because he never cares whether he pays for it or not – but if he did, depend upon it he would be very particular. Tradesmen all wish to be paid for their ware, don't they?

SHOPMAN

Certainly, sir.

BLUNTLY

Then why will they force so many unnecessary things, and make so many extravagant charges as to put all power of payment out of the question?

Enter Evans: —The Tradesman goes off at the opposite Door

BLUNTLY

How do you do, Mrs. Evans? [*Sullenly*.

EVANS

What makes you sigh, Mr. Bluntly?

BLUNTLY

What makes you smile?

EVANS

To see all the grand preparations for the ball this evening. I anticipate the joy my lady will take here, and I smile for *her*.

BLUNTLY

And I sigh for my master. – I foresee all the bills that will be brought in, for this evening's expence, and I anticipate the sorrow it will one day be to *him*.

EVANS

But consider, Mr. Bluntly, your master has my lady's fortune to take.

BLUNTLY

Yes, but I consider he has your lady to take along with it; and I prophecy one will stick by him some time after the other is gone.

EVANS

For shame. – My lady, I have no doubt, will soon cure Sir George of his extravagance.

BLUNTLY

It will then be by taking away the means. – Why, Lady Caroline is as extravagant as himself.

EVANS

You are mistaken. – She never gives routs, masquerades, balls, or entertainments of any kind.

BLUNTLY

But she constantly goes to them whenever she is invited.

EVANS

That, I call but a slight imprudence. – She has no wasteful indiscretions like Sir George. For instance, she never makes a lavish present.

BLUNTLY

No, but she *takes* a lavish present, as readily as if she did.

EVANS

And surely you cannot call that imprudence?

BLUNTLY

No, I call it something worse.

EVANS

Then, although she loves gaming to distraction, and plays deep, yet she never loses.

BLUNTLY

No, but she always wins – and *that* I call something worse.

[A loud rapping at the street-door.]

EVANS

Here's the company. Will you permit me, Mr. Bluntly, to stand in one corner, and have a peep at them?

BLUNTLY

If you please. (*Rapping again.*) What spirit there is in that, Rat, tat, tat, tat. – And what life, frolic, and joy, the whole house is going to experience except myself. As for me, I am ready to cry at the thoughts of it all.

[Exit.]

Enter Lady Caroline

LADY CAROLINE

Here, the first of the company. I am sorry for it. (*Evans comes forward.*) Evans, what has brought you hither?

EVANS

I came, my lady, to see the preparations making on *your* account – for it is upon your account alone, that Sir George gives this grand *fête*.

LADY CAROLINE

Why, I do flatter myself it is. – But where is he? What is it o'clock? – It was impossible to stay at the stupid opera. – How do I look? I once did intend to wear those set of diamonds Sir George presented me with the other morning – but then, I reflected again, that if —

EVANS

Ah, my lady, what a charming thing to have such a lover – Sir George prevents every wish — he must make the best of husbands.

LADY CAROLINE

And yet my father wishes to break off the marriage – he talks of his prodigality – and, certainly, Sir George lives above his income.

EVANS

But then, Madam, so does every body else.

LADY CAROLINE

But Sir George ought undoubtedly to change his conduct, and not be thus continually giving balls and entertainments – and inviting to his table acquaintance, that not only come to devour his dinners and suppers, but him.

EVANS

And there are people malicious enough to call your ladyship one of his devourers too.

LADY CAROLINE

As a treaty of marriage is so nearly concluded between us, I think, Mrs. Evans, I am at liberty to visit Sir George, or to receive his presents, without having my character, or my delicacy called in question. (*A loud rapping.*) The company are coming: is it not strange he is not here to receive them.

[Exit Evans.

Enter two Ladies and a Gentleman, who curtsy and bow to Lady Caroline. – Sir George enters at the opposite door, magnificently dressed

SIR GEORGE

Ladies, I entreat your pardon; dear Lady Caroline excuse me. I have been in the country all the morning, and have had scarce time to return to town and dress for your reception.

[Another rapping.

Enter Mr. Lucre, Lord Hazard, Lady Bridget Squander, &c.

SIR GEORGE

Dear Lucre, I am glad to see you.

MR. LUCRE

My dear Sir George, I had above ten engagements this evening, but they all gave place to your invitation.

SIR GEORGE

Thank you. – My dear Lady Bridget —

LADY BRIDGET

It is impossible to resist an invitation from the most polished man alive. (*Sir George bows.*) What a superb dress! (*in his hearing, as he turns away*) and what an elegant deportment.

