

Boss for Three Days.

Adapted for the Stage
by
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Scene 1: Market place in front of tavern

Messenger

[1 - 11]

Listen, you all, and be quiet. People say that if a man is married to a bad woman he never gets his way. Again and again he has to suffer the same thing because, as is also well known, there is no way that a man can win with a bad wife. That's certainly true. We'll demonstrate this clearly right here in front of your eyes. Now be quiet and patient because we'll start our play here right away.

[Catcalls, complaints, jeers from audience]

Neighbor [Imbrecht]

[12 - 41]

We'll put on a really shitty play for you here, right up here above your head. May God pour shame and ridicule down on you. Afterwards, you just go home and get mixed up in an affair like this one.

[Points to someone in the audience]

I bet he's got a mess exactly like this at home which he'll find tomorrow morning.

[Pointing to Jan and Bette at their home]

That idiot - he had to go and interfere! And couldn't he have kept quiet? It's because of him that we are going to play here, right now, today, and all because of his foolish drivel. Now I'll go

to the pub. I'll sit by the tap and drink a good pitcher by the fire.

Pour it, pour the beer! Fill it to the top, hurry up now! A curse on anyone who holds back today! I'm going to drink without worrying. If I'm alive today, I could die tomorrow! Let's see, can't I handle this? Hmmm, this really smells good, by St. John! And now I know how good it tastes all right!

[Jeers from audience]

Look, how those people are standing around and gaping. Didn't you ever see people before? Do you want to buy me? Seems to me you don't have to go far to catch some fools without a net. You could catch more people here than sparrows. Aw, by St. Nick's buns, just look at those gapers! In the meantime I'm going to have a drink.

[Jeers]

Bah! What do you think, is it all right with you? Today you're not going to see a different play, it's no use standing around here waiting for one.

[Jan and Bette can be seen in their house; he is helping her with winding wool thread into a ball]

Wife [Bette]

[42 - 45]

What the hell have you done now! Here, you've wound up the thread in a complete mess! I'll give you a good hiding, because no matter what you

do, you do it all wrong.

Neighbor [Imbrecht]

[46 - 51]

[To audience]

Aw, you all may as well go and get cushions for everyone's feet and make yourselves comfortable. Holy Mary, mother and sweet virgin, I tell you, you don't have any shame. Take a good look at me! Do you think I'm a skinny scarecrow? I've never heard of such gawking.

Scene 2, Tavern

[Jan comes from his house to join Imbrecht in the tavern.]

Jan

[52 - 53]

Neighbor, you seem upset. Is something bothering you?

Neighbor [Imbrecht]

[54 - 57]

Don't you see those people there? How they stand there and stare at me and make fun of me? They act like they have never seen a human being before. Look, dear neighbor, just look at them!

Jan

[58 - 71]

Neighbor, if that's all that bothers you, then I don't feel very sorry for you. By God, neighbor, you can complain in comfort. Because, if you had left a wife like mine at home, I bet you'd quickly forget these people you are so mad at now. Oh, neighbor, neighbor, neighbor, if you only knew how those of us suffer who have no clothes, no property, no money, and on top of that have a bad wife at home! We suffer the same misery as if we were plunged into the deepest hell.

Neighbor [Imbrecht]

[72 - 73]

Neighbor, I'm your buddy. Tell me what's bothering you. I really want to know.

Jan

[74 - 117]

Neighbor, do you know what hurts me? As you know very well, I have a bad wife who always cusses me out and orders me around. Every evening she swears at me at least seven times, so much so that I think I'm going to die. And if I defend myself when she hits me, she hits me even harder. It's really very bad. And if I try cajoling her with flattery she still won't stop. Neighbor, that isn't even the worst of it! Because there isn't a day or an hour when she doesn't make my life miserable. This is an ordeal without end. How can I live in such misery! How can any wife be so bad! Neighbor, you know my situation. I like drinking in the tavern, but then she is forever following me there and cursing at me, and I can't get away from her. Embarrassed and followed by catcalls, I'm forced to hurry home with her. Then she beats and hits me until I think my ribs will crack. I'm sure she would leave me in peace if I took her along drinking with me. She doesn't mind pouring for herself and drinking as long as she is thirsty. She wouldn't stop, even if she were ready to burst, until she has licked the last drop from the bottom of the drinking cup. And if she doesn't have a drinking cup, then she puts the whole pitcher to her mouth and doesn't stop until she sees bottom. Neighbor, with all of this I am dishonored. If I could find an honorable way to make her shut up and get myself some peace, I would be a lord for the rest of my life. I thought it a great idea if I gave her a petticoat or a nice piece of cloth for a skirt. Maybe then she would leave me in peace. If I could have three days of peace, maybe she would like it so much that it could last six or seven months, maybe even for the rest of our lives. Well, I'll try cajoling her out of her bad temper with flattery.

