

Monsieur Lamblin

BY GEORGE ANCEY

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY BARRETT H. CLARK.

CHARACTERS

LAMBLIN. MARTHE. MADAME BAIL. MADAME COGÉ.
SERVANT.

First published in the *Stratford Journal*, March, 1917. Reprinted by permission of Mr. Barrett H. Clark.

MONSIEUR LAMBLIN

A COMEDY BY GEORGE ANCEY

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[A stylish drawing-room. There are doors at the back, and on each side. Down-stage to the right is a window; near it, but protected by a screen, is a large arm-chair near a sewing-table. Down-stage opposite is a fire-place, on each side of which, facing it, are a sofa and another large arm-chair; next the sofa is a small table, and next to it, in turn, a stool and two chairs. This part of the stage should be so arranged as to make a little cozy-corner. The set is completed by various and sundry lamps, vases with flowers, and the like.]

As the curtain rises, the servant enters to Lamblin, Marthe and Madame Bail, bringing coffee and cigarettes, which he lays on the small table.]

LAMBLIN [*settling comfortably into his chair*]. Ah, how comfortable it is! Mm--! [*To Marthe.*] Serve us our coffee, my child, serve us our coffee.

MARTHE [*sadly*]. Yes, yes.

LAMBLIN [*aside*]. Always something going round and round in that little head of hers! Needn't worry about it--nothing serious.--Well, Mother-in-law, what do you say to the laces, eh?

MADAME BAIL. Delicious! It must have cost a small fortune! You have twenty yards there!

LAMBLIN. Five thousand francs! Five thousand francs! [*To Marthe.*] Yes, madame, your husband was particularly generous. He insists upon making his wife the most beautiful of women and giving her everything her heart desires. Has he succeeded?

MARTHE. Thank you. I've really never seen such lovely malines. Madame Pertuis ordered some lately and they're not nearly so beautiful as these.

LAMBLIN. I'm glad to hear it. Well, aren't you going to kiss your husband--for his trouble? [*She kisses him.*] Good! There, now.

MADAME BAIL [*to Lamblin*]. You spoil her!

LAMBLIN [*to Marthe*]. Do I spoil you?

MARTHE. Yes, yes, of course.

LAMBLIN. That's right. Everybody happy? That's all we can ask, isn't that so, Mamma Bail? Take care, I warn you! If you continue to look at me that way I'm likely to become dangerous!

MADAME BAIL. Silly man.

LAMBLIN. Ha!

MADAME BAIL [*to Marthe*]. Laugh, why don't you?

MARTHE. I do.

LAMBLIN [*bringing his wife to him and putting her upon his knee*]. No, no, but you don't laugh enough, little one. Now, to punish you, I'm going to give you another kiss. [*He kisses her.*]

MARTHE. Oh! Your beard pricks so! Now, take your coffee, or it'll get cold, and then you'll scold Julie again. [*A pause.*]

LAMBLIN. It looks like pleasant weather to-morrow!

MADAME BAIL. What made you think of that?

LAMBLIN. The particles of sugar have all collected at the bottom of my cup. [*He drinks his coffee.*]

MADAME BAIL. As a matter of fact, I hope the weather will be nice.

LAMBLIN. Do you have to go out?

MADAME BAIL. I must go to Argentuil.

LAMBLIN. Now, my dear mother-in-law, what are you going to do at Argentuil? I have an idea that there must be some old general there--?

MADAME BAIL [*ironically*]. Exactly! How would you like it if--?

LAMBLIN. Don't joke about such things!

MADAME BAIL. You needn't worry! Catch me marrying again!

LAMBLIN [*timidly*]. There is a great deal to be said for the happiness of married life.

MADAME BAIL. For the men!

LAMBLIN. For every one. Is not the hearth a refuge, a sacred spot, where both man and woman find sweet rest after a day's work? Deny it, Mother. Here we are, the three of us, each doing what he likes to do, in our comfortable little home, talking together happily. The mind is at rest, and the heart quiet. Six years of family life have brought us security in our affection, and rendered us kind and indulgent toward one another. It is ineffably sweet, and brings tears to the eyes. [*He starts to take a sip of cognac.*]

MARTHE [*preventing him*]. Especially when one is a little--lit up!

MADAME BAIL. Marthe, that's not at all nice of you!

LAMBLIN [*to Madame Bail*]. Ah, you're the only one who understands me, Mother! Now, little one, you're going to give me a cigar, one of those on the table.