MR. LUCRE

[After speaking apart with Sir George.

No, I am not in a state to take any part at Pharo – I am ruin'd. – Would you believe it Sir George, I am not worth a farthing in the world.

SIR GEORGE

Yes, I believed it long ago.

MR. LUCRE

Now we are on that subject – could you lend me a hundred pounds?

SIR GEORGE

[Taking out his pocket-book.

I have about me, only this bill for two hundred.

MR. LUCRE

That will do as well – I am not circumstantial. (*Takes it.*) And my dear Sir George command my purse at any time – all it contains, will ever be at your service.

SIR GEORGE

I thank you.

MR. LUCRE

Nay, though I have no money of my own, yet you know I can always raise friends – and by heaven! my dear Sir George, I often wish to see you reduced to my circumstances, merely to prove how much I could, and *would*, do to serve you.

SIR GEORGE

I sincerely thank you.

MR. LUCRE

And one can better ask a favour for one's friend than for one's-self, you know: for when one wants to borrow money on one's own account, there are so many little delicacies to get the better of – such as I felt just now. – I was as pale as death, I dare say, when I asked you for this money – did not you perceive I was?

SIR GEORGE

I can't say I did.

MR. LUCRE

But you must have observed I hesitated, and looked very foolish.

SIR GEORGE

I thought for my part, that I looked as foolish. – But I hope I did not hesitate.

MR. LUCRE

Nor ever will, when a friend applies to you, I'll answer for it – Nor ever shall a friend hesitate when you apply.

LORD HAZARD

[Taking Sir George aside.]

The obligations I am under to you for extricating me from that dangerous business —

SIR GEORGE

Never name it.

LORD HAZARD

Not only name it, Sir George, but shortly I hope to return the kindness; and, if I do but live —

SIR GEORGE

[To the company.]

Permit me to conduct you to the next apartment.

LADY CAROLINE

Most willingly, Sir George. I was the first who arrived; which proves my eagerness to dance.

SIR GEORGE

[Aside to her.]

But let me hope, passion for dancing was not the only one, that caused your impatience.

[As the company move towards the ball-room, Mr. Lucre and Lord Hazard come forward.]

MR. LUCRE

Oh! there never was such a man in the world as the master of this house; there never was such a friendly, generous, noble heart; he has the best heart in the world, and the best taste in dress.

[The company Exeunt, and the music is heard to begin.]

SCENE II. *An Apartment, which denotesthe Poverty of the Inhabitants. Henry and Eleanor discovered*

ELEANOR

It is very late and very cold too, brother; and yet we have neither of us heart to bid each other good night.

HENRY

No – beds were made for rest.

ELEANOR

And that noise of carriages and link-boys at Sir George Splendorville's, next door, would keep us awake, if our sorrows did not.

HENRY

The poor have still more to complain of, when chance throws them thus near the rich, – it forces upon their minds a comparison might drive them to despair, if —

ELEANOR

– If they should not have good sense enough to reflect, that all this bustle and show of pleasure, may fall very short of happiness; as all the distress *we* feel, has not yet, thank Heaven, reached to misery.

HENRY

What do you call it then?

ELEANOR

A trial; sent to make us patient.

HENRY

It may make you so, but cannot me. Good morning to you.

[Going.]

ELEANOR

Nay, it is night yet. Where are you going?

HENRY

I don't know. – To take a walk. – The streets are not more uncomfortable than this place, and scarcely colder.

ELEANOR

Oh, my dear brother! I cannot express half the uneasiness I feel when you part from me, though but for the shortest space.

HENRY

Why?

ELEANOR

Because I know your temper; you are impatient under adversity; you rashly think providence is unkind; and you would snatch those favours, which are only valuable when bestowed.

HENRY

What do you mean?

ELEANOR

Nay, do not be angry; but every time you go out into this tempting town, where superfluous riches continually meet the eye of the poor, I tremble lest you should forfeit your honesty for that, which Heaven decreed should not belong to you.

HENRY

And if I did, you would despise and desert me?

ELEANOR

No: not desert you; for I am convinced you would only take, to bring to me; but this is to assure you, I do not want for any thing.

HENRY

Not want? – Nor does my father?

ELEANOR

Scarcely, while we visit him. Every time he sees us we make him happy; but he would never behold us again if we behaved unworthy of him.

HENRY

What! banish us from a prison?

ELEANOR

And although it is a prison, you could not be happy under such a restriction.

HENRY

Happy! – When was I happy last?