Neighbor [Imbrecht]

[118 - 137]

Dear Jan, I'm sorry that you have such battles. But I swear by St. Nick, Jan, we have to put up with it for the sake of domestic peace and sometimes keep quiet altogether, even if it goes against the grain. But, for sure, I'm sorry about your suffering. Well, some women like to be coaxed with flattery, others want to be kept happy with gifts, some need to be yelled at, and some need to be beaten black and blue with a good stick. And even after all of that they don't improve and stay just as bad. Here's my best advice: if you can afford it, flatter her with gifts, and at all times speak to her in a friendly manner. Maybe then she'll lose her wickedness. Wives who can never be satisfied are really nasty. Neighbor, do as I tell you. It seems like it might work.

Jan

[138 - 141]

Gladly, neighbor, right away. Goodbye, I'll go right now.

[Leaves timidly]

Scene 3: Jan's house

[Jan enters timidly.]

Now let's see how she receives me when she sees me coming home.

Bette

[142 - 155]

[To the audience]

Just look at him! Holy Mary, damn him! Goddamn him, no matter where he goes, he makes me suffer so much with his drinking night and day. I have a right to wail, "Oh me, oh my, that I ever took him on as a husband."

[To Jan]

Now go, you goddamn idiot, and get water; and be quick about it, or I'll stomp on you with my feet. Just you wait, you'll be sorry that you ever met me.

[To the audience]

He's so drunk that he can't stand on his feet, that dirty good-for-nothing!

[To Jan]

Just get out of my sight!

Jan

[156 - 157]

My dear Bette, calm down! I promise I haven't had a drop yet.

Bette

[158 - 163]

You would lie, even if they would kill you for it. Do you think I don't smell the liquor? You are standing there raving mad like a chicken with its head cut off. Go and do as I tell you, or I'll give you such a beating that your ribs will crack.

Jan

[164 - 179]

Now my dear Bette, listen to me. If I could get your love, by God, it could benefit both of us. If you would let me be the complete boss of the house for just three days, and then never again, I would give you such wonderful jewelry that there wouldn't be a woman in the neighborhood who would leave her husband in peace. They'd all be jealous of you for years to come. And I'd give you a beautiful fur of good quality which I bought from Peter. He brought it for me from England. You shall have it all if you let me be the boss for three days. I would be very reasonable and not

take advantage of you.

Bette

[180 - 183]

[Aside to the audience]

To hell with the furs! You bought them for another belly! By God, he'll tell me yet who he really bought them for.

Jan

[184 - 185]

My dear love, that's all lies. Take it now, and do as I tell you.

Bette

[186 - 191]

[To the audience]

All right, I'll take it, because it would hurt me if he gave it to some other slut. I really should say to hell with the furs, because someone could find out that I have sold myself like this.

[To Jan]

So let's make this a secret pact and tell nobody about it.

Jan

[192 - 193]

Oh no, on my honor, I'll keep absolutely quiet about it.

Bette

[194 - 197]

All right, now do your will and be lord and master for three days, and then never again.

[To the audience]

All the same, it will feel like a long time to me.

