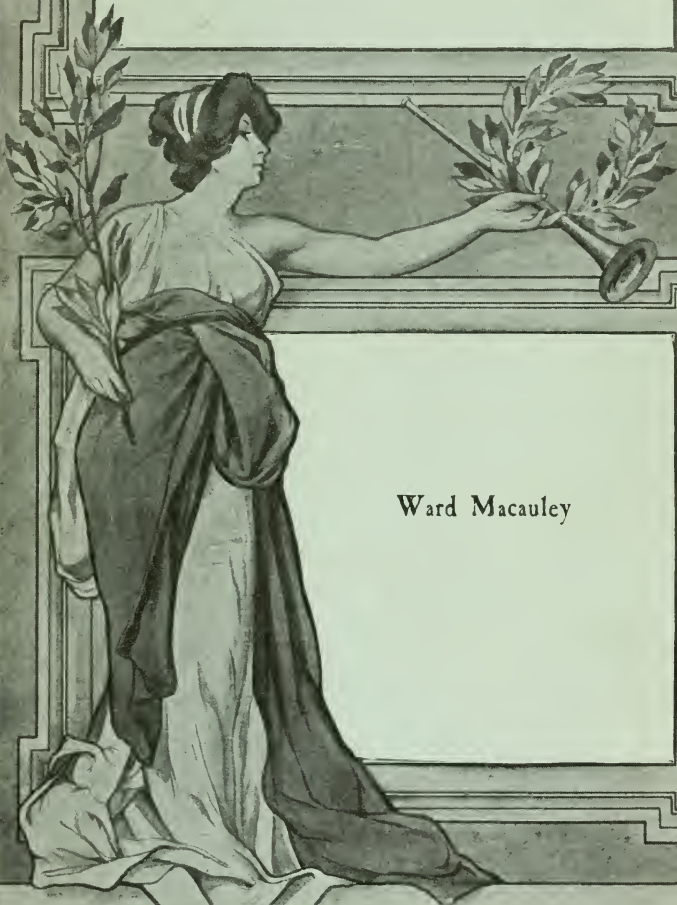


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Pollin Picks a Wife

Ward Macauley

THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY



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THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY
PHILADELPHIA

Pollin Picks a Wife

A Play in One Act

By

WARD MACAULEY

*Author of "Lazy Bob Parkins," "Examination
Day at Wood Hill School," "Mr. Editor," etc.*



PHILADELPHIA
THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY

1915

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Pollin Picks a Wife

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no 1

Pollin Picks a Wife

CHARACTERS

MR. POLLIN	<i>a scientific gentleman</i>
ARTHUR SWIFT	<i>a dashing youth</i>
JULIUS SHARPE	<i>willing to take a chance</i>
JOHN RANDALL	<i>a proud father</i>
MR. JAMES	<i>a guest</i>
MARY RANDALL	<i>a charming lady</i>
MISS SIMPLIN	<i>a hopeful maiden</i>
MRS. RANDALL	<i>a fond mamma</i>
MRS. SMITH	<i>of voluminous voice</i>

Other guests, as desired.

TIME OF PLAYING.—One hour.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Mr. Pollin is a scientific gentleman who feels that it is time to marry. He has made out a list of three hundred girls, and cut out all but three. Out of those three he has finally selected Mary Randall, whom he has been calling on now for over a year. A careful study of her ancestors and temperament has at last brought him to the decision that Mary will do. Hurried on a bit by his friend Sharpe and by a rival who has appeared on the horizon, he finally comes to the point—but he gets a surprise.

COSTUMES, ETC.

POLLIN. Thirty. Very dignified, in irreproachable attire.

ARTHUR. Twenty-five. A handsome and enthusiastic young man.

SHARPE. Thirty-five. Clever and sophisticated.

RANDALL. Fifty. A fat matter-of-fact gentleman.

JAMES. Twenty-five. A lively youth.

MARY. Twenty-two. A pretty and attractive girl.

MRS. RANDALL. Fifty. Handsomely dressed matronly lady.

MRS. SMITH. Thirty-five. Heavy, and of ponderous voice.

MISS SIMPLIN. Thirty. Plain but gushing.