ELEANOR

Yesterday, when your father thanked you for your kindness to him. Did we not all three weep with affection for each other? and was not that happiness?

HENRY

It was – nor will I give up such satisfaction, for any enticement that can offer. – Be contented, Eleanor, – for your sake and my father's, I will be honest. – Nay, more, – I will be scrupulously proud – and that line of conduct which my own honour could not force me to follow, my love to *you* and *him*, shall compel me to. – When, through necessity, I am tempted to plunder, your blushes and my father's anguish shall hold my hand. – And when I am urged through impatience, to take away my own life, your lingering death and his, shall check the horrid suggestion, and I will live for you.

ELEANOR

Then do not ever trust yourself away, at least from one of us.

HENRY

Dear sister! do you imagine that your power is less when separated from me? Do you suppose I think less frequently on my father and his dismal prison, because we are not always together? Oh! no! he comes even more forcibly to my thoughts in his absence – and then, more bitterly do I feel his misery, than while the patient old man, before my eyes, talks to me of his consolations; his internal comforts from a conscience pure, a mind without malice, and a heart, where every virtue occupy a place. – Therefore, do not fear that I shall forget either him or you, though I might possibly forget myself.

[Exit.]

ELEANOR

If before him I am cheerful, yet to myself I must complain. [*Weeps*] And that sound of festivity at the house adjoining is insupportable! especially when I reflect that a very small portion of what will be wasted there only this one night, would be sufficient to give my dear father liberty.

[*A rapping at the door of her chamber, on the opposite entrance.*]

ELEANOR

Who's there?

MR. BLACKMAN

Open the door. [*Without.*]

ELEANOR

The voice of our landlord. [*Goes to the door.*]

Is it you, Mr. Blackman?

BLACKMAN

Yes, open the door. [*Rapping louder.*]

[*She opens it: Blackman enters, followed by Bluntly.*]

BLACKMAN

What a time have you made me wait! – And in the name of wonder, why do you lock your door? Have you any thing to lose? Have not you already sold all the furniture you brought hither? And are you afraid of being stolen yourself?

[*Eleanor retires to the back of the Stage.*]

BLUNTLY

Is this the chamber?

BLACKMAN

Yes, Sir, yes, Mr. Bluntly, this is it.

[*Blackman assumes a very different tone of voice in speaking to Bluntly and Eleanor; to the one he is all submissive humility, to the other all harshness.*]

BLUNTLY

This! [*Contemptuously*].

BLACKMAN

Why yes, sir, – this is the only place I have left in my own house, since your master has been pleased to occupy that next door, while his own magnificent one has been repairing. – Lock yourself up, indeed! (*Looking at Eleanor*.) – You have been continually asking me for more rooms, Mr. Bluntly, and have not I made near half a dozen doors already from one house to the other, on purpose to accommodate your good family. – Upon my honour, I have not now a single chamber but what I have let to these lodgers, and what I have absolute occasion for myself.

BLUNTLY

And if you do put yourself to a little inconvenience, Mr. Blackman, surely my master —

BLACKMAN

Your master, Mr. Bluntly, is a very good man – a very generous man – and I hope at least he has found me a very lucky one; for good luck is all the recommendation which I, in my humble station, aspire to – and since I have been Sir George's attorney, I have gained him no less than two law-suits.

BLUNTLY

I know it. I know also that you have lost him four.

BLACKMAN

We'll drop the subject. – And in regard to this room, sir, it does not suit, you say?

BLUNTLY

No, for I feel the cold wind blow through every crevice.

BLACKMAN

But suppose I was to have it put a little into repair? That window, for instance, shall have a pane or two of glass put in; the cracks of the door shall be stopt up; and then every thing will have a very different appearance.

BLUNTLY

And why has not this been done before?

BLACKMAN

Would you have me be laying out my money, while I only let the place at a paltry price, to people who I am obliged to threaten to turn into the streets every quarter, before I can get my rent from them?

BLUNTLY

Is that the situation of your lodgers at present?

BLACKMAN

Yes. – But they made a better appearance when they first came, or I had not taken such persons to live thus near to your master.

BLUNTLY

That girl (*looking at* Eleanor) seems very pretty – and I dare say my master would not care if he was nearer to her.

BLACKMAN

Pshaw, pshaw – she is a poor creature – she is in great distress. She is misery itself.

BLUNTLY

I feel quite charmed with misery. – Who belongs to her?

BLACKMAN

A young man who says he is her brother – very likely he is not – but that I should not enquire about, if they could pay my rent. If people will pay me, I don't care what they are. (*Addressing himself to*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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