

J. M. Barrie

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**What Every  
Woman Knows**

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# WHAT EVERY WOMAN KNOWS

A Comedy

J. M. BARRIE

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## I

*James Wylie is about to make a move on the dambrod, and in the little Scotch room there is an awful silence befitting the occasion. James with his hand poised—for if he touches a piece he has to play it. Alick will see to that—raises his red head suddenly to read Alick's face. His father, who is Alick, is pretending to be in a panic lest James should make this move. James grins heartlessly, and his fingers are about to close on the 'man' when some instinct of self-preservation makes him peep once more. This time Alick is caught: the unholy ecstasy on his face tells as plain as porridge that he has been luring James to destruction. James glares; and, too late, his opponent is a simple old father again. James mops his head, sprawls in the manner most conducive to thought in the Wylie family, and, protruding his underlip, settles down to a reconsideration of the board. Alick blows out his cheeks, and a drop of water settles on the point of his nose.*

*You will find them thus any Saturday night (after family worship, which sends the servant to bed); and sometimes the pauses are so long that in the end they forget whose move it is.*

*It is not the room you would be shown into if you were calling socially on Miss Wylie. The drawing-room for you, and Miss Wylie in a coloured merino to receive you; very likely she would exclaim, 'This is a pleasant surprise!' though she has seen you coming up the avenue and has just had time to whip the dust-cloths off the chairs, and to warn Alick, David and James, that they had better not dare come in to see you before they have put on a dickey. Nor is this the room in which you would dine in solemn grandeur if invited to drop in and take pot-luck, which is how the Wylies invite, it being a family weakness to pretend that they sit down in the dining-room daily. It is the real living room of the house where Alick, who will never get used to fashionable ways, can take off his collar and sit happily in his stocking soles, and James at times would do so also; but catch Maggie letting him.*

*There is one very fine chair, but, heavens, not for sitting on; just to give the room a social standing in an emergency. It sneers at the other chairs with an air of insolent superiority, like a haughty bride who has married into the house for money. Otherwise the furniture is homely; most of it has come from that smaller house where the Wylies began. There is the large and shiny chair which can be turned into a bed if you look the other way for a moment. James cannot sit on this chair without gradually sliding down it till he is lying luxuriously on the small of his back, his legs indicating, like the hands of a clock, that it is ten past twelve; a position in which Maggie shudders to see him receiving company.*

*The other chairs are horse-hair, than which nothing is more comfortable if there be a good slit down the seat. The seats are heavily dented, because all the Wylie family sit down with a dump. The draughtboard is on the edge of a large centre table, which also displays four books placed at equal distances from each other, one of them a Bible, and another the family album. If these were the only books they would not justify Maggie in calling this chamber the library, her dogged name for it; while David and James call it the west-room and Alick calls it 'the room,' which is to him the natural name for any apartment without a bed in it. There is a bookcase of pitch pine, which contains six hundred books, with glass doors to prevent your getting at them.*

*No one does try to get at the books, for the Wylies are not a reading family. They like you to gasp*

when you see so much literature gathered together in one prison-house, but they gasp themselves at the thought that there are persons, chiefly clergymen, who, having finished one book, coolly begin another. Nevertheless it was not all vainglory that made David buy this library: it was rather a might respect for education, as something that he has missed. This same feeling makes him take in the Contemporary Review and stand up to it like a man. Alick, who also has a respect for education, tries to read the Contemporary, but becomes dispirited, and may be heard muttering over its pages, 'No, no use, no use, no,' and sometimes even 'Oh hell.' James has no respect for education; and Maggie is at present of an open mind.

They are Wylie and Sons of the local granite quarry, in which Alick was throughout his working days a mason. It is David who has raised them to this position; he climbed up himself step by step (and hewed the steps), and drew the others up after him. 'Wylie Brothers,' Alick would have had the firm called, but David said No, and James said No, and Maggie said No; first honour must be to their father; and Alick now likes it on the whole, though he often sighs at having to shave every day; and on some snell mornings he still creeps from his couch at four and even at two (thinking that his mallet and chisel are calling him), and begins to pull on his trousers, until the grandeur of them reminds him that he can go to bed again. Sometimes he cries a little, because there is no more work for him to do forever and ever; and then Maggie gives him a spade (without telling David) or David gives him the logs to saw (without telling Maggie).

We have given James a longer time to make his move than our kind friends in front will give him, but in the meantime something has been happening. David has come in, wearing a black coat and his Sabbath boots, for he has been to a public meeting. David is nigh forty years of age, whiskered like his father and brother (Alick's whiskers being worn as a sort of cravat round the neck), and he has the too brisk manner of one who must arrive anywhere a little before any one else. The painter who did the three of them for fifteen pounds (you may observe the canvases on the walls) has caught this characteristic, perhaps accidentally, for David is almost stepping out of his frame, as if to hurry off somewhere; while Alick and James look as if they were pinned to the wall for life. All the six of them, men and pictures, however, have a family resemblance, like granite blocks from their own quarry. They are as Scotch as peat for instance, and they might exchange eyes without any neighbour noticing the difference, inquisitive little blue eyes that seem to be always totting up the price of things.

The dambrod players pay no attention to David, nor does he regard them. Dumping down on the sofa he removes his 'lastic sides, as his Sabbath boots are called, by pushing one foot against the other, gets into a pair of hand-sewn slippers, deposits the boots as according to rule in the ottoman, and crosses to the fire. There must be something on David's mind tonight, for he pays no attention to the game, neither gives advice (than which nothing is more maddening) nor exchanges a wink with Alick over the parlous condition of James's crown. You can hear the wag-at-the-wall clock in the lobby ticking. Then David lets himself go; it runs out of him like a hymn:

DAVID. Oh, let the solid ground  
Not fail beneath my feet,  
Before my life has found  
What some have found so sweet.

(This is not a soliloquy, but is offered as a definite statement. The players emerge from their game with difficulty.)

ALICK (with James's crown in his hand). What's that you're saying, David?

DAVID (like a public speaker explaining the situation in a few well chosen words). The thing I'm speaking about is Love.

JAMES (keeping control of himself). Do you stand there and say you're in love, David Wylie?

DAVID. Me; what would I do with the thing?

JAMES (*who is by no means without pluck*). I see no necessity for calling it a thing.

(*They are two bachelors who all their lives have been afraid of nothing but Woman. DAVID in his sportive days—which continue—has done roguish things with his arm when conducting a lady home under an umbrella from a soiree, and has both chuckled and been scared on thinking of it afterwards. JAMES, a commoner fellow altogether, has discussed the sex over a glass, but is too canny to be in the company of less than two young women at a time.*)

DAVID (*derisively*). Oho, has she got you, James?

JAMES (*feeling the sting of it*). Nobody has got me.

DAVID. They'll catch you yet, lad.

JAMES. They'll never catch me. You've been nearer caught yourself.

ALICK. Yes, Kitty Menzies, David.

DAVID (*feeling himself under the umbrella*). It was a kind of a shave that.