PROPERTIES

Two newspapers, framed photograph on the table, some heavy volumes in a bookcase and on the table.

Pollin Picks a Wife

SCENE.—*Library of the home of JOHN RANDALL, evening. Entrances C. and L. The library is well furnished and well filled with books.*

(*Curtain discovers MR. and MRS. RANDALL, seated at the library table, reading newspaper. Their backs are toward each other.*)

MRS. R. (*explosively*). Why, the idea!

JOHN RANDALL (*chuckling as he reads*). Stole home from second again. My, that boy's a wonder! (*Reads.*)

MRS. R. I don't believe it.

RANDALL (*coming out of his paper with evident regret*). Hey! What's that?

MRS. R. This scientist says that in fifty years or less people won't fall in love, and ——

RANDALL. All going to get sensible, hey?

MRS. R. Sensible! I don't call that sensible. How would you men like to have your wives picked for you by a government bureau?

RANDALL. Well, some of us might get good ones.

MRS. R. (*severely*). John! What do you mean by that remark?

RANDALL (*going back to paper*). Oh, nothing—nothing at all.

MRS. R. The article says a government bureau will experiment to find what kinds of temperaments will be congenial, and will match people whether they like it or not.

RANDALL. Then, if they find a lady with the right disposition for me, I'd have to marry her, even if she had a face that would curdle cream?

MRS. R. That's the idea.

RANDALL. Does that apply to second wives, too?

MRS. R. John! What do you mean?

RANDALL. Oh, nothing—nothing at all. Say, you'd better show that to young Pollin.

MRS. R. (*shocked*). To whom?

RANDALL. Young Pollin—Mary's friend. He's a great chap for those newfangled scientific things.

MRS. R. I shall do nothing of the kind, but (*determinedly*) I am going to have a talk with Mary about Mr. Pollin. He has been coming here pretty regularly for a year and a half.

RANDALL. You'll have to talk soon if you want to say anything before the guests get here. And take her somewhere else, won't you? I want to read the score. You made me quit with the bases full and two out.

(*Enter MARY RANDALL, C.*)

MRS. R. Mary, your father and I have been speaking about you. (RANDALL *annoyed*.)

MARY. Don't you often speak of me, mother?

MRS. R. Yes, but this was exceptional. It was about you and Mr. Pollin.

(*MARY appears annoyed.*)

RANDALL (*irritably*). I'm going some place where I can read in peace. (*He slams out, C.*)

MRS. R. All right, if your score is more important than your daughter. Mary, I want to talk to you about Mr. Pollin.

MARY. Now, mother, don't you think that we have talked about Mr. Pollin enough?

MRS. R. No. I'm going to keep right on talking until I get my answer. Does he mean business? That's what I want to know.

MARY. Business? Mother, how you talk. Can't a girl have a friendly interest in a man without everybody's wanting to know if they are going to be married?

MRS. R. Friendly interest? Hear the girl! Why, yes, all the friendly interest you want, but let's know it is friendly interest, and nothing more. Now, see here, Mary, would you marry Mr. Pollin if he asked you?

MARY. Well, Mr. Pollin is certainly a fine man. There are lots of things to like about him; but, mother—

MRS. R. Well!

MARY. He's so peculiar. He has so many theories. Sometimes he seems perfectly splendid, and then again —

MRS. R. (*disgustedly*). Girls nowadays never do know their own minds. Now, when I was a girl, I knew your father was the one, and when he asked me, I didn't make any fuss about its being so sudden, either.

MARY. I guess times have changed, mother. Don't worry. I will attend to Mr. Pollin.

MRS. R. Well, I hope so. He makes me nervous. I think I hear him at the door now. I will send him to you while I look after the other guests.

(*Exit, c.*)

(MARY *takes a seat near the table and fingers a book while waiting. After a moment Mr. POLLIN enters, c.*)

POLLIN. Ah, here you are, Mary. Your mother kindly suggested I look for you in the library.

MARY. Won't you sit down? I was looking at some new books father has bought.

POLLIN. I'd like to see them. Hello! What is this? Ah, a set of Hornung's Scientific Encyclopedia. I didn't know your father pursued science.

