

## Easy virtue (2008)

Larita (Jessica Biel), a glamorous American widow and successful racecar driver, meets young John Whittaker (Ben Barnes) in Monaco. They marry, and he takes his bride home to meet his family at their dauntingly large rural mansion, where seven generations of Whittakers have been gentleman farmers. There she meets her icy cold mother-in-law, Veronica (Kristin Scott Thomas) and disheveled, sad-eyed father-in-law, Major Jim Whittaker (Colin Firth).

Veronica, already predisposed to dislike her new daughter-in-law ("John's floozy") is further disappointed to find that she is a brash American who, like the Major, speaks fluent French. Larita also meets John's former girlfriend and neighbour Sarah Hurst (Charlotte Riley), who is gracious about the marriage. Larita remains calm in the face of her new mother-in-law's disdain, even being so bold as to reveal having been previously married.

Time passes, and to Larita's disappointment, John is not eager to leave the estate so that they can find a home of their own. Larita is bored and miserable in the countryside and hates blood sports like hunting, and indeed any of the entertainment country English people seem to enjoy. She reads *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, by D.H. Lawrence, which shocks her husband's female relatives, and she doesn't want to play tennis. She also dislikes Veronica's stuffy decor, her constant entertaining of her friends and the overcooked food. Worse still, she suffers from hay fever. She tries to get along with her mother-in-law, but Veronica refuses to accept her and naturally resents her attempts to bring some American traditions into the situation.

Larita makes some inadvertent gaffes, accidentally killing the family chihuahua and giving some joking advice to the younger daughter, Hilda (Kimberley Nixon), that unfortunately results in embarrassment to, and enmity from, the daughters. Sarah comes to the Whittakers' parties, and to play tennis, accompanied by her brother Philip (Christian Brassington), on whom Hilda has a crush. Philip, however, is infatuated with Larita, which further angers Hilda. To Veronica's horror, she and her hunting party discover John and Larita making love in an outbuilding. Larita finds herself increasingly isolated and demoralized by her mother-in-law's derision, verbal attacks and dirty tricks. Larita's only sympathetic friends are the Major and the servants, whom she treats better than Veronica does. Larita retreats to the Major's workshop to help him work on his motorcycle. Still troubled from having lost all his men in the war, Jim Whittaker has lost interest in his home, and any love between him and his wife has long since gone.

The Whittaker estate has fallen on hard times. John, once in the shadow of his dragon-lady mother, loses his independence and seems immature to her as he is drawn into family life. In addition, John's affection for Larita seems to be waning, as he complains about his wife to Sarah, who finds his overture inappropriate.

Finally, Hilda obtains a newspaper cutting revealing scandalous secrets about Larita's first marriage to a much older man who was dying of cancer: she had helped him die using poison. John withdraws from Larita, while the Major scolds his daughters for their cruelty.

## Cast

Jessica Biel	as	Larita Whittaker
Ben Barnes	as	John Whittaker
Colin Firth	as	Major Jim Whittaker
Kristin Scott Thomas	as	Mrs. Veronica Whittaker
Kimberley Nixon	as	Hilda Whittaker
Katherine Parkinson	as	Marion Whittaker
Kris Marshall	as	Furber
Christian Brassington	as	Philip Hurst
Charlotte Riley	as	Sarah Hurst
Jim McManus	as	Jackson
Pip Torrens	as	Lord Hurst
Georgie Glen	as	Mrs. Langridon
John Warburton	as	Mr. Gribble

## Memorable quotes (with notes on difficult vocabulary)

Hilda Whittaker: She's the first **lady racer**.

Marion Whittaker: But she didn't actually win.

Hilda Whittaker: She **crossed the line** first. It's so exciting.

Jim Whittaker: Not nearly as exciting as **crossing** your mother.

Veronica Whittaker: I think we can all ignore that. Oh, what is that man doing? Jackson!

Jackson: Madam?

Veronica Whittaker: What did I tell you? Get the camellias out of the rain and put them by the front door before the guests arrive! Furber!