Jan

[198 - 223]

Wow! Now I'm the lord of everything after all! Hold my coat tails! Go and scrub and wash out the barrels! Where are they now, those show-off neighbors of mine? You know what? I'm going to get a drink now. If I see any of them, I'll wink to them, because I'm going beer drinking, while they are sitting at home by their fires now, winding and spinning thread, those low-life idiots. They won't dare get a drink because of their wives, who scold and yell at them. Now my wife would rather break both her legs before she did that to me. Because I would teach her such a lesson that others could learn from it. To hell with those cuckolds, who let themselves be dominated by their wives. I can see there is nothing to be gained staying here. I'm going drinking without a worry on my mind. And even if I don't come back before tomorrow, my wife will not complain about it. She scrubs, she cleans, she spins, she sews, and she does her chores around the house. There she sits, even quieter than a mouse and does her very best. I do believe that no one has ever seen a better wife. Now I want to go drinking till I fall down drunk.

Scene 4: The tavern

Neighbor [Imbrecht]

[224 - 225]

Well, well, well, neighbor! Drinking? Hey, tell me now, neighbor, how did you make out?

Jan

[226 - 227]

I'll tell you everything without leaving out a word. But first, I just have to have a drink.

Neighbor [Imbrecht]

[228 - 229]

Take the mug. I'll pour for you. Drink it all now.

It's good beer.

Jan

[230 - 231]

Aah! God has brought me here. This beer is great for my health.

Neighbor [Imbrecht]

[232 - 233]

Neighbor, tell me now, what did your wife say? If I knew all about it, maybe it could help me, too.

Jan

[234 - 253]

Neighbor, I'll tell you straight out, because you are my best friend. I've cast off all my troubles as you'll be able to see even today. You'll have to come and eat dinner at my house, you and your better half. And you'll be able to observe how - with loving kindness - I have become the absolute lord of the house. Now I can go drinking just as I want, without being yelled at by my wife. I've been married now for twenty-five years, and never had a moment's rest at home. Oh, how I suffered. How I kept quiet. Up till now! And that's why I'm asking you, come and eat dinner right away. Now don't forget! Because I am now the complete master of the house. Come quickly now. Don't dilly-dally.

Neighbor [Imbrecht]

[254 - 255]

Go and set the table. I'll come. I wouldn't miss this for the world.

Jan

[256 - 257]

I'll go and get the table ready, You follow me right away, and bring Lijsbet along.

Neighbor [Imbrecht]

[258 - 269]

Gladly, neighbor, I'll hurry up.

Scene 5: Imbrecht's house or the street

Lijsbet, Lijsbet! You'll have to come along with me. Our neighbor Jan has invited us to come and eat dinner with him. Because now, on this very day, he has managed it in such a way that never before in his life has he gotten along with his wife so well as now. But he'll have his peace and quiet for only three days, maybe not even until supper time tonight. Lijsbet, just hurry up and get ready for this show.

Wife [Lijsbet]

[270 - 277]

Imbrecht, if he has invited me, too, I'll come right along. But I think he won't be able to enjoy his peace and quiet for long. And once Bette starts to get mad he won't feel much like inviting us anymore. Let's hurry up and go now, because this is a great idea.

Neighbor [Imbrecht]

[278 - 279]

All right, let's hurry up and go. They'll put us right by the fire.

Scene 6: Jan's house

Jan

[280 - 283]

Bette, now make both of us very happy! Is everything ready so that we can eat? I believe our neighbor and his better half are coming to join us.

Bette

[284 - 291]

Oh yeah? There is almost nothing to eat in the house.

[Catches herself]

It's your right to invite guests, but there is nothing else to eat than this. But I'm happy with it, so let them come.

[To the audience]

Holy Mary, you've heard that he is now master of the house. But with guests in the house he might control himself and not go too far with his bossy attitude.

[Enter Lijsbet and Imbrecht.]

Jan

[292 - 293]

Bette, now shut up, because our guests are here.

Neighbor [Imbrecht]

[294 - 295]

God and Saint Michael grant you peace here!

Jan

[296 - 303]

Welcome, neighbor. Go wash your hands. You sit there and your lady here, and I'm going to sit next to the fire. Bette, put the salt and bread right here. Bring all the big and little dishes we're having to eat. Bring us goblets and wine from the pub, the best in town.

Bette

[304 - 305]

[Aside]

Goddamn your mother! You're not going to drive me like this for long.