MARY. Oh, no, he doesn't, but the agent told him that they ought to be in every library, and they are so nicely bound and so well illustrated. They are too deep for me, though.

POLLIN. Not at all—not at all. You could find nothing more delightful than the study of—(*taking book from shelf*) anthropology, for example. The proper study of mankind is man, you know. I often think, my dear Mary, how edifying it would be for us to pursue the paths of scientific research together. Surely pleasant companionship would add to the delights of knowledge.

MARY. I am afraid I shouldn't be an appreciative companion.

POLLIN. Oh, yes, under my tutelage you would.

MARY. Every one does not know so much as you do, Mr. Pollin.

POLLIN. True, true. Still, any one may learn. It would be a great pleasure to instruct you, Mary. Just last week I was inveigled into attending a theatrical performance. I cannot tell you how bored I was when I might have been

home reading what Ferraro says about marriage in Rome under the Cæsars.

MARY. There, some more of the guests are coming. Don't you hear Mrs. Smith's voice? She is to sing, you know.

POLLIN. I think I shall remain here. By the way, Mary, perhaps you will remember mentioning that your great-grandfather died of heart failure. Did any others in your family suffer from the same complaint?

MARY. Goodness me, I don't know. I must be going.

(POLLIN offers to shake hands and gives MARY'S a little touch of affection before relinquishing it. MARY exits, c. POLLIN is alone for a minute, during which he examines several of the volumes attentively, at one time ejaculating "Rubbish!" before replacing the volume.)

(Enter RANDALL.)

RANDALL. Ah, here you are, Pollin. We have been looking for you. The folks are arriving.

POLLIN. A very interesting set of books you have here.

(Indicates the Scientific Encyclopedia.)

RANDALL. I guess so. Looks good on the shelf, anyway. The book agent told me Jenkins bought a set, and I can't let him get ahead of me. By the way, Mr. Pollin, I am glad I found you alone. There is a little matter I have intended to speak about.

POLLIN. Yes?

RANDALL. I'm blunt and to the point, no beating around the bush with me. You've been a pretty frequent caller here for the past two years.

POLLIN. A year and a half, I think.

RANDALL. A year and a half, then.

POLLIN. I admit it. I hope I have been welcome.

RANDALL. I guess you haven't been in my way particularly, but this is the point: your being around has kept other young fellows away more or less, you know.

POLLIN. I cannot conceive of any particular reason —

RANDALL. We face a condition, not a theory. The point is, are your inclinations toward Mary, or do you call merely as a friend of the family?

POLLIN. Why, neither, exactly, and yet both.

RANDALL. Neither? Both?

POLLIN. Let me narrate the history of the case.

RANDALL. Go ahead, but remember the folks out there.

(*Points.*)

POLLIN. Some two years ago I suddenly confronted the conviction that it was my duty to marry. The question arose, to whom? I carefully considered the list of my acquaintances, discarding those that were entirely undesirable or obviously unattainable. My original list consisted of some three hundred names.

RANDALL. Three hundred names? Say—that's going some.

POLLIN. Yes, I put on that list practically every young woman I knew, and some that I did not, but whose acquaintance I felt would not be attended by particular difficulty. I then used a number of tests in a process of elimination until the list was brought down to a dozen names.

RANDALL. My boy, you have a great head. Then what?

POLLIN. I cultivated these ladies in a social way. Shortly the list diminished to four. Among these, a choice was difficult. Finally, I learned that one's grandfather had died of asthma and the aunt of another had been notable for an irritable disposition. That brought the list to two, one of whom, I must confess, was eliminated by personal preference. It was a weakness, of course. Then I faced the question—"Shall it be Mary Randall?" That is the problem I am wrestling with, and I need all the light I can get.

RANDALL (*blankly*). Well, I'll be darned. Now, that's all very well, but does my daughter understand that you are maintaining an option on her?

POLLIN. I do not look at the matter in that light. No hasty steps would be advisable.

RANDALL. I see. Well, it's evident you won't be hasty. We must be getting back. The guests are expecting us. Besides, Mrs. Smith is to sing.

POLLIN. I prefer looking over your books.

RANDALL. No, sir, we won't have people talk about your sneaking away from company.

POLLIN. Where can I find such company as this?