MARTHE [*giving him a cigar*]. Lazy! He can't even stretch his arm out!

LAMBLIN. You see, I prefer to have my little wife serve me and be nice to me.

MADAME BAIL [*looking at them both*]. Shall I go?

LAMBLIN. Why should you?

MADAME BAIL. Well--because--

LAMBLIN [*understanding*]. Oh! No, no, stay with us and tell us stories. The little one is moody and severe, I don't dare risk putting my arm around her. Her religion forbids her--expanding!

MADAME BAIL. Then you don't think I'll be in the way?

LAMBLIN. You, Mother! I tell you, the day I took it into my head to bring you here to live with us, I was an extremely clever man. It's most convenient to have you here. Men of business like me haven't the time to spend all their leisure moments with their wives. Very often, after a day's work at the office, I'm not at liberty to spend the evening at home: I must return to the office, you know.

MARTHE. As you did yesterday!

LAMBLIN. As I did yesterday. And when I take it into my head to stroll along the boulevard--

MADAME BAIL. Or elsewhere!

LAMBLIN. You insist on your little joke, Mother. If, I say, I take it into my head to go out, there's the little one all alone. You came here to live with us, and now my conscience is easy: I leave my little wife in good hands. I need not worry. There were a thousand liberties I never indulged in before you came. Now I take them without the slightest scruple.

MADAME BAIL. How kind of you!

LAMBLIN. Don't you think so, little one?

MARTHE. I believe that Mamma did exactly the right thing.

LAMBLIN. You see, I want people to be happy. It is not enough that I should be: every one must be who is about me. I can't abide selfish people.

MADAME BAIL. You're right!

LAMBLIN. And it's so easy not to be! [*A pause.*] There is only one thing worrying me now: I brought a whole package of papers with me from the office, which I must sign.

MARTHE. How is business now?

LAMBLIN. Not very good.

MARTHE. Did M. Pacot reimburse you?

MADAME BAIL. Yes, did he?

LAMBLIN. It's been pretty hard these past three days, but I am reimbursed, and that's all I ask. Now I'm going to sign my papers. It won't take me more than a quarter of an hour. I'll find you here when I come back, shan't I? [*To Marthe.*] And the little one will leave me my cognac, eh? See you soon.

MADAME BAIL. Yes, see you soon.

LAMBLIN [*to Marthe*]. You'll let me have my cognac?

MARTHE. No! It's ridiculous! It'll make you ill. [*Lamblin goes out.*]

MADAME BAIL. There's a good boy!

MARTHE. You always stand up for him. The world is full of "good boys" of his sort. "Good boys"! They're all selfish!

MADAME BAIL. Don't get so excited!

MARTHE. I'm not in the least excited. I'm as calm now as I was excited a year ago when I learned of Alfred's affair.

MADAME BAIL. I understand.

MARTHE. No, you don't understand.

MADAME BAIL. You didn't behave at all reasonably, as you ought to have done long since. You still have absurd romantic ideas. You're not at all reasonable.

MARTHE [*very much put out*]. Well, if I still have those absurd ideas, if I rebel at times, if, as you say, I'm unreasonable, whom does it harm but me alone? What do you expect? The bare idea of sharing him is repulsive to me. Think of it a moment--how perfectly abominable it all is! Why, we are practically accomplices! I thought we were going to discuss it with him just now! It will happen, I know!

MADAME BAIL. What do you intend to do about it? You keep on saying the same thing. I'm an experienced woman. Why don't you take my word, and be a philosopher, the way all women are, the way I've had to be more than once? If you think for one moment that your own father--! Well, we won't say anything about him.

MARTHE. Philosopher, philosopher! A nice way to put it! In what way is that Mathilde Cogé, who is his mistress, better than I? I'd like to know that!

MADAME BAIL. In any event, he might have done much worse. She is a widow, a woman of the world, and she isn't ruining him. I know

her slightly; I've seen her at Madame Parent's. She just seems a little mad, and not in the least spiteful!

MARTHE [*raging*]. Ah!

MADAME BAIL. But what are you going to do about it?

MARTHE. It would be best to separate.

MADAME BAIL. Why didn't you think of that sooner? You know very well you'd be sorry the moment you'd done it.

MARTHE. Don't you think that would be best for us all? What am I doing here? What hopes have I for the future? Merely to complete the happiness of Monsieur, who deigns to see in me an agreeable nurse, who occasionally likes to rest by my side after his escapades elsewhere! Thank you so much! I might just as well go!