Furber: Madam?

Veronica Whittaker: **Salvage** any of Jackson's **appalling pruning** and send it to Mrs Holborough, who kindly offered up a **leg of mutton** for tonight's dinner, which you're going to **fetch**, Marion.

**Lady racer**: pilota donna; **to cross the line**: (qui) tagliare il traguardo; **to cross**: far arrabbiare; **to salvage**: salvare/recuperare; **appalling**: orrendo/terribile; **pruning**: (qui) pianta in vaso; **leg of mutton**: cosciotto di montone.

Hilda Whittaker: Uncle George has posted the most **grisly clippings** of the Valentine's Day Massacre!

Marion Whittaker: Hilda...

Hilda Whittaker: Seven terrified men **cut down** in a **hail of automatic gun fire**! Made worse by the **strays** that came to **lap** the **curdled blood**.

Veronica Whittaker: Hilda...

Hilda Whittaker: The Devil Dogs! The Hounds of Hell!

Veronica Whittaker: The leg of lamb! Now. Why we try and marry her off to **gentry** when plainly she'd prefer an **undertaker**.

**Grizzly**: raccapricciante/cruento; **clipping**: ritagli (di giornale); **cut down**: fare a pezzi; **hail of automatic gun fire**: raffica di colpi di arma da fuoco automatica; **strays (i.e. stray dogs)**: randagi; **lap**: leccare; **curdled blood**: sangue rappreso; **gentry**: nobiltà terriera; **undertaker**: impresario funebre.

Veronica Whittaker: Whilst your brother **sows his wild oats** in the South of France with his **floozy**? No. We'll keep the home fires burning until **his highness** wanders home.

Marion Whittaker: Hmm. Like father did?

Veronica Whittaker: Yes. Like your father did.

Hilda Whittaker: I've got news, everybody!

Jackson: You all right, sir?

Jim Whittaker: No. Are you?

Jackson: **Coping**, sir.

Jim Whittaker: Hear, hear. Well done.

Veronica Whittaker: Well done? They look like they're waiting for a **firing squad**. Can't you make them more relaxed?

Jim Whittaker: Last meal and a cigarette, perhaps?

Hilda Whittaker: I can't believe it. You'll never guess. Houdini escaped the Chinese water torture only to die of a **burst appendix**. How **ghastly**!

**To sow one's wild oats**: (fig.) fare l'uccel di bosco; **floozy**: (volg.) puttarella; **his highness**: (qui ironico) sua altezza; **to cope**: (qui) tirare avanti; **firing squad**: plotone di esecuzione; **burst appendix**: appendicite; **ghastly**: disgustoso/orribile.

John Whittaker: Mother, Larita and I would like to find a home in London.

Veronica Whittaker: But this is your home.

Jim Whittaker: A home of their own.

Veronica Whittaker: But Panda, we need you here. Since you went off on your **quick jolt** around the Riviera, we've had to **let go** of six more people.

John Whittaker: Mother, If you'd just listened to me and taken on some machinery.

Veronica Whittaker: Oh, wouldn't that be a good idea? I could run the entire estate **single-handedly**.

Congratulations on your insight and your spontaneity. Sarah and Philip are coming to dinner tonight, and I have got a table plan that will take the League of Nations to **unravel**.

John Whittaker: Tonight? That's absolutely splendid!

Marion Whittaker: Don't be so **fickle** in your affections. Sarah might not be as accommodating as you expect.

John Whittaker: **Codswallop**. She'll be delighted. If mother was so desperate for her hand in marriage, she should've asked herself!

**Quick jolt**: (qui) una puntatina veloce; **to let go of someone**: (qui) licenziare; **single-handedly**: da solo/senza l'aiuto di nessuno; **to unravel**: risolvere; **fickle**: incostante; **codswallop**: stupidaggini/sciocchezze.

Sources: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easy\\_Virtue\\_%282008\\_film%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easy_Virtue_%282008_film%29)