

**HENRY
FIELDING**

THE OLD
DEBAUCHEES,
A COMEDY

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The Old Debauchees. A Comedy

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The Old Debauchees. A Comedy:

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The Old Debauchees.

A Comedy

PROLOGUE

Spoken by Mr. *William Mills*

*I Wish, with all my Heart, the Stage and Town
Would both agree to cry all Prologues down;
That we, no more oblig'd to say or sing,
Might drop this useless necessary Thing:
No more with aukward Strut, before the Curtain,
Chaunt out some Rhimes – there's neither good nor hurt in.*

*What is this Stuff the Poets make us deal in,
But some old worn-out Jokes of their Retailing:
From Sages of our own, or former Times,
Transvers'd from Prose, perhaps transpros'd from Rhimes.*

*How long the Tragick Muse her Station kept,
How Guilt was humbl'd, and how Tyrants wept,
Forgetting still how often Hearers slept.*

}

Perhaps, for Change, you, now and then, by Fits,
Are told that Criticks are the Bane of Wits;
How they turn Vampyres, being dead and damn'd,
And with the Blood of living Bards are cramm'd:
That Poets thus tormented die, and then
The Devil gets in them, and they suck agen.

*Thus modern Bards, like Bays, their Prologues frame,
For this, and that, and every Play the same,
Which you, most justly, neither praise nor blame.*

As something must be spoke, no matter what;
No Friends are now by Prologues lost or got;
By such Harangues we raise nor Spleen, nor Pity —
Thus ends this idle, but important Ditty.

Dramatis Personæ

MEN

Old Laroon. Mr. Shepard.

Young Laroon. Mr. Mills, Junior.

Father Martin. Mr. Cibber, Junior.

Old Jourdain. Mr. Roberts.

WOMEN

Isabel. Miss Raftor.

Beatrice. Miss Williams.

SCENE *THOULON*

ACT I

SCENE I

SCENE, *Mr. Jourdain's*

Isabel, Beatrice

Isabel

A Nunnery! Ha, ha, ha! And is it possible, my dear *Beatrice*, you can intend to sacrifice your Youth and Beauty, to go out of the World as soon as you come into it!

Bea. No one, my dear *Isabel*, can sacrifice too much or too soon to Heaven.

Isa. Pshaw! Heaven regards Hearts and not Faces, and an old Woman will be as acceptable a Sacrifice as a young one.

Bea. It is possible you may come to a better Understanding, and value the World as little as I do.

Isa. As you say, it is possible when I can enjoy it no longer, I may; nay, I do not care if I promise you when I grow old and ugly, I'll come and keep you Company: But this I am positive, till the World is weary of me, I never shall be weary of the World.

Bea. What can a Woman of Sense see in it worth her valuing?

Isa. Oh! ten thousand pretty things! Equipage, Cards, Musick, Plays, Balls, Flattery, Visits, and that prettiest thing of all pretty things, a pretty Fellow – I rather wonder what Charms a Woman of any Spirit can fancy in a Nunnery, in watching, working, praying, and sometimes, I am afraid, wishing for other Company than that of an old fusty Friar – Oh! 'tis a delightful State, when every Man one sees, instead of tempting us to Sin, is to rebuke us for them.

Bea. Such Sentiments as these would indeed make you very uneasy – but believe me, Child, you would soon bring yourself to hate Mankind; fasting and praying are the best Cures in the World for these violent Passions.

Isa. On my Conscience I should want neither; if the continual Sight of a Set of dirty Priests would not bring me to abhor Mankind, I dare swear nothing could.

SCENE II

Old Laroon, Isabel, Beatrice

Old Lar. Good-morrow, my little Wag-tail – my Grashopper, my Butterfly. Ods! you little Baggage, you look as full of – as full of Love and Sport and Wantonness – I wish I was a young Fellow again – Oh! that I was but five and twenty for thy sake. Where's my Boy? What, has not he been with you, has not he serenaded you? – Odsheart – I never let his Mother sleep for a Month before I married her.