MADAME BAIL. That would be madness. You wouldn't be so foolish as to do it.

MARTHE. Yes--I know--society would blame me!

MADAME BAIL. That's the first point. We should submit to everything rather than do as some others do and fly in the face of convention. We belong to society.

MARTHE. In that case I should at least have peace.

MADAME BAIL. Peace! Nothing of the sort, my dear. You know very well, you would have regrets.

MARTHE [*ironically*]. What regrets?

MADAME BAIL. God knows! Perhaps, though you don't know it, you still love him, in some hidden corner of your heart. You may pity him. You can go a long way with that feeling. Perhaps you have some vague hope--[*Marthe is about to speak.*] Well, we won't say any more about that. And then you are religious, you have a big forgiving soul. Aren't these sufficient reasons for waiting? You may regret it. Believe

me, my dear child. [*Marthe stands silent, and Madame Bail changes her attitude and tone of voice.*] Now, you must admit, you haven't so much to complain of. Your husband is far from the worst; indeed, he's one of the best. What would you do if you were in Madame Ponceau's position? Her husband spends all their money and stays away for two and three months at a time. He goes away, is not seen anywhere, and when he returns, he has the most terrible scenes with poor Marie, and even beats her! Now, Alfred is very good to you, pays you all sorts of attentions, he comes home three evenings a week, gives you all sorts of presents. And these laces! He never bothers you or abuses you. See how nice he was just a few minutes ago, simple and natural! He was lovely, and said the pleasantest imaginable things.

MARTHE [*bitterly*]. He flattered you!

MADAME BAIL. That isn't the reason!

MARTHE. That you say nice things about him? Nonsense! He pleases and amuses you. You don't want me to apply for a separation because you want him near you, and because you are afraid of what people will say. Be frank and admit it.

MADAME BAIL. Marthe, that's not at all nice of you.

MARTHE. It's the truth.

MADAME BAIL. No, no, nothing of the sort.

MARTHE. Another thing that grates on me in this life we are leading is to see the way my mother takes her son-in-law's part against me. You find excuses for him on every occasion; and your one fear seems to be that he should hear some random word that will wound him; and the proof is that he never interrupts one of our conversations--which are always on the same subject--but that you don't fail to make desperate signs to me to keep still!

MADAME BAIL. What an idea! [*Marthe is about to reply, when Madame Bail perceives Lamblin reëntering, and signs to Martha to say nothing more.*] It's he! [*Marthe shrugs her shoulders.*]

[*Enter Lamblin.*]

LAMBLIN [*joyfully*]. There, that's done. One hundred and two signatures. Kiss me, little one. In less than an hour I've earned a thousand francs for us. Isn't that splendid?

[*Enter a servant.*]

SERVANT. Monsieur?

LAMBLIN. What is it?

SERVANT [*embarrassed*]. Some one--from the office--who wishes to speak with Monsieur.

LAMBLIN. From the office? At this time?

SERVANT. Yes, Monsieur.

LAMBLIN. Say that I am with my family, and that I am not receiving any one.

SERVANT. That is what I said, but the--person--insists.

LAMBLIN. How annoying!

MADAME BAIL. See him, dear, Marthe and I will go out and you may see him here. No one will disturb you.

MARTHE. Yes, it's best to see him! [*They make ready to go out; pick up their work, and so on.*]

LAMBLIN [*to the servant*]. Tell him to come in. [*The servant goes out.*]

MARTHE [*to Madame Bail, as she points after the servant*]. Did you notice? Adolphe was very embarrassed!

MADAME BAIL. Now what are you going to worry about?

MARTHE. I tell you, I saw it! [*The women go out.*]

LAMBLIN. This is too much! Not a moment of peace!

[*Enter Madame Cogé.*]

You?

MADAME COGÉ. What do you think of my trick?

LAMBLIN. Detestable as well as dangerous.

MADAME COGÉ. Come, come. I wanted to go to the *Bouffes*, and I wanted you to go with me. It's nine o'clock, but we'll be in time for the principal play.

LAMBLIN. No, no, no, impossible. And what do you mean by falling upon me this way without warning! My dear Mathilde, what were you thinking about?

MADAME COGÉ. I decided this morning. You were so nice yesterday!

LAMBLIN. You must go at once! What if some one found you here?