ALICK (*who knows all that is to be known about women and can speak of them without a tremor*). It's a curious thing, but a man cannot help winking when he hears that one of his friends has been caught.

DAVID. That's so.

JAMES (*clinging to his manhood*). And fear of that wink is what has kept the two of us single men.

And yet what's the glory of being single?

DAVID. There's no particular glory in it, but it's safe.

JAMES (*putting away his aspirations*). Yes, it's lonely, but it's safe. But who did you mean the poet for, then?

DAVID. For Maggie, of course.

(*You don't know DAVID and JAMES till you know how they love their sister MAGGIE.*)

ALICK. I thought that.

DAVID (*coming to the second point of his statement about Love*). I saw her reading poetry and saying those words over to herself.

JAMES. She has such a poetical mind.

DAVID. Love. There's no doubt as that's what Maggie has set her heart on. And not merely love, but one of those grand noble loves; for though Maggie is undersized she has a passion for romance.

JAMES (*wandering miserably about the room*). It's terrible not to be able to give Maggie what her heart is set on.

(*The others never pay much attention to JAMES, though he is quite a smart figure in less important houses.*)

ALICK (*violently*). Those idiots of men.

DAVID. Father, did you tell her who had got the minister of Galashiels?

ALICK (*wagging his head sadly*). I had to tell her. And then I—I—bought her a sealskin muff, and I just slipped it into her hands and came away.

JAMES (*illustrating the sense of justice in the Wylie family*). Of course, to be fair to the man, he never pretended he wanted her.

DAVID. None of them wants her; that's what depresses her. I was thinking, father, I would buy her that gold watch and chain in Snibby's window. She hankers after it.

JAMES (*slapping his pocket*). You're too late, David; I've got them for her.

DAVID. It's ill done of the minister. Many a pound of steak has that man had in this house.

ALICK. You mind the slippers she worked for him?

JAMES. I mind them fine; she began them for William Cathro. She's getting on in years, too, though she looks so young.

ALICK. I never can make up my mind, David, whether her curls make her look younger or older.

DAVID (*determinedly*). Younger. Whisht! I hear her winding the clock. Mind, not a word about the minister to her, James. Don't even mention religion this day.

JAMES. Would it be like me to do such a thing?

DAVID. It would be very like you. And there's that other matter: say not a syllable about our having reason for sitting up late tonight. When she says it's bed-time, just all pretend we're not sleepy.

ALICK. Exactly, and when—

(*Here MAGGIE enters, and all three are suddenly engrossed in the dambrod. We could describe MAGGIE at great length. But what is the use? What you really want to know is whether she was good-looking. No, she was not. Enter MAGGIE, who is not good-looking. When this is said, all is said. Enter MAGGIE as it were, with her throat cut from ear to ear. She has a soft Scotch voice and a more resolute manner than is perhaps fitting to her plainness; and she stops short at sight of JAMES sprawling unconsciously in the company chair.*)

MAGGIE. James, I wouldn't sit on the fine chair.

JAMES. I forgot again.

(*But he wishes she had spoken more sharply. Even profanation of the fine chair has not roused her. She takes up her knitting, and they all suspect that she knows what they have been talking about.*)

MAGGIE. You're late, David, it's nearly bed-time.

DAVID (*finding the subject a safe one*). I was kept late at the public meeting.

ALICK (*glad to get so far away from Galashiels*). Was it a good meeting?

DAVID. Fairish. (*With some heat.*) That young John Shand *would* make a speech.

MAGGIE. John Shand? Is that the student Shand?

DAVID. The same. It's true he's a student at Glasgow University in the winter months, but in summer he's just the railway porter here; and I think it's very presumptuous of a young lad like that to make a speech when he hasn't a penny to bless himself with.

ALICK. The Shands were always an impudent family, and jealous. I suppose that's the reason they haven't been on speaking terms with us this six years. Was it a good speech?

DAVID (*illustrating the family's generosity*). It was very fine; but he needn't have made fun of *me*.

MAGGIE (*losing a stitch*). He dared?

DAVID (*depressed*). You see I can *not* get started on a speech without saying things like 'In rising *fo* to make a few remarks.'

JAMES. What's wrong with it?

DAVID. He mimicked me, and said 'Will our worthy chairman come for to go for to answer my questions?' and so on; and they roared.

JAMES (*slapping his money pocket*). The sacket.

DAVID. I did feel bitterly, father, the want of education. (*Without knowing it, he has a beautiful way of pronouncing this noble word.*)

MAGGIE (*holding out a kind hand to him*). David.

ALICK. I've missed it sore, David. Even now I feel the want of it in the very marrow of me. I'm shamed to think I never gave you your chance. But when you were young I was so desperate poor, how could I do it, Maggie?

MAGGIE. It wasn't possible, father.

ALICK (*gazing at the book-shelves*). To be able to understand these books! To up with them one at a time and scrape them as clean as though they were a bowl of brose. Lads, it's not to riches, it's to scholarship that I make my humble bow.

JAMES (*who is good at bathos*). There's ten yards of them. And they were selected by the minister o Galashiels. He said—

DAVID (*quickly*). James.



JAMES. I mean—I mean—

MAGGIE (*calmly*). I suppose you mean what you say, James. I hear, David, that the minister of Galashiels is to be married on that Miss Turnbull.

DAVID (*on guard*). So they were saying.

ALICK. All I can say is she has made a poor bargain.

MAGGIE (*the damned*). I wonder at you, father. He's a very nice gentleman. I'm sure I hope he has chosen wisely.

JAMES. Not him.

MAGGIE (*getting near her tragedy*). How can you say that when you don't know her? I expect she is full of charm.

ALICK. Charm? It's the very word he used.

DAVID. Havering idiot.

ALICK. What is charm, exactly, Maggie?

MAGGIE. Oh, it's—it's a sort of bloom on a woman. If you have it, you don't need to have anything else; and if you don't have it, it doesn't much matter what else you have. Some women, the few, have charm for all; and most have charm for one. But some have charm for none.

(*Somehow she has stopped knitting. Her men-folk are very depressed, JAMES brings his fist down on the table with a bang.*)

JAMES (*shouting*). I have a sister that has charm.

MAGGIE. No, James, you haven't.

JAMES (*rushing at her with the watch and chain*). Ha'e, Maggie.  
(*She lets them lie in her lap.*)

DAVID. Maggie, would you like a silk?

MAGGIE. What could I do with a silk? (*With a gust of passion.*) You might as well dress up a little brown hen.

(*They wriggle miserably.*)

JAMES (*stamping*). Bring him here to me.

MAGGIE. Bring whom, James?

JAMES. David, I would be obliged if you wouldn't kick me beneath the table.

MAGGIE (*rising*). Let's be practical; let's go to our beds.

(*This reminds them that they have a job on hand in which she is not to share.*)

DAVID (*slily*). I don't feel very sleepy yet.

ALICK. Nor me either.

JAMES. You've just taken the very words out of my mouth.

DAVID (*with unusual politeness*). Goodnight to you, Maggie.