(*Moves hand toward the shelves. POLLIN reluctantly allows himself to be led away by RANDALL. Exeunt, C.*)

(Enter JULIUS SHARPE and Mr. JAMES, L.)

SHARPE. Now, speak up. Money talks, my boy. You said that you were willing to bet that Pollin won't be married for five years. Now make good.

JAMES. That was only idle conversation.

SHARPE. You can't make conversation with me, son. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll go you one better. I'll bet you that Mr. Pollin is married within a year.

JAMES. He's too slow for that.

SHARPE. Not when he's made up his mind, he isn't. Do you take me up?

JAMES. Sure, and your ten is as good as in my pocket-book.

SHARPE. That's the third bet I've booked to-night. Five even that Mrs. Smith sings at least six songs, five even that it rains before morning. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll bet you one dollar against five that the first man that comes into the office to-morrow is bald-headed.

JAMES. You're the limit, Julius.

SHARPE (*at the door*). Is it a bet?

(*Exeunt, C.*)

(*After a moment POLLIN enters quietly, C., and sits down at the table. He picks up a book and throws it aside contemptuously. Finally he discovers one that absorbs him completely. He pauses momentarily and goes to the door. MRS. SMITH'S booming voice is heard. He closes the door in sharp disgust and resumes his seat, becoming so interested that he fails to hear MARY when she enters, C.*)

MARY. Oh, Mr. Pollin, you are deserting us.

POLLIN (*confused and surprised*). Just for a moment, just for a moment. A most interesting book—"The Theory of Marriage in the Evolution of the Human Race." How did you come to have it?

MARY. Father got it and five others as a premium with the "Monthly Opinion"—you know, so much down and two dollars a month. I hope Mrs. Smith didn't notice my absence. She sings well, doesn't she?

POLLIN. Voluminously, I should say.

MARY. Father is going to bring the people to see his books.

POLLIN. You are certainly a charming girl, Mary.

MARY (*coquettishly*). Thank you so much, kind sir, and now I think I had better join the others.

POLLIN. No, sit down, Mary. I have something to say to you.

MARY. To me? What can the learned gentleman wish to say to humble me?

POLLIN. It has often occurred to me that we are congenial in many ways.

MARY. I am very sure that we are, Mr. Pollin.

POLLIN. There is something I have intended to say to you for some time.

MARY. Yes?

POLLIN. You have no doubt noted that I have called more or less frequently during the last year and a half?

MARY. No more than you have been welcome, I am sure.

POLLIN. I feel free to confess that I have been considering whether we might not be suited to each other for a more permanent relationship.

MARY (*aside*). Oh, dear, I believe he is going to propose.

POLLIN. It is a question that requires a great deal of thought.

MARY. Yes, indeed.

POLLIN. You cannot blame me for going over the ground thoroughly before taking a positive position.

MARY (*puzzled*). Of course not.

POLLIN. Marriage should not be lightly entered into. For their own sakes, as well as for the sake of society at large, people should be very sure that the union is entirely suitable.

MARY. They certainly should.

POLLIN. I have had the matter on my mind for some time, and I have done a little investigating.

MARY. Investigating? Why, Mr. Pollin, you talk as though love were a sort of detective bureau.

POLLIN. Anyway, I have been investigating, to the degree I believe necessary, family history, all that sort of thing. Besides, I have endeavored to learn from your friends what are your predominating traits. I have analyzed myself with a view to ascertaining my own.

MARY. Predominating traits. Maybe I haven't any. How can a person judge his own qualities?

POLLIN. He can if he proceeds without any bias in his own favor. Anyway, as I said, I have tried to see whether or not we properly supplement each other. Mere fascination must not take the place of these higher motives.

MARY (*puzzled*). Oh, certainly not.

POLLIN. I'm glad we agree. I thought—indeed it has been called to my attention—that possibly some explanation might be expected. That is why I am speaking in this way. My investigations are progressing nicely, and I can safely say that everything points to a satisfactory conclusion. Still, I must tell you that up to this minute I have not reached a final decision.

MARY. Do you mean that you are studying me?

POLLIN. I do.