MADAME COGÉ. Your wife? Quick, then, we must be going. Take your hat, say good-by. I'll wait for you downstairs. I have a cab. [*A pause.*]

LAMBLIN. I tell you, it's out of the question. Go alone. I have a headache--I've smoked too much.

MADAME COGÉ. You refuse? And I was looking forward so--!

LAMBLIN. Now, listen to me, my dear: I have told you once for all, I'm not a rounder. I like everything well regulated. I have my own little habits, and I don't like something to come along and upset everything. I'm very much of a family man, I've often impressed that fact upon you, and I'm astonished, perfectly astonished, that you don't take that into account.

MADAME COGÉ [*in a high voice*]. You make me tired. So there.

LAMBLIN. Don't scream so! I tell you, I wouldn't go out to-night for anything under the sun. Yesterday, Heaven knows, I was only too happy to be with you: we enjoyed ourselves; it was most pleasant. As for this evening--no: to-morrow. We decided on Mondays, Wednesday, Fridays, and a Sunday from time to time. I have no wish to alter that schedule. I'm regulated like a cuckoo clock. You don't seem to believe that. I strike when I'm intended to strike.

MADAME COGÉ. That is as much as to say that you like me three days a week, and the rest of the time I mean as little to you as the Grand Turk! That's a queer kind of love!

LAMBLIN. Not at all. I think of you very often, and if you were to disappear, I should miss you a great deal. Only it's a long way between that and disturbing my equilibrium.

MADAME COGÉ. And I suppose you love your wife?

LAMBLIN. Are you jealous?

MADAME COGÉ. I am, and I have reason to be be....

LAMBLIN. How childish of you! You know very well that you are the only woman, only--

MADAME COGÉ. Ah, there is an "only"!

LAMBLIN. Yes,--only, just because I love you is no reason why I should feel no affection for her, and that you should treat her as you do! She is so devoted!

MADAME COGÉ. What is there so extraordinary about her?

LAMBLIN [*becoming excited*]. She does for me what others would not do--you for instance! She has a steady affection for me; I keep it for my bad moments; her action doesn't turn in every wind. You should see her, so resigned, so anxious to do everything for my

comfort and convenience! She's worried when I have a headache, she runs for my slippers when I come home in wet weather--from your house! [*Deeply moved.*] You see that cognac there? That was the second glass I poured out for myself this evening; the moment I started to drink it her little hand stretched forth and took it from me, because she said I would make myself ill! [*He starts to weep.*] You know, I poured it out just in order that she should prevent my drinking it. These things stir the heart! [*A pause.*] Now you must go.

MADAME COGÉ. No, no. I love you, and I--

LAMBLIN. You are selfish. And you know I can't stand selfish people. You want to deprive me of a quiet evening in the bosom of my family.

MADAME COGÉ. I want you to love me, and me alone. I want you to leave your home if need be.

LAMBLIN. Yes, and if I were to fall sick--which might happen, though I have a strong constitution, thank God!--I know you. You're the best woman in the world, but that doesn't prevent your being a little superficial!

MADAME COGÉ. Superficial!

LAMBLIN. Yes, you are, and you can't deny it! Your dropping in on me, like a bolt from the blue, proves it conclusively. And when you once begin chattering about yourself, about your dresses, oh, my! You never stop. You can't be serious, your conversation is not the sort that pleases a man, flatters and amuses him.

MADAME COGÉ. Oh!

LAMBLIN. You never talk about *him*! One night I remember, I was a little sick and you sent me home. *There* they made tea for me. The cook was already in bed, and Marthe didn't hesitate an instant to go to the kitchen and soil her hands!

MADAME COGÉ. When was that? When was that?

LAMBLIN. For God's sake, don't scream so! Not more than two weeks ago.

MADAME COGÉ. You didn't say what was the matter with you, that's all.

LAMBLIN. I complained enough, Heaven knows. [*A pause.*]

MADAME COGÉ. Then you won't come?

LAMBLIN. No.

MADAME COGÉ [*resolutely*]. Very well, then, farewell.

LAMBLIN. Now, you mustn't get angry. [*He puts his arm round her waist*]. You know I can't do without you. You are always my dear little Mathilde, my darling little girl. Aren't you? Do you remember yesterday, eh? You know I love you--deeply?

MADAME COGÉ. On Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and from time to time on Sundays. Thanks! [*She starts to go.*]

LAMBLIN. Mathilde!

MADAME COGÉ. Good evening. [*Returning to him.*] Do you want me to tell you something? Though I may be superficial, *you* are a selfish egotist, and you find your happiness in the tears and suffering of those who love you! Good-by! [*She starts to go again.*]

LAMBLIN. Mathilde, Mathilde, dear! To-morrow?

MADAME COGÉ [*returning*]. Do you want me to tell you something else? When a man is married and wants to have a mistress, he would do much better and act more uprightly to leave his wife!

LAMBLIN [*simply*]. Why?

MADAME COGÉ. Why?--Good evening! [*She goes out.*]

LAMBLIN. Mathilde, Mathilde! Did I make her angry? Oh, she'll forget it all in a quarter of an hour. My, what a headache! [*Catching sight of Marthe, who enters from the right.*] Marthe! She looks furious! She saw Mathilde go out! What luck!

MARTHE [*furiously*]. Who was that who just left?

LAMBLIN. Why--

MARTHE. Who was that who just left? Answer me!

LAMBLIN. It was--

MARTHE. Madame Cogé, wasn't it? Don't lie, I saw her! What can you be thinking of? To bring your mistress here! I don't know what's prevented my going away before, and leaving you to your debauchery! This is the end--understand? I've had enough. You're going to live alone from now on. [*He starts to speak.*] Alone. Good-by, monsieur!

LAMBLIN [*moved*]. Marthe! [*She dashes out. Lamblin goes to the door through which Marthe has gone.*] Marthe, Marthe, little one! Tell me that you forgive me. [*Coming down-stage.*] It's all up! Good Lord!

[*Enter Madame Bail.*]

LAMBLIN [*goes to her, nearly in tears*]. Oh, Mother, all is lost!

MADAME BAIL. No, no, you great child! I know everything, and I promise it will be all right.

LAMBLIN. No, no, I tell you. Marthe told me she wanted to leave me.

MADAME BAIL. Now, don't carry on that way. I don't want to see you cry.

LAMBLIN. But how can I be calm when my whole future is ruined?

MADAME BAIL. Nothing of the sort. Don't you think I know my own daughter? She is too well educated, she has too much common sense, to leave you.

LAMBLIN [*a little consoled*]. You think so? Oh, if that were only true!

MADAME BAIL. But it is true! She's crying now; her tears will ease her, and make her change her mind.

LAMBLIN. Yes, yes, let her cry, let her cry all she wants to!

MADAME BAIL. I tell you she is yours; she loves you.

LAMBLIN [*brightening*]. Is that true? [*Madame Bail nods.*] How happy I am! [*A pause. His attitude changes.*] But there's one thing that troubles me.

MADAME BAIL. What?

LAMBLIN [*embarrassed*]. No, nothing.

MADAME BAIL. Confide in me. Tell me. [*A pause.*]

LAMBLIN. Well, that lady who came here this evening--I'm afraid I was a little short with her. I think I offended her. I practically showed her the door.

MADAME BAIL. Don't worry about that. Perhaps you weren't so rude as you thought you were.

LAMBLIN. No, I'm sure. I know very well that--

MADAME BAIL. You mustn't worry and get all excited--

LAMBLIN. Do you know anything about it?

MADAME BAIL. No, nothing, only--as I rather suspected what was going on in here--and was afraid--of a quarrel--I met her as she was going out, and I--spoke to her.

LAMBLIN [*taking her hands--joyfully*]. I thank you! [*They are both embarrassed for a moment, then sit down.*] Ah, good. Well, and Marthe?

MADAME BAIL [*pointing to Marthe who enters*]. There she is. What did I tell you? [*Marthe enters without saying a word. She brings her work, Madame Bail takes up hers, and sits next her. A pause. Madame Bail speaks to Marthe.*] What a pretty design! Where did you find the pattern?

MARTHE. I just picked it up at the store.

MADAME BAIL. It's charming. I must get one like it.

LAMBLIN [*ill at ease*]. May I see it, little one? [*Marthe unrolls the embroidery for him and shows it.*] Oh, it's perfectly lovely! We men would be hard put to it to make anything half as beautiful! [*He laughs awkwardly, and pours out some cognac, in full sight of Marthe.*]

MARTHE [*quickly*]. That's ridiculous, Alfred. [*Then she says slowly, as she lowers her eyes.*] You'll make yourself ill!

LAMBLIN [*in perfect contentment*]. How charming she is!

[*Curtain.*]