MAGGIE (*fixing the three of them*). All of you unsleepy, when, as is well known, ten o'clock is your regular bed-time?

JAMES. Yes, it's common knowledge that we go to our beds at ten. (*Chuckling.*) That's what we're counting on.

MAGGIE. Counting on?

DAVID. You stupid whelp.

JAMES. What have I done?

MAGGIE (*folding her arms*). There's something up. You've got to tell me, David.

DAVID (*who knows when he is beaten*). Go out and watch, James.

MAGGIE. Watch?

(*JAMES takes himself off, armed, as MAGGIE notices, with a stick.*)

DAVID (*in his alert business way*). Maggie, there are burglars about.

MAGGIE. Burglars? (*She sits rigid, but she is not the kind to scream.*)

DAVID. We hadn't meant for to tell you till we nabbed them; but they've been in this room twice of late. We sat up last night waiting for them, and we're to sit up again tonight.

MAGGIE. The silver plate.

DAVID. It's all safe as yet. That makes us think that they were either frightened away these other times, or that they are coming back for to make a clean sweep.

MAGGIE. How did you get to know about this?

DAVID. It was on Tuesday that the polissman called at the quarry with a very queer story. He had seen a man climbing out at this window at ten past two.

MAGGIE. Did he chase him?

DAVID. It was so dark he lost sight of him at once.

ALICK. Tell her about the window.

DAVID. We've found out that the catch of the window has been pushed back by slipping the blade of a knife between the woodwork.

MAGGIE. David.

ALICK. The polissman said he was carrying a little carpet bag.

MAGGIE. The silver plate *is* gone.

DAVID. No, no. We were thinking that very likely he has bunches of keys in the bag.

MAGGIE. Or weapons.

DAVID. As for that, we have some pretty stout weapons ourselves in the umbrella stand. So, if you'll go to your bed, Maggie—

MAGGIE. Me? and my brothers in danger.

ALICK. There's just one of them.

MAGGIE. The polissman just saw one.

DAVID (*licking his palms*). I would be very pleased if there were three of them.

MAGGIE. I watch with you. I would be very pleased if there were four of them.

DAVID. And they say she has no charm!

(*JAMES returns on tiptoe as if the burglars were beneath the table. He signs to every one to breathe no more, and then whispers his news.*)

JAMES. He's there. I had no sooner gone out than I saw him sliding down the garden wall, close to the rhubarbs.

ALICK. What's he like?

JAMES. He's an ugly customer. That's all I could see. There was a little carpet bag in his hand.

DAVID. That's him.

JAMES. He slunk into the rhodydendrons, and he's there now, watching the window.

DAVID. We have him. Out with the light.

(*The room is beautified by a chandelier fitted for three gas jets, but with the advance of progress one of these has been removed and the incandescent light put in its place. This alone is lit. ALICK climbs a chair, pulls a little chain, and the room is now but vaguely lit by the fire. It plays fitfully on four sparkling faces.*)

MAGGIE. Do you think he saw you, James?

JAMES. I couldn't say, but in any case I was too clever for him. I looked up at the stars, and yawned loud at them as if I was tremendous sleepy.

(*There is a long pause during which they are lurking in the shadows. At last they hear some movement and they steal like ghosts from the room. We see DAVID turning out the lobby light; then the door closes and an empty room awaits the intruder with a shudder of expectancy. The window opens and shuts as softly as if this were a mother peering in to see whether her baby is asleep. Then the head of*

man shows between the curtains. The remainder of him follows. He is carrying a little carpet bag. He stands irresolute; what puzzles him evidently is that the Wylies should have retired to rest without lifting that piece of coal off the fire. He opens the door and peeps into the lobby, listening to the wag-at-the-wall clock. All seems serene, and he turns on the light. We see him clearly now. He is JOHN SHAND, age twenty-one, boots muddy, as an indignant carpet can testify. He wears a shabby topcoat and a cockerty bonnet; otherwise he is in the well-worn corduroys of a railway porter. His movement at first stealthy, become almost homely as he feels that he is secure. He opens the bag and takes out a bunch of keys, a small paper parcel, and a black implement that may be a burglar's jemmy. This cool customer examines the fire and piles on more coals. With the keys he opens the door of the bookcase, selects two large volumes, and brings them to the table. He takes off his topcoat and opens his parcel which we now see contains sheets of foolscap paper. His next action shows that the 'jemmy' is really a ruler. He knows where the pen and ink are kept. He pulls the fine chair nearer to the table, sits on it, and proceeds to write, occasionally dotting the carpet with ink as he stabs the air with his pen. He is so occupied that he does not see the door opening, and the Wylie family staring at him. They are armed with sticks.)

ALICK (*at last*). When you're ready, John Shand.

(JOHN *hints back, and then has the grace to rise, dogged and expressionless.*)

JAMES (*like a railway porter*). Ticket, please.

DAVID. You can't think of anything clever for to go for to say now, John.

MAGGIE. I hope you find that chair comfortable, young man.

JOHN. I have no complaint to make against the chair.

ALICK (*who is really distressed*). A native of the town. The disgrace to your family. I feel pity for the Shands this night.

JOHN (*glowering*). I'll thank you, Mr. Wylie, not to pity my family.

JAMES. Canny, canny.

MAGGIE (*that sense of justice again*). I think you should let the young man explain. It mayn't be so bad as we thought.

DAVID. Explain away, my billie.

JOHN. Only the uneducated would need an explanation. I'm a student, (*with a little passion*) and I'm desperate for want of books. You have all I want here; no use to you but for display; well, I came her to study. I come twice weekly. (*Amazement of his hosts.*)

DAVID (*who is the first to recover*). By the window.

JOHN. Do you think a Shand would so far lower himself as to enter your door? Well, is it a case for the police?

JAMES. It is.

MAGGIE (*not so much out of the goodness of her heart as to patronise the Shands*). It seems to me it is a case for us all to go to our beds and leave the young man to study; but not on that chair. (*And she wheels the chair away from him.*)

JOHN. Thank you, Miss Maggie, but I couldn't be beholden to you.

JAMES. My opinion is that he's nobody, so out with him.

JOHN. Yes, out with me. And you'll be cheered to hear I'm likely to be a nobody for a long time to come.

DAVID (*who had been beginning to respect him*). Are you a poor scholar?

JOHN. On the contrary, I'm a brilliant scholar.

DAVID. It's siller, then?

JOHN (*glorified by experiences he has shared with many a gallant soul*). My first year at college I lived on a barrel of potatoes, and we had just a sofa-bed between two of us; when the one lay down th

other had to get up. Do you think it was hardship? It was sublime. But this year I can't afford it. I'll have to stay on here, collecting the tickets of the illiterate, such as you, when I might be with Romulus and Remus among the stars.

JAMES (*summing up*). Havers.

DAVID (*in whose head some design is vaguely taking shape*). Whisht, James. I must say, young lad, like your spirit. Now tell me, what's your professors' opinion of your future.

JOHN. They think me a young man of extraordinary promise.

DAVID. You have a name here for high moral character.