Isa. Indeed!

Old Lar. No Madam, nor for a Month afterwards neither. The young Fellows of this Age are nothing, mere Butterflies, to those of ours – Odsheart I remember the Time, when I could have taken a Hop, Step, and Jump over the Steeple of *Notre Dame*.

Bea. I fancy the Sparks of your Age had Wings, Sir.

Old Lar. Wings, you little Baggage, no – but they had – they had Limbs, like Elephants, and as strong they were as *Sampson*, and as swift as – Why, I have my self run down a Stag in a fair Chace, and eat him afterwards for my Dinner. But come, where is my old Neighbour, my old Friend, my old *Jourdain*?

Isa. At his Devotions, I suppose, this is the Hour he generally

employs in them.

Old Lar. This Hour! ay, all Hours. I dare swear he spends more Time in them, than all the Priests in *Toulon*. Well, give him his due, he was wicked as long as he could be so, and when he could sin no longer, why he began to repent that he had sinned at all. Oh! there is nothing so devout as an old Whoremaster.

Bea. I fancy then it will be shortly Time for you to think of it, Sir!

Old Lar. Ay, Madam, about some thirty or forty Years hence it may – Odsheart! I am but in the prime of my Years yet: And if it was not for a saucy young Rascal who looks me in the Face and calls me Father, might make a very good Figure among the Beaus. But tho' I am not so young in Years, I am in Constitution as any of them; and I don't question but to live to see a Son and a great Grandson both born on the same Day.

Isa. You will excuse this Lady, Mr. *Laroon*, who is going to retire so much earlier —

Old Lar. Retire! – Then it is with a young Fellow, I hope.

Isa. Into a Cloister, I assure you.

Old Lar. A Cloister! – Why, Madam, if you have a mind to hang your self at the Year's End; would it not be better to spend your Time in Matrimony than in a Nunnery? Don't let a Set of rascally Priests put strange Notions in your Head. Take my Word for it, and I am a very honest Fellow, there are no Raptures worth a Louse, but those in the Arms of a brisk young Cavalier. Of all the Actions of my Youth, there are none I reflect on with so much

Pleasure as having burnt half a Dozen Nunneries, and delivered several hundred Virgins out of Captivity.

Bea. Oh! Villany! unheard of Villany!

Isa. Unheard of till this Moment I dare swear.

Old Lar. Out of which Number there are at present nine Countesses, three Dutchesses, and a Queen, who owe their Liberty and their Promotion to this Arm.

SCENE III

Old Laroon, Young Laroon, Isabel, Beatrice

Old Lar. You are a fine Spark truly to let your Father visit your Mistress before you – 'Sdeath! I believe you are no Son of mine. Where have you been, Sir? What have you been doing, Sir, hey?

Y. Lar. Sir, I have been at my Devotions.

Old Lar. At your Devotions! nay, then you are no Son of mine, that's certain. Is not this the Shrine you are to offer up at, Sirrah! Is not here the Altar you are to officiate at? – Sirrah! you have no Blood of mine in you. I believe you are the Bastard of some travelling *English* Alderman, and must have come into the World with a Custard in your Mouth.

Y. Lar. I hope, Madam, you will allow my Excuse, tho' the old Gentleman here will not.

Old Lar. Old Gentleman! very fine! Sirrah! I'll convince you I am a young Gentleman; I'll marry to-night, and make you a Brother before you are a Father; I'll teach you to thrust him out of the World that thrust you into it – Madam, have no more to say to the ungracious Dog.

Y. Lar. That will be a sure way to quit all Obligations between us; for the Happiness I propose in this Lady, is the chief Reason why I should thank you for bringing me into the World.

Old Lar. What's that you say, Sir; say that again, Sir.

Y. Lar. I was only thanking you, Sir, for desiring this Lady to take from me all I esteem on Earth.

Old Lar. Well enough that! I begin to think him my own again. I have made that very Speech to half the Women in *Paris*.

SCENE IV

To them Martin

Mart. Peace be with you all, Good People.

Old Lar. Peace cannot stay long in any Place where a Priest comes.

[Aside.

Mart. Daughter, I am ready to receive your Confession —

Old Lar. Ay, ay, she has a fine Parcel of sinful Thoughts to

answer for, I warrant her.

Mart. Mr. *Laroon*, you are too much inclined to Slander, I must reprove you for it. My Daughter's Thoughts are as pure as a Saint's.

Old Lar. As any Saint's in Christendom within a Day of Matrimony.

Mart. Within a Day of Matrimony; it is too quick; I have not yet had sufficient Time to prepare her Mind for that solemn Sacrament.

Old Lar. Prepare her Mind for a young Fellow; prepare your Mind for a Bishoprick.

Mart. Sir, there are Ceremonies requisite, I shall be as expeditious as possible, but the Church has Rules.

Old Lar. Sir, you may be as expeditious or as slow as you please, but I will not have my Boy disappointed of his Happiness one Day, for all the Rules in *Europe*.

SCENE V

Martin, Isabel

Mart. I shall bring this Haughtiness to a Penance, you may not like. Well, my dear Daughter, I hope your Account is not long. You have not many Articles since our last Reckoning.

Isa. I wish you do not think it so, Father. First, telling nine Lyes at the Opera the other Night to Mr. *Laroon*; yesterday talk'd during the whole Mass to a young Cavalier, [*he groans.*] Nay, if you groan already, I shall make you groan more before I have done; last Night cheated at Cards, scandalized three of my Acquaintance, went to Bed without saying my Prayers, and dreamt of Mr. *Laroon*.

Mart. Oh! – Tell me the Particulars of that Dream.

Isa. Nay, Father, that I must be excus'd.

Mart. Modesty at Confession is as unseasonable as in Bed, and your Mind should appear as naked to your Confessor, as your Person to your Husband.

Isa. I thought he embraced me with the utmost Tenderness.

Mart. But were you pleas'd therewith?

Isa. You know, Father, a Lye now would be the greatest of Sins. I was not displeas'd I assure you. But I have often heard you say, there is no Sin in Love.

Mart. No, in Love it self there is not: Love is not *Malum in se*. Nor in the Excess is there sometimes any: but then it must be rightly plac'd, must be directed to a proper Object. The Love a Daughter bears her Confessor is no doubt not only innocent, but extremely laudable.

Isa. Yes, but that – that is another sort of Love, you know.

Mart. You are deceiv'd, there is but one sort of Love which is justifiab'l, or, indeed, desirab'l.

Isa. I hope my Love for *Laroon* is that.

Mart. That I know not, I wish it may; however, I have some Dispute as yet remaining with me concerning it; 'till that be satisfied, it will be improper for you to proceed any farther in the Affair. All the Penance, therefore, I shall enjoin you on this Confession, is to defer your Marriage one Week; by which time I shall have resolved within my self whether you shall marry him at all.

Isa. Not marry him at all? Sure, Father, you are not in earnest.

Mart. I never jest on these Occasions.

Isa. What Reason can you have?

Mart. My Reasons may not be so ripe for your Ears at present. But, perhaps, better things are designed for you.

Isa. A Fidlestick! I tell you, Father, better things cannot be designed for me. I suppose, you have found out some old Fellow with twenty Livres a Year more in his Power; but I can assure you, if I marry not *Laroon*, I'll not marry any.

Mart. Perhaps you are not designed to marry any. Let me feel your Pulse – Extremely feverish.

Isa. You are enough to put any one in a Fever. I was to have been married to-morrow to a pretty Fellow, and now I must defer my Marriage, 'till you have consider'd whether I shall marry at all or no.

Mart. Have you any more Sins to confess!

Isa. Sins! – You have put all my Sins out of my Head, I think.

Mart. Benedicite – [*crossing himself.*] Daughter, you shall see me soon again, for great things are in Agitation; At present, I

leave you to your Prayers.

SCENE V

Isabel alone

Isa. Sure never poor Maid had more need of Prayers: but you have left me no great Stomach to them. Great things are in Agitation! What can he mean? It must be so – Some old liquorish Rogue with a Title, or a larger Estate hath a mind to supplant my dear *Laroon*.

SCENE VI

Young Laroon, Isabel

Yo. Lar. My *Isabel*, my Sweet! – how painfully do I count each tedious Hour, till I can call you mine?

Isa. Indeed, you are like to count many more tedious Hours than you imagine.

Yo. Lar. Ha! What means my Love?

Isa. I would not have your Wishes too impatient, that's all; but if you will wait a Week, you shall know whether I intend to

marry you or not.

Yo. Lar. And is this possible? Can Words like these fall from *Isabel's* sweet Lips; can she be false, inconstant, perjured?

Isa. Oh! do not discharge such a Volley of terrible Names upon me before you are certain I deserve them; doubt only whether I can be obedient to my Confessor, and guess the rest.

Yo. Lar. Can he have enjoined you to be perjured, by Heaven it would be sinful to obey him.

Isa. Be satisfied, if I prevail with my self to obey him in this Week's Delay, I will carry my Obedience no farther.

Yo. Lar. Oh! to what Happiness have those dear Words restor'd me. I am again my self: for while the Possession of thee is sure, tho' distant, there is in that dear Hope, more Transport than any other actual Enjoyment can afford.

Isa. Well adieu, and to cram you quite full with Hope (since you like the Food) I here promise you, that the Commands of all the Priests in *France* shall not force me to marry another. That is, Sir, I will either marry you or die a Maid, and I have no violent Inclination to the latter, on the Word of a Virgin.

SCENE VII

Young Laroon solus

Whether a violent Hatred to my Father, or an inordinate Love for Mischief, hath set the Priest on this Affair, I know not. Perhaps it is the former – for the old Gentleman hath the Happiness of being universally hated by every Priest in *Toulon*– Let a Man abuse a Physician, he makes another Physician his Friend, let him rail at a Lawyer, another will plead his Cause gratis; if he libel this Courtier, that Courtier receives him into his Bosom: but let him once attack a Hornet or a Priest, the whole Nest of Hornets, and the whole Regiment of Black-guards are sure to be upon him.

SCENE VIII

Old Laroon laughing, Young Laroon

Yo. Lar. You are merry, Sir.

Old. Lar. Merry, Sir! Ay, Sir! I am merry, Sir. Would you have your Father sad, you Rascal? Have you a mind to bury him

in his Youth?

Yo. Lar. Pardon me, Sir, I rather wished to know the happy Occasion of your Mirth.

Old Lar. The Occasion of my Mirth, Sir, is the saddest Sight that ever Mortal beheld.

Yo. Lar. A very odd Occasion indeed.

Old Lar. Very odd truly. It is the Sight of an old honest Whoremaster in a Fit of Despair, and a damned Rogue of a Priest riding him to the Devil.

Yo. Lar. Ay, Sir, but I have seen a more melancholy Sight.

Old Lar. Ha! what can that be?

Yo. Lar. A fine young Lady in a Fit of Love, and a Priest keeping her from her Lover.

Old Lar. How?

Yo. Lar. The Explanation of which is, that Father Martin hath put off our Match for a Week.

Old. Lar. Put off your Match with *Isabel!*

Yo. Lar. Even so, Sir.

Old Lar. Well I never have made a Hole in a Gown yet, I never have tapped a Priest: but if I don't let out some reverend Blood before the Sun sets, may I never See him rise again. I'll carbonade the Villain, I'll make a Ragout for the Devil's Supper of him.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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