[Jan and the guests eat]

Neighbor [Imbrecht]

[306 - 313]

I've never heard of a bad wife with such a good temper. I can see, people will do a lot for money. She has given in and is keeping quiet about it. And he does whatever he wants. Just look how we can keep down bad wives. Dear neighbor, how did you do it?

Bette

[314]

Now drink up! Here's the wine.

Neighbor [Imbrecht]

[315]

Gladly! Now give her something to drink.

Bette

[316 - 319]

Dear God, no! Don't pour anything for me. If you want anything else, just let me know. Then I can eat too. So tell me now, and then be done with it.

Jan

[320 - 325]

Bette, there is just one more little thing. You'll have to prepare a jam tart for us which we will eat before before our guests leave. Now hurry up and go put it in the oven, and don't make such a fuss! You must do it, I tell you.

Bette

[326 - 327]

[Aside]

I would rather have something to eat now than have something else to do.

Jan

[328 - 331]

Go now, and don't be so fresh. Just stop your whining. Because I tell you, you'll quickly catch more blows on your ears here than anything else.

Bette

[332 - 333]

[Aside]

I'd much rather hurry up and do the best I can.

Jan.

[334 - 341]

Don't I talk like a man now? There is an old saying: "No arse is any good without a whipping." Now eat and drink, my dear neighbors. By God, I'll make her regret those furs I gave her so I could have three days of peace and be the master.

Neighbor [Imbrecht].

[342 - 343]

Jan, that's enough now. You have it made! Don't push your luck!

Bette.

[344 - 345]

[Brings the jam tart]

Now taste it. Do you like it? I think it's very well made.

Jan.

[346 - 351]

[Jan tastes it]

No. It didn't come out right at all. It's too watery. Are you trying to teach me how to make pastry? How to mix the jam preserves? Go and do it over again, you miserable wretch.

[To Imbrecht]

Is this filling any good? What do you think of it?

Neighbor [Imbrecht].

[352 - 353]

I do like it! I sit here, slobbered to my ears.

Jan.

[354 - 357]

[Bette serves up a second tart]

Surely, neighbor, that's how a tart ought to come out. And now, Bette, you can drink. But first you'll pour another one for me. Et tantôt je boirai [And then I'll drink right away.]

Neighbor [Imbrecht].

[358 - 359]

Neighbor, now you are very happy, just like a rotten Frenchman.

Jan.

[360 - 363]

And don't you think I can dominate my wife with the way I talk? I'll make her jump through hoops before you leave here.

Wife [Lijsbet].

[364 - 387]

[Privately to Bette.]

Aunty, how did you get yourself into this mess? How could you have sold yourself like this? More often than not you get what you're asking for anyhow. And that's why your husband is acting like this, it seems to me. He would never know how to be your master without this clever trick. And if from now on he stayed master we wives will all have to suffer for it. Aunty, I swear by the buns of St. Nick that before I gave in for a fur I would beat the daylights out of him, the old bastard. Just remember, unhappy woman, if you

need furs or a coat, you only need to say two sweet words, and you get what you want. Just change your tune right away, and you'll be the boss again, just like before. If he should come out on top then all the men will want to dominate their wives the way he does. There wouldn't be a woman in the neighborhood who could run things the way she wants. They would all be worse off, and all because of you.

Bette.

[388 - 393]

Dear niece, now calm down. By suffering St. Nick! I won't do it anymore. I'd rather hang him up in a basket in our smoke house. Bah! Damn the fur I surrendered for.

Jan.

[394 - 397]

My wife is really on the move now. I'll teach her how to make a jam tart. It's risky, and I could lose it all. But I have never seen a crazier woman!

Neighbor [Imbrecht].

[398 - 401]

Dear Jan, believe me, this is food beyond praise. Lise, this is the way I'm going to teach you to run and fetch during dinner.

Wife [Lijsbet].

[402 - 403]

By God, that won't help you very much

[Pointing to Jan]

and won't help him either.

Jan.

[404 - 405]

I want her to be quick about doing what I tell her to do.

[Bette brings a third tart and dumps it on Jan's head. Lijsbet drags Imbrecht off by his ear. General chaos.]