JOHN. And justly.

DAVID. Are you serious-minded?

JOHN. I never laughed in my life.

DAVID. Who do you sit under in Glasgow?

JOHN. Mr. Flemister of the Sauchiehall High.

DAVID. Are you a Sabbath-school teacher?

JOHN. I am.

DAVID. One more question. Are you promised?

JOHN. To a lady?

DAVID. Yes.

JOHN. I've never given one of them a single word of encouragement. I'm too much occupied thinking about my career.

DAVID. So. (*He reflects, and finally indicates by a jerk of the head that he wishes to talk with his father behind the door.*)

JAMES (*longingly*). Do you want me too?

(*But they go out without even answering him.*)

MAGGIE. I don't know what maggot they have in their heads, but sit down, young man, till they come back.

JOHN. My name's Mr. Shand, and till I'm called that I decline to sit down again in this house.

MAGGIE. Then I'm thinking, young sir, you'll have a weary wait.

(*While he waits you can see how pinched his face is. He is little more than a boy, and he seldom has enough to eat. DAVID and ALICK return presently, looking as sly as if they had been discussing some move on the dambrod, as indeed they have.*)

DAVID (*suddenly become genial*). Sit down, Mr. Shand, and pull in your chair. You'll have a thimbleful of something to keep the cold out? (*Briskly.*) Glasses, Maggie.

(*She wonders, but gets glasses and decanter from the sideboard, which JAMES calls the chiffy. DAVID and ALICK, in the most friendly manner, also draw up to the table.*)

You're not a totaller, I hope?

JOHN (*guardedly*). I'm practically a totaller.

DAVID. So are we. How do you take it? Is there any hot water, Maggie?

JOHN. If I take it at all, and I haven't made up my mind yet, I'll take it cold.

DAVID. You'll take it hot, James?

JAMES (*also sitting at the table but completely befogged*). No, I—

DAVID (*decisively*). I think you'll take it hot, James.

JAMES (*sulking*). I'll take it hot.

DAVID. The kettle, Maggie.

(*JAMES has evidently to take it hot so that they can get at the business now on hand while MAGGIE goes kitchenward for the kettle.*)

ALICK. Now, David, quick, before she comes back.

DAVID. Mr. Shand, we have an offer to make you.

JOHN (*warningly*). No patronage.

ALICK. It's strictly a business affair.

DAVID. Leave it to me, father. It's this—(*But to his annoyance the suspicious MAGGIE has already returned with the kettle.*) Maggie, don't you see that you're not wanted?

MAGGIE (*sitting down by the fire and resuming her knitting*). I do, David.

DAVID. I have a proposition to put before Mr. Shand, and women are out of place in business transactions.

(*The needles continue to click.*)

ALICK (*sighing*). We'll have to let her bide, David.

DAVID (*sternly*). Woman. (*But even this does not budge her.*) Very well then, sit there, but don't interfere, mind. Mr. Shand, we're willing, the three of us, to lay out £300 on your education if—

JOHN. Take care.

DAVID (*slowly, which is not his wont*). On condition that five years from now, Maggie Wylie, if still unmarried, can claim to marry you, should such be her wish; the thing to be perfectly open on her side but you to be strictly tied down.

JAMES (*enlightened*). So, so.

DAVID (*resuming his smart manner*). Now, what have you to say? Decide.

JOHN (*after a pause*). I regret to say—

MAGGIE. It doesn't matter what he regrets to say, because I decide against it. And I think it was very ill-done of you to make any such proposal.

DAVID (*without looking at her*). Quiet, Maggie.

JOHN (*looking at her*). I must say, Miss Maggie, I don't see what reasons *you* can have for being so set against it.

MAGGIE. If you would grow a beard, Mr. Shand, the reasons wouldn't be quite so obvious.

JOHN. I'll never grow a beard.

MAGGIE. Then you're done for at the start.

ALICK. Come, come.

MAGGIE. Seeing I have refused the young man—

JOHN. Refused!

DAVID. That's no reason why we shouldn't have his friendly opinion. Your objections, Mr. Shand?

JOHN. Simply, it's a one-sided bargain. I admit I'm no catch at present; but what could a man of my abilities not soar to with three hundred pounds? Something far above what she could aspire to.

MAGGIE. Oh, indeed.

DAVID. The position is that without the three hundred you can't soar.

JOHN. You have me there.

MAGGIE. Yes, but—

ALICK. You see *you're* safe-guarded, Maggie; you don't need to take him unless you like, but he has to take you.

JOHN. That's an unfair arrangement also.

MAGGIE. I wouldn't dream of it without that condition.

JOHN. Then you *are* thinking of it?

MAGGIE. Poof.

DAVID. It's a good arrangement for you, Mr. Shand. The chances are you'll never have to go on with it, for in all probability she'll marry soon.

JAMES. She's tremendous run after.

JOHN. Even if that's true, it's just keeping me in reserve in case she misses doing better.

DAVID (*relieved*). That's the situation in a nutshell.

JOHN. Another thing. Supposing I was to get fond of her?

ALICK (*wistfully*). It's very likely.

JOHN. Yes, and then suppose she was to give me the go-by?

DAVID. You have to risk that.

JOHN. Or take it the other way. Supposing as I got to know her I *could not* endure her?

DAVID (*suavely*). You have both to take risks.

JAMES (*less suavely*). What you need, John Shand, is a clout on the head.

JOHN. Three hundred pounds is no great sum.

DAVID. You can take it or leave it.

ALICK. No great sum for a student studying for the ministry!

JOHN. Do you think that with that amount of money I would stop short at being a minister?

DAVID. That's how I like to hear you speak. A young Scotsman of your ability let loose upon the world with £300, what could he not do? It's almost appalling to think of; especially if he went among the English.

JOHN. What do you think, Miss Maggie?

MAGGIE (*who is knitting*). I have no thoughts on the subject either way.

JOHN (*after looking her over*). What's her age? She looks young, but they say it's the curls that does it.

DAVID (*rather happily*). She's one of those women who are eternally young.

JOHN. I can't take that for an answer.

DAVID. She's twenty-five.

JOHN. I'm just twenty-one.

JAMES. I read in a book that about four years' difference in the ages is the ideal thing. (*As usual he disregarded.*)

DAVID. Well, Mr. Shand?

JOHN (*where is his mother!*). I'm willing if she's willing?

DAVID. Maggie?

MAGGIE. There can be no 'if' about it. It must be an offer.

JOHN. A Shand give a Wylie such a chance to humiliate him? Never.

MAGGIE. Then all is off.

DAVID. Come, come, Mr. Shand, it's just a form.

JOHN (*reluctantly*). Miss Maggie, will you?

MAGGIE (*doggedly*). Is it an offer?

JOHN (*dourly*). Yes.

MAGGIE (*rising*). Before I answer I want first to give you a chance of drawing back.

DAVID. Maggie.

MAGGIE (*bravely*). When they said that I have been run after they were misleading you. I'm without charm; nobody has ever been after me.

JOHN. Oho!

ALICK. They will be yet.

JOHN (*the innocent*). It shows at least that you haven't been after them.

(*His hosts exchange a self-conscious glance.*)

MAGGIE. One thing more; David said I'm twenty-five, I'm twenty-six.

JOHN. Aha!

MAGGIE. Now be practical. Do you withdraw from the bargain, or do you not?

JOHN (*on reflection*). It's a bargain.

MAGGIE. Then so be it.

DAVID (*hurriedly*). And that's settled. Did you say you would take it hot, Mr. Shand?

JOHN. I think I'll take it neat.

(*The others decide to take it hot, and there is some careful business here with the toddy ladles.*)

ALICK. Here's to you, and your career.

JOHN. Thank you. To you, Miss Maggie. Had we not better draw up a legal document? Lawyer Crosbie could do it on the quiet.

DAVID. Should we do that, or should we just trust to one another's honour?

ALICK (*gallantly*). Let Maggie decide.

MAGGIE. I think we would better have a legal document.

DAVID. We'll have it drawn up tomorrow. I was thinking the best way would be for to pay the money in five yearly instalments.

JOHN. I was thinking, better bank the whole sum in my name at once.

ALICK. I think David's plan's the best.

JOHN. I think not. Of course if it's not convenient to you—

DAVID (*touched to the quick*). It's perfectly convenient. What do you say, Maggie?

MAGGIE. I agree with John.

DAVID (*with an odd feeling that Maggie is now on the other side*). Very well.

JOHN. Then as that's settled I think I'll be stepping. (*He is putting his papers back in the bag.*)

ALICK (*politely*). If you would like to sit on at your books—

JOHN. As I can come at any orra time now I think I'll be stepping, (*MAGGIE helps him into his topcoat.*)

MAGGIE. Have you a muffler, John?

JOHN. I have. (*He gets it from his pocket.*)

MAGGIE. You had better put it twice round. (*She does this for him.*)

DAVID. Well goodnight to you, Mr. Shand.

ALICK. And good luck.

JOHN. Thank you. The same to you. And I'll cry in at your office in the morning before the 6.20 is due.

DAVID. I'll have the document ready for you. (*There is the awkward pause that sometimes follows great events.*) I think, Maggie, you might see Mr. Shand to the door.

MAGGIE. Certainly, (*JOHN is going by the window.*) This way, John. (*She takes him off by the more usual exit.*)

DAVID. He's a fine frank fellow; and you saw how cleverly he got the better of me about banking the money. (*As the heads of the conspirators come gleefully together.*) I tell you, father, he has a grand business head.

ALICK. Lads, he's canny. He's cannier than any of us.

JAMES. Except maybe Maggie. He has no idea what a remarkable woman Maggie is.

ALICK. Best he shouldn't know. Men are nervous of remarkable women.

JAMES. She's a long time in coming back.

DAVID (*not quite comfortable*). It's a good sign. H'sh. What sort of a night is it, Maggie?

MAGGIE. It's a little blowy.

(*She gets a large dust-cloth which is lying folded on a shelf, and proceeds to spread it over the fine chair. The men exchange self-conscious glances.*)

DAVID (*stretching himself*). Yes—well, well, oh yes. It's getting late. What is it with you, father?

ALICK. I'm ten forty-two.

JAMES. I'm ten forty.

DAVID. Ten forty-two.

*(They wind up their watches.)*

MAGGIE. It's high time we were bedded. *(She puts her hands on their shoulders lovingly, which is the very thing they have been trying to avoid.)* You're very kind to me.

DAVID. Havers.

ALICK. Havers.

JAMES *(but this does not matter)*. Havers.

MAGGIE *(a little dolefully)*. I'm a sort of sorry for the young man, David.

DAVID. Not at all. You'll be the making of him. *(She lifts the two volumes.)* Are you taking the book to your bed, Maggie?

MAGGIE. Yes. I don't want him to know things I don't know myself.

*(She departs with the books; and ALICK and DAVID, the villains, now want to get away from each other.)*

ALICK. Yes—yes. Oh yes—ay, man—it is so—umpha. You'll lift the big coals off, David.

*(He wanders away to his spring mattress. DAVID removes the coals.)*

JAMES *(who would like to sit down and have an argy-bargy)*. It's a most romantical affair. *(But he gets no answer.)* I wonder how it'll turn out? *(No answer.)* She's queer, Maggie. I wonder how some clever writer has never noticed how queer women are. It's my belief you could write a whole book about them. *(DAVID remains obdurate.)* It was very noble of her to tell him she's twenty-six.

*(Muttering as he too wanders away.)* But I thought she was twenty-seven.

*(DAVID turns out the light.)*



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## II

*Six years have elapsed and John Shand's great hour has come. Perhaps his great hour really lies ahead of him, perhaps he had it six years ago; it often passes us by in the night with such a faint call that we don't even turn in our beds. But according to the trumpets this is John's great hour; it is the hour for which he has long been working with his coat off; and now the coat is on again (broadcloth but ill-fitting), for there is no more to do but await results. He is standing for Parliament, and this is election night.*

*As the scene discloses itself you get, so to speak, one of John Shand's posters in the face. Vote for Shand. Shand, Shand, Shand. Civil and Religious Liberty, Faith, Hope, Freedom. They are all fly-blown names for Shand. Have a placard about Shand, have a hundred placards about him, it is snowing Shand tonight in Glasgow; take the paste out of your eye, and you will see that we are in one of Shand's committee rooms. It has been a hairdresser's emporium, but Shand, Shand, Shand has swept through it like a wind, leaving nothing but the fixtures; why shave, why have your head doused in those basins when you can be brushed and scraped and washed up forever by simply voting for Shand.*

*There are a few hard chairs for yelling Shand from, and then rushing away. There is an iron spiral staircase that once led to the ladies' hairdressing apartments, but now leads to more Shand, Shand, Shand. A glass door at the back opens on to the shop proper, screaming Civil and Religious Liberty, Shand, as it opens, and beyond is the street crammed with still more Shand pro and con. Men in every sort of garb rush in and out, up and down the stair, shouting the magic word. Then there is a lull, and down the stair comes Maggie Wylie, decidedly over-dressed in blue velvet and (let us get this over) less good-looking than ever. She raises her hands to heaven, she spins round like a little teetotum. To her from the street, suffering from a determination of the word Shand to the mouth, rush Alick and David. Alick is thinner (being older), David is stouter (being older), and they are both in tweeds and silk hats.*

MAGGIE. David—have they—is he? quick, quick!

DAVID. There's no news yet, no news. It's terrible.

*(The teetotum revolves more quickly.)*

ALICK. For God's sake, Maggie, sit down.

MAGGIE. I can't, I can't.

DAVID. Hold her down.

*(They press her into a chair; JAMES darts in, stouter also. His necktie has gone; he will never again be able to attend a funeral in that hat.)*

JAMES *(wildly)*. John Shand's the man for you. John Shand's the man for you. John Shand's the man for you.

DAVID *(clutching him)*. Have you heard anything?

JAMES. Not a word.

ALICK. Look at her.

DAVID. Maggie *(he goes on his knees beside her, pressing her to him in affectionate anxiety)*. It was mad of him to dare.

MAGGIE. It was grand of him.

ALICK (*moving about distraught*). Insane ambition.

MAGGIE. Glorious ambition.

DAVID. Maggie, Maggie, my lamb, best be prepared for the worst.

MAGGIE (*husky*). I am prepared.

ALICK. Six weary years has she waited for this night.

MAGGIE. Six brave years has John toiled for this night.

JAMES. And you could have had him, Maggie, at the end of five. The document says five.

MAGGIE. Do you think I grudge not being married to him yet? Was I to hamper him till the fight was

won.

DAVID (*with wrinkled brows*). But if it's lost?

(*She can't answer.*)

ALICK (*starling*). What's that?

(*The three listen at the door; the shouting dies down.*)

DAVID. They're terrible still; what can make them so still?

(*JAMES spirits himself away, ALICK and DAVID blanch to hear MAGGIE speaking softly as if to JOHN.*)

MAGGIE. Did you say you had lost, John? Of course you would lose the first time, dear John. Six years. Very well, we'll begin another six tonight. You'll win yet. (*Fiercely.*) Never give in, John, never give in!

(*The roar of the multitude breaks out again and comes rolling nearer.*)

DAVID. I think he's coming.

(*JAMES is fired into the room like a squeezed onion.*)

JAMES. He's coming!

(*They may go on speaking, but through the clang outside none could hear. The populace seem to be trying to take the committee room by assault. Out of the scrimmage a man emerges dishevelled and bursts into the room, closing the door behind him. It is JOHN SHAND in a five guinea suit, including the hat. There are other changes in him also, for he has been delving his way through loamy ground all those years. His right shoulder, which he used to raise to pound a path through the crowd, now remains permanently in that position. His mouth tends to close like a box. His eyes are tired, they need some one to pull the lids over them and send him, to sleep for a week. But they are honest eyes still, and faithful, and could even light up his face at times with a smile, if the mouth would give a little help.*)

JOHN (*clinging to a chair that he may not fly straight to heaven*). I'm in; I'm elected. Majority two hundred and forty-four; I'm John Shand, M.P.

(*The crowd have the news by this time and their roar breaks the door open. JAMES is off at once to tell them that he is to be Shand's brother-in-law. A teardrop clings to ALICK'S nose; DAVID hits out playfully at JOHN, and JOHN in an ecstasy returns the blow.*)

DAVID. Fling yourself at the door, father, and bar them out. Maggie, what keeps you so quiet now?

MAGGIE (*weak in her limbs*). You're sure you're in, John.

JOHN. Majority 244. I've beaten the baronet. I've done it, Maggie, and not a soul to help me; I've done it alone. (*His voice breaks; you could almost pick up the pieces.*) I'm as hoarse as a crow, and I have to address the Cowcaddens Club yet; David, pump some oxygen into me.

DAVID. Certainly, Mr. Shand. (*While he does it, MAGGIE is seeing visions.*)

ALICK. What are you doing, Maggie?

MAGGIE. This is the House of Commons, and I'm John, catching the Speaker's eye for the first time. Do you see a queer little old wifie sitting away up there in the Ladies' Gallery? That's me. Mr.

Speaker, sir, I rise to make my historic maiden speech. I am no orator, sir; voice from Ladies' Gallery

'Are you not, John? you'll soon let them see that'; cries of 'Silence, woman,' and general indignation. Mr. Speaker, sir, I stand here diffidently with my eyes on the Treasury Bench; voice from the Ladies Gallery, 'And you'll soon have your coat-tails on it, John'; loud cries of 'Remove that little old wifie,' in which she is forcibly ejected, and the honourable gentleman resumes his seat in a torrent of admiring applause.

(ALICK and DAVID waggle their proud heads.)

JOHN (*tolerantly*). Maggie, Maggie.

MAGGIE. You're not angry with me, John?

JOHN. No, no.

MAGGIE. But you glowered.

JOHN. I was thinking of Sir Peregrine. Just because I beat him at the poll he took a shabby revenge; he congratulated me in French, a language I haven't taken the trouble to master.

MAGGIE (*becoming a little taller*). Would it help you, John, if you were to marry a woman that could speak French?

DAVID (*quickly*). Not at all.

MAGGIE (*gloriously*). Mon cher Jean, laissezmoi parler le français, voulez-vous un interprète?

JOHN. Hullo!

MAGGIE. Je suis la sœur française de mes deux frères écossais.

DAVID (*worshipping her*). She's been learning French.

JOHN (*lightly*). Well done.

MAGGIE (*grandly*). They're arriving.

ALICK. Who?

MAGGIE. Our guests. This is London, and Mrs. John Shand is giving her first reception. (*Airily.*) Have I told you, darling, who are coming tonight? There's that dear Sir Peregrine. (*To ALICK.*) Sir Peregrine, this is a pleasure. Avez-vous. . . . So sorry we beat you at the poll.

JOHN. I'm doubting the baronet would sit on you, Maggie.

MAGGIE. I've invited a lord to sit on the baronet. *Voilà!*

DAVID (*delighted*). You thing! You'll find the lords expensive.

MAGGIE. Just a little cheap lord. (JAMES enters importantly.) My dear Lord Cheap, this is kind of you (JAMES hopes that Maggie's reason is not unbalanced.)

DAVID (*who really ought to have had education*). How de doo, Cheap?

JAMES (*bewildered*). Maggie—

MAGGIE. Yes, do call me Maggie.

ALICK (*grinning*). She's practising her first party, James. The swells are at the door.

JAMES (*heavily*). That's what I came to say. They are at the door.

JOHN. Who?

JAMES. The swells; a carriage and pair. (*He gives JOHN three cards.*)

JOHN. 'Mr. Tenterden.'

DAVID. Him that was speaking for you?

JOHN. The same. He's a whip and an Honourable. 'Lady Sybil Tenterden. (*Frowns.*) Her! She's his sister.

MAGGIE. A married woman?

JOHN. No. 'The Comtesse de la Brière.'

MAGGIE (*the scholar*). She must be French.

JOHN. Yes; I think she's some relation. She's a widow.

JAMES. But what am I to say to them? (*'Mr. Shand's compliments, and he will be proud to receive them' is the very least that the Wylies expect.*)

JOHN (*who was evidently made for great ends*). Say I'm very busy, but if they care to wait I hope presently to give them a few minutes.

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JAMES (*thunderstruck*). Good God, Mr. Shand!

(*But it makes him John's more humble servant than ever, and he departs with the message.*)

JOHN (*not unaware of the sensation he has created*). I'll go up and let the crowd see me from the window.

MAGGIE. But—but—what are we to do with these ladies?

JOHN (*as he tramps upwards*). It's your reception, Maggie; this will prove you.

MAGGIE (*growing smaller*). Tell me what you know about this Lady Sybil?

JOHN. The only thing I know about her is that she thinks me vulgar.

MAGGIE. You?

JOHN. She has attended some of my meetings, and I'm told she said that.

MAGGIE. What could the woman mean?

JOHN. I wonder. When I come down I'll ask her.

(*With his departure Maggie's nervousness increases.*)

ALICK (*encouragingly*). In at them, Maggie, with your French.

MAGGIE. It's all slipping from me, father.

DAVID (*gloomily*). I'm sure to say 'for to come for to go.'

(*The new-comers glorify the room, and MAGGIE feels that they have lifted her up with the tongs and deposited her in one of the basins. They are far from intending to be rude; it is not their fault that they do swans scatter the ducks. They do not know that they are guests of the family, they think merely that they are waiting with other strangers in a public room; they undulate enquiringly, and if MAGGIE could undulate in return she would have no cause for offence. But she suddenly realises that this is an art as yet denied her, and that though David might buy her evening gowns as fine as theirs (and is at this moment probably deciding to do so), she would look better carrying them in her arms than on her person. She also feels that to emerge from wraps as they are doing is more difficult than to plank your money on the counter for them. The Comtesse she could forgive, for she is old; but Lady Sybil is young and beautiful and comes lazily to rest like a stately ship of Tarsus.*)

COMTESSE (*smiling divinely, and speaking with such a pretty accent*). I hope one is not in the way. We were told we might wait.

MAGGIE (*bravely climbing out of the basin*). Certainly—I am sure—if you will be so—it is—  
(*She knows that David and her father are very sorry for her.*)  
(*A high voice is heard orating outside.*)

SYBIL (*screwing her nose deliciously*). He is at it again, Auntie.

COMTESSE. Mon Dieu! (*Like one begging pardon of the universe.*) It is Mr. Tenterden, you understand, making one more of his delightful speeches to the crowd. *Would you be so charming as to shut the door?*

(*This to DAVID in such appeal that she is evidently making the petition of her life. DAVID saves her.*)

MAGGIE (*determined not to go under*). J'espère que vous—trouvez—cette—réunion—intéressante?

COMTESSE. Vous parlez français? Mais c'est charmant! Voyons, causons un peu. Racontezmoi tout de ce grand homme, toutes les choses merveilleuses qu'il a faites.

MAGGIE. I—I—Je connais—(*Alas!*)

COMTESSE (*naughtily*). Forgive me, Mademoiselle, I thought you spoke French.

SYBIL (*who knows that DAVID admires her shoulders*). How wicked of you, Auntie. (*To MAGGIE.*) I assure you none of us can understand her when she gallops at that pace.

MAGGIE (*crushed*). It doesn't matter. I will tell Mr. Shand that you are here.

SYBIL (*drawling*). Please don't trouble him. We are really only waiting till my brother recovers and

can take us back to our hotel.

MAGGIE. I'll tell him.

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(*She is glad to disappear up the stair.*)

COMTESSE. The lady seems distressed. Is she a relation of Mr. Shand?

DAVID. Not for to say a relation. She's my sister. Our name is Wylie.

(*But granite quarries are nothing to them.*)

COMTESSE. How do you do. You are the committee man of Mr. Shand?

DAVID. No, just friends.

COMTESSE (*gaily to the basins*). Aha! I know you. Next, please! Sybil, do you weigh yourself, or are you asleep?

(*LADY SYBIL has sunk indolently into a weighing-chair.*)

SYBIL. Not quite, Auntie.

COMTESSE (*the mirror of la politesse*). Tell me all about Mr. Shand. Was it here that he—picked up the pin?

DAVID. The pin?

COMTESSE. As *I* have read, a self-made man always begins by picking up a pin. After that, as the memoirs say, his rise was rapid.

(*DAVID, however, is once more master of himself, and indeed has begun to tot up the cost of their garments.*)

DAVID. It wasn't a pin he picked up, my lady; it was £300.

ALICK (*who feels that JOHN'S greatness has been outside the conversation quite long enough*). And his rise wasn't so rapid, just at first, David!

DAVID. He had his fight. His original intention was to become a minister; he's university-educated, you know; he's not a workingman member.

ALICK (*with reverence*). He's an M.A. But while he was a student he got a place in an iron cementer business.

COMTESSE (*now far out of her depths*). Iron cementer?

DAVID. They scrape boilers.

COMTESSE. I see. The fun men have, Sybil!

DAVID (*with some solemnity*). There have been millions made in scraping boilers. They say, father, he went into business so as to be able to pay off the £300.

ALICK (*slily*). So I've heard.

COMTESSE. Aha—it was a loan?

(*DAVID and ALICK are astride their great subject now.*)

DAVID. No, a gift—of a sort—from some well-wishers. But they wouldn't hear of his paying it off, father!

ALICK. Not them!

COMTESSE (*restraining an impulse to think of other things*). That was kind, charming.

ALICK (*with a look at DAVID*). Yes, Well, my lady, he developed a perfect genius for the iron-cementing.

DAVID. But his ambition wasn't satisfied. Soon he had public life in his eye. As a heckler he was something fearsome; they had to seat him on the platform for to keep him quiet. Next they had to let him into the Chair. After that he did all the speaking; he cleared all roads before him like a fire-engine; and when this vacancy occurred, you could hardly say it did occur, so quickly did he step into it. My lady, there are few more impressive sights in the world than a Scotsman on the make.

COMTESSE. I can well believe it. And now he has said farewell to boilers?

DAVID (*impressively*). Not at all; the firm promised if he was elected for to make him their London

manager at £800 a year.

COMTESSE. ~~There is a strong man for you, Sybil; but I believe you *are* asleep.~~

SYBIL (*stirring herself*). Honestly I'm not. (*Sweetly to the others.*) But *would* you mind finding out whether my brother is drawing to a close?

(DAVID *goes out, leaving poor ALICK marooned. The COMTESSE is kind to him.*)

COMTESSE. Thank you very much. (*Which helps ALICK out.*) Don't you love a strong man, sleepy head?

SYBIL (*preening herself*). I never met one.

COMTESSE. Neither have I. But if you *did* meet one, would he wake you up?

SYBIL. I dare say he would find there were two of us.

COMTESSE (*considering her*). Yes, I think he would. Ever been in love, you cold thing?

SYBIL (*yawning*). I have never shot up in flame, Auntie.

COMTESSE. Think you could manage it?

SYBIL. If Mr. Right came along.

COMTESSE. As a girl of today it would be your duty to tame him.

SYBIL. As a girl of today I would try to do my duty.

COMTESSE. And if it turned out that *he* tamed you instead?

SYBIL. He would have to do that if he were *my* Mr. Right.

COMTESSE. And then?

SYBIL. Then, of course, I should adore him. Auntie, I think if I ever really love it will be like Mary Queen of Scots, who said of her Both-well that she could follow him round the world in her nighty.

COMTESSE. My petite!

SYBIL. I believe I mean it.

COMTESSE. Oh, it is quite my conception of your character. Do you know, I am rather sorry for this Mr. John Shand.

SYBIL (*opening her fine eyes*). Why? He is quite a boor, is he not?

COMTESSE. For that very reason. Because his great hour is already nearly sped. That wild bull manner that moves the multitude—they will laugh at it in your House of Commons.

SYBIL (*indifferent*). I suppose so.

COMTESSE. Yet if he had education—

SYBIL. Have we not been hearing how superbly he is educated?

COMTESSE. It is such as you or me that he needs to educate him now. *You* could do it almost too well.

SYBIL (*with that pretty stretch of neck*). I am not sufficiently interested. I retire in your favour. How would you begin?

COMTESSE. By asking him to drop in, about five, of course. By the way, I wonder is there a Mrs. Shand?

SYBIL. I have no idea. But they marry young.

COMTESSE. If there is not, there is probably a lady waiting for him, somewhere in a boiler.

SYBIL. I dare say.

(MAGGIE *descends.*)

MAGGIE. Mr. Shand will be down directly.

COMTESSE. Thank you. Your brother has been giving us such an interesting account of his career. I forget, Sybil, whether he said that he was married.

MAGGIE. No, he's not married; but he will be soon.

COMTESSE. Ah! (*She is merely making conversation.*) A friend of yours?

MAGGIE (*now a scorner of herself*). I don't think much of her.

COMTESSE. In that case, tell me all about her.

MAGGIE. There's not much to tell. She's common, and stupid. One of those who go in for self-culture; and then when the test comes they break down. (*With sinister enjoyment.*) She'll be the ruin of him.

COMTESSE. But is not that sad! Figure to yourself how many men with greatness before them have been shipwrecked by marrying in the rank from which they sprang.

MAGGIE. I've told her that.

COMTESSE. But she will not give him up?

MAGGIE. No.

SYBIL. Why should she if he cares for her? What is her name?

MAGGIE. It's—Maggie.

COMTESSE (*still uninterested*). Well, I am afraid that Maggie is to do for John, (*JOHN comes down.*) Ah, our hero!

JOHN. Sorry I have kept you waiting. The Comtesse?

COMTESSE. And my niece Lady Sybil Tenterden. (*SYBIL'S head inclines on its stem.*) She is not really all my niece; I mean I am only half of her aunt. What a triumph, Mr. Shand!

JOHN. Oh, pretty fair, pretty fair. Your brother has just finished addressing the crowd, Lady Sybil.

SYBIL. Then we must not detain Mr. Shand, Auntie.

COMTESSE (*who unless her heart is touched thinks insincerity charming*). Only one word. I heard you speak last night. Sublime! Just the sort of impassioned eloquence that your House of Commons loves.

JOHN. It's very good of you to say so.

COMTESSE. But we must run. *Bon soir.*

(*SYBIL bows as to some one far away.*)

JOHN. Goodnight, Lady Sybil. I hear you think I'm vulgar. (*Eyebrows are raised.*)

COMTESSE. My dear Mr. Shand, what absurd—

JOHN. I was told she said that after hearing me speak.

COMTESSE. Quite a mistake, I—

JOHN (*doggedly*). Is it not true?

SYBIL (*'waking up'*). You seem to know, Mr. Shand; and as you press me so unnecessarily—well, yes, that is how you struck me.

COMTESSE. My child!

SYBIL (*who is a little agitated*). He would have it.

JOHN (*perplexed*). What's the matter? I just wanted to know, because if it's true I must alter it.

COMTESSE. There, Sybil, see how he values your good opinion.

SYBIL (*her svelte figure giving like a fly-rod*). It is very nice of you to put it in that way, Mr. Shand. Forgive me.

JOHN. But I don't quite understand yet. Of course, it can't matter to me, Lady Sybil, what you think of me; what I mean is, that I mustn't be vulgar if it would be injurious to my career.

(*The fly-rod regains its rigidity.*)

SYBIL. I see. No, of course, I could not affect your career, Mr. Shand.

JOHN (*who quite understands that he is being challenged*). That's so, Lady Sybil, meaning no offence.

SYBIL (*who has a naughty little impediment in her voice when she is most alluring*). Of course not. And we are friends again?

JOHN. Certainly.

SYBIL. Then I hope you will come to see me in London as I present no terrors.

JOHN (*he is a man, is John*). I'll be very pleased.

SYBIL. Any afternoon about five.

JOHN. ~~Much obliged. And you can teach me the things I don't know yet, if you'll be so kind.~~

SYBIL (*the impediment becoming more assertive*). If you wish it, I shall do my best.

JOHN. Thank you, Lady Sybil. And who knows there may be one or two things I can teach you.

SYBIL (*it has now become an angel's hiccough*). Yes, we can help one another. Goodbye till then.

JOHN. Goodbye. Maggie, the ladies are going.

(*During this skirmish MAGGIE has stood apart. At the mention of her name they glance at one another*

JOHN escorts SYBIL, but the COMTESSE turns back. She says:

'Are you, then, *the* Maggie? (*MAGGIE nods rather defiantly and the COMTESSE is distressed.*) But if I had known I would not have said those things. Please forgive an old woman.'

'It doesn't matter.'

'I—I dare say it will be all right. Mademoiselle, if I were you I would not encourage those *tête-à-têtes* with Lady Sybil. I am the rude one, but she is the dangerous one; and I am afraid his impudence has attracted her. *Bon voyage*, Miss Maggie.'

'Goodbye—but I *can* speak French. Je parle français. Isn't that right?'

'But, yes, it is excellent. (*Making things easy for her.*) C'est très bien.'

'Je me suis embrouillée—la dernière fois.'

'Good! Shall I speak more slowly?'

'No, no. Non, non, faster, faster.'

'J'admire votre courage!'

'Je comprends chaque mot.'

'Parfait! Bravo!'

'Voilà!'

'Superbe!'

(*The COMTESSE goes, applauding; and MAGGIE has a moment of elation, which however has passed before JOHN returns for his hat.*)

'Have you more speaking to do, John?'

(*He is somehow in high good-humour.*)

'I must run across and address the Cowcaddens Club. (*He sprays his throat with a hand-spray.*) I wonder if I *am* vulgar, Maggie?'

'You are not, but *I* am.'

'Not that *I* can see.'

'Look how over-dressed I am, John! I knew it was too showy when I ordered it, and yet I could not resist the thing. But I will tone down, I will. What did you think of Lady Sybil?'

'That young woman had better be careful. She's a bit of a besom, Maggie.'

'She's beautiful, John.'

'She has a neat way of stretching herself. For playing with she would do as well as another.'

(*MAGGIE looks at him wistfully.*)

'You couldn't stay and have a talk for a few minutes?'

'If you want me, Maggie. The longer you keep them waiting, the more they think of you.'

'When are you to announce that we're to be married, John?'

'I won't be long. You've waited a year more than you need have done, so I think it's your due I should hurry things now.'

'I think it's noble of you.'

'Not at all, Maggie; the nobleness has been yours in waiting so patiently. And your brothers would insist on it at any rate. They're watching me like cats with a mouse.'

'It's so little I've done to help.'



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