MARY. "Obj. mat.," I suppose? (*Smiles.*)

POLLIN. I'm afraid I don't —

MARY. Object matrimony, as they say in the advertisements.

POLLIN (*guardedly*). Perhaps.

MARY (*laughing*). Oh, Mr. Pollin, you are delicious. But, really, you know, a girl doesn't like to be analyzed as you would a flower or some new kind of beetle. She wants love and chivalry, and —

POLLIN. Now, let us not be silly, Mary. I think I do love you, but I must, it is my highest duty to, keep control of my emotions until my reason gives consent.

MARY. Some time, Mr. Pollin, you will realize that love is greater than reasoning or investigations or—or—anything in the whole world. I'm not a learned professor or anything, but I know that. Now I must be getting back, and you had better come with me.

POLLIN. In five minutes, my dear Mary, I promise you. I am at a most vital point.

MARY. Well, five minutes, no more.

(*Enter ARTHUR SWIFT, C.*)

ARTHUR. Ah, here you are. I've been looking everywhere for you. Hello, Pollin. My, you look solemn.

MARY. We've been having a most weighty conversation, haven't we, Mr. Pollin? (*Laughs.*)

POLLIN (*gravely*). We have.

MARY. All about science and predominating traits and—things.

ARTHUR. Dear me. I'm afraid I have butted in.

MARY. Oh, not at all. We had quite finished for the present. Mr. Pollin is going to make some further investigations and let me know the result. (*Laughs.*) Come on, Mr. Swift.

(*Exit MARY, C., laughing, followed by ARTHUR.*)

POLLIN. Dear me, is she angry? Women are odd, very odd. I must speak to her more in the terms of her comprehension. (*He reads.*)

(*Enter SHARPE, C.*)

SHARPE. Ah, Pollin, old boy, I have caught you. What are you hiding in here for? Come on, Mrs. Smith is going to sing again.

POLLIN. I prefer to remain here.

SHARPE. Oh, tut! We can't always do as we prefer, my boy. We owe something to the conventions of society.

POLLIN. A scientific man is above such things.

SHARPE. Is he? Well, maybe, but wait till you are married, then you'll get down to earth. That's what you need.

POLLIN. I don't understand you.

SHARPE. No, very few people do. But to get back to my argument, you ought to get married.

POLLIN. I agree with you, Sharpe. Marriage is a duty a man owes to himself and to society. The family during the ages has become the unit of civilization.

SHARPE. Gee, that's a hot one. Say it again and say it slow.

POLLIN. It is best that a man should live not alone, but as a part of a social unit.

SHARPE. Now you're talking. Why not up and do it?

POLLIN. In contemplating marriage, a man should give due consideration to whether the alliance he is contemplating is an entirely proper one.

SHARPE. You couldn't do better, old man. Mary's a peach.

POLLIN. A peach?

SHARPE. Yes, and you have been tagging after her for nearly two years.

POLLIN. A year and a half, Sharpe, if you please.

SHARPE. Long enough, anyway. Why not up and ask her?

POLLIN. This matter should be given due thought. One should not take a leap in the dark.

SHARPE. No danger, my boy, no danger. Compared to you, a snail could be arrested for violating the speed ordinances.

POLLIN. I have looked into the family history with a great deal of care, and I must say that the record is excellent.

SHARPE. You haven't any perpetual option on Mary, you know. You had better get busy or you will have to continue your investigations on some other girl.

POLLIN. I think that Mary understands the situation. Right now, I admit I could love her if I let myself go, but I realize that my first duty is to keep myself from any alliance that is not for the best good of society at large. You will see, Sharpe, before many years, organized society will not permit people to enter into hasty and unsuitable marriages. Possibly even matrimonial arrangements will be entered into only by governmental supervision.

SHARPE. Well, I move that you be appointed the head of the new department. But take my advice and get busy. I really believe Mary is fond of you.

POLLIN (*half eagerly*). Do you think so? Ah, but this is a weakness. If I arrive at the conclusion that Mary is the wife for me, I will love her, but otherwise I cannot, must not. (SHARPE *throws open the door quickly*. MRS. SMITH'S *raucous voice can be heard*.) I beseech you, close that door.

SHARPE. You have no soul for music.

POLLIN. At any rate, keep that door closed.

SHARPE. That was her final trill. I guess I win my bet.

POLLIN. Your bet?

SHARPE. Yes, that Mrs. Smith would sing at least six pieces to-night. That's her fourth up to date. Hear the applause.

(*He throws the door open and applause is heard*.)

POLLIN (*gazing at his watch*). I must go. I promised Mary to be there in five minutes.

SHARPE (*opening door*). Too late.

POLLIN. But I pledged my word.

SHARPE. Too late. They are coming out here now.

(Enter RANDALL, C., followed by JAMES, MRS. R., MISS SIMPLIN and guests.)

RANDALL. This is the library, and some library, too.

MISS S. Isn't it perfectly fascinating?

RANDALL. Quite so, quite so. You will find here books on every subject. I don't read 'em myself. When I get home at night I'm too tired. I look over the paper and then I'm ready for bed. But Mary reads some. And anyway, a fellow ought to have a library, you know.

MISS S. When I am married, I shall surely have books.

SHARPE (to JAMES). "When" is right.

RANDALL. Just got me a set of George Eliot. A first-class author, though he did cut up some high jinks, from what they tell me. They say his books are all right, though.

(Enter MARY and ARTHUR, C. They remain up L. talking.)

MISS S. Why, George Eliot's works are simply magnificent. I read them over and over again.

RANDALL. Here is a set of Dickens, thirty volumes. How any one could write as much as that is beyond me.

SHARPE. He wrote it for so much a column. The more he wrote the more they paid him.

MISS S. What an awful way to think about it, Mr. Sharpe. How very sordid!

RANDALL. It fills up a shelf, anyway.

MRS. SMITH (booming voice). Everybody ought to have a library.

MISS S. I just adore books.

RANDALL. Wasn't Mrs. Smith in magnificent voice to-night?

SHARPE. Quite the contrary. I think the magnificent voice was in Mrs. Smith. (He bows grandiloquently to the singer, who acknowledges with a lofty curtsy. Aside to JAMES.) It must be in her, because I didn't hear any come out.

(ARTHUR is completely monopolizing MARY. His interest in her is the prominent point in the scene. Others are glancing at books. POLLIN is much absorbed in the same book as on his previous appearance.)

RANDALL. If a fellow hasn't knowledge in his head, he can have all he wants in his library.

SHARPE. Pollin seems greatly interested in something there.

MRS. S. Quite so.

MISS S. He is completely enveloped.

SHARPE. I say, Pollin! (*No answer.*)

SEVERAL (*loudly*). Pollin!

RANDALL. Oh, Mr. Pollin!

POLLIN. Did some one speak? I fear I was absorbed.

SHARPE. You were. This is a party, Mr. Pollin. You owe some of your brilliance to the guests. Chirp up—chatter!

MISS S. (*aside to Mrs. S.*). What was he reading?

MRS. S. Oh, some book about scientific marriage, you know.

MISS S. He ought to try some practical experience.

(*She looks significantly at MARY.*)

MRS. S. There seems to be more than one string to her bow.

SHARPE. Also more than one beau on the string.

MISS S. Oh, Mr. Sharpe, you are so clever. Your wit is absolutely instantaneous.

SHARPE. I've got a bet up he marries in a year.

MISS S. Did you mean to any one person in particular?

SHARPE. No. Just that he's married. He seems to be making quite a study of the subject.

(*POLLIN is again absorbed, while ARTHUR is in animated conversation with MARY.*)

RANDALL. We had better get back to the parlor—er—living-room and have some more music.

SHARPE. Fine. That's me. Say, did you know we're a musical bunch up to our house?

RANDALL. How so?

SHARPE. Name's Sharpe, live in a flat, get a note from mother-in-law, no more rests, hard to be natural, omit all bars, skilful touch, soft pedal, can't get a key and harmony's all gone.

MISS S. Isn't he the cutest thing? I always said I wanted to marry a witty man.

SHARPE. Too late, too late, Miss Simplin. I'm off the market.

(Led by RANDALL the guests exeunt, c. MRS. R. goes out L. POLLIN is brought to his feet by SHARPE and escorted out, among the last. MARY turns to follow, but ARTHUR restrