

## **GOOD BENCHES GOOD NEIGHBOURS**

By Olivia Arieti

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## **GOOD BENCHES GOOD NEIGHBOURS**

### Synopsis:

An old bench placed in the garden of a block of flats makes life brighter for the folks living there and gives them the chance to meet and become better neighbours.

### CHARACTERS

LARRY - 60s. Wears a check shirt, jeans. Friendly type.

JOE – 40s.

FLORA – 50s. Cheerful, housewife type.

HELEN – 30s. Sophisticated.

JENNY – 20s.

PHIL – 20s. Slightly clumsy.

SETTING: A garden. A bench.

TIME: The present. Morning.

PROPS: A bunch of daisies (Larry), grocery bags (Flora), a handkerchief (Helen), a magazine (Jenny), a box of chocolates (Phil), a tin, a brush (Joe).

*(LARRY and JOE bring in the bench.)*

LARRY

Whew! Good thing you've come down to give me a hand, Joe, this bench is really heavy.

JOE

Good thing it's made of wood and not of iron. Boy, it does it look old. It must be full of woodworms.

LARRY

It was a great bargain, woodworms included.

JOE

Can't see why you took all the trouble, Larry, no one will ever use it. Folks are so unfriendly or always in a hurry around here.

LARRY

Give them a chance.

JOE

Too trustful, man.

LARRY

You might even make up with Helen... *(Smiles.)* You know, a word or two in the sunshine...

JOE

Are you kidding? The lady's a true pain in the neck, always complaining about the dog barking or the TV too loud.

LARRY

*(Chuckles.)*

She's a great beauty though.

JOE

Can't deny that.

LARRY

Well, as for me, I'm glad that now I can read my newspaper outdoors without having to go all way down to the park.

JOE

Sounds good, huh? Well, I have to go, buddy, see you later.

*(Exits.)*

*(LARRY sits down, FLORA passes by. She has grocery bags.)*

FLORA

Why, Larry, what a nice bench! Never noticed it before.

LARRY

You couldn't, I've just brought it here. Joe, the guy on the third floor, helped me.

FLORA

*(Sits down.)*

Nothing more pleasant than a bench to rest on a warm spring morning... I can already see the daisies all around.

LARRY

*(Chuckles.)*

Perhaps, it's a bit early for those, but I must say that the first sunshine makes you feel good.

*(Looks at the bags.)*

Hey, with all that grocery you must be planning to cook a big meal, Flora.

FLORA

Not really, since my husband passed away, I don't bother much.

LARRY

Since I divorced, I've been living on takeaways or TV dinners.

FLORA

That's horrible. Say, would you like to come up for dinner? I'll be glad to prepare a decent dinner for you, Larry.

LARRY

With great pleasure!

FLORA

*(Gets up.)*

See you at seven then, sixth floor, second door on the right.

*(Exits.)*

LARRY

*(Loudly.)*

I'll be there.

*(JENNY enters.)*

JENNY

Wow! We've got a bench at last! The garden looked so empty, nowhere to sit and chat not even for a few minutes.

LARRY

Now there is.

JENNY

How did it get here?

LARRY  
*(Smiles.)*

I guess the blame's all mine...

JENNY

It's a wonderful gift, Sir, for all of us.

LARRY

Well, I hope to see you again out here, Miss.

JENNY

For sure.

*(LARRY exits. JENNY sits down. Takes out a magazine, starts reading. PHIL arrives, has a box of chocolates.)*

PHIL  
*(Embarrassed.)*

Hello there... Mind if I sit down?

JENNY

No, not at all...

PHIL  
*(Sits down.)*

Phil Bakers, fifth floor.

JENNY

Jenny Smith, fourth.

PHIL

Thanks to this bench I have the chance to talk to you.

JENNY

Oh, really?

PHIL

When I saw you from my window sitting there, well, I just couldn't help rushing down...

*(Takes out a box of chocolates.)*

I realise it may look a bit awkward, I had just bought these chocolates for my granny, but then... I thought that it would be nice bringing them to you.

JENNY

How sweet.

PHIL

I hope you're not on a diet... Err, I mean not that you need to be actually, for you're lovely, Jenny, I'd say, perfect.

JENNY

Why, thank you, Phil.

PHIL

Say, do you think we could go for a drink somewhere this evening? I'd love to spend some time with you.

JENNY

Why not?

PHIL

No need to come and pick you up, I'll just get off the elevator and ring your bell.

JENNY

*(Laughs.)*

Of course, we're neighbours, aren't we?

PHIL

You bet. See you at six then.

*(PHIL and JENNY exit happily.)*

*(JOE enters, sits on the bench. HELEN arrives behind JOE's back.)*

HELEN

*(Shouts.)*

Mr. Joe Davies, where on earth did that bench come from?

JOE

*(Jumps up.)*

Good gracious, Helen, you scared me to death! However, if you really want to know, Larry, the guy on the first floor, brought it here.

HELEN

*(Harshly.)*

He should have asked before bringing those old boards over; the garden is common property.

JOE

*(Sits back down.)*

Why won't you take it easy and sit down for a while? Basking in the sun warms up the heart.

HELEN

*(Takes out a handkerchief, wipes it.)*

Don't want to get my new skirt dirty.

*(Sits down, reluctantly.)*

Hum... it's more comfortable than it looks.

JOE

Say, couldn't we try and be good neighbours instead of fighting all the time?

**HELEN**

Are you willing to give up your dog and your TV?

JOE

Everything except the dog.

HELEN

What about those stinking butts I always find on my balcony?

JOE

You'll never see them again, cross my heart.

HELEN

Hum... Never thought an old bench could make life easier.

*(FLORA arrives.)*

FLORA

So you guys have already taken advantage of Larry's gift.

JOE

We were just straightening out a few things... Well, better get going.

*(Gets up.)*

See you, ladies.

*(Exits.)*

FLORA

You must be the lady of the second floor.

HELEN

That's me, Helen Jones, Mrs...?

FLORA

Flora Smith, sixth. *(Smiles.)* Say, I've noticed you caught that handsome guy's eye.

HELEN

Come on now...

FLORA

I'd give him a chance if I were you... Too bad I can't stay and have a little chat, I'm off to the butcher's, a friend's coming over for dinner and I forgot the mincemeat for my lasagne.

HELEN

Lasagne? Sounds delicious, I've never had them.

FLORA

I'll be happy to prepare them for you, too, if you want, *(Winks.)* another time of course.

HELEN

No problem, dear.

FLORA

Bye, hon.

*(Exits.)*

*(JOE arrives, has a tin, a brush.)*

HELEN

Hey, what are you doing with that paint?

JOE

It's coating, actually, I wouldn't want the rain to ruin the bench. By the way, Helen, I was thinking if I could take you out for a meal, you know, just to make up for all the trouble I made you go through, the barks, the butts...

HELEN

Well...

JOE

*(Hurriedly.)*

Tomorrow evening, perhaps?

HELEN

Could be...

JOE

Swell! I'll be right here waiting for you. Will seven be fine?

HELEN

Yeah, see you tomorrow then.

*(Exits.)*

*(JOE starts painting, whistling happily. LARRY arrives with a bunch of daisies.)*

LARRY

Hey, what are you up to, buddy?

JOE

Hope you don't mind if I put some coating on your bench.

LARRY

Absolutely, go ahead, but remember to put the fresh paint sign afterwards; *(Chuckles.)* don't want our neighbours' bottoms to get stuck to it.

JOE

Say, who are those daisies for?

LARRY

For a very charming lady on the sixth floor.

JOE

Wow! Seems this bench does wonders.

LARRY

You bet, good benches, good neighbours! See you, Joe.

*(Exits.)*

Blackout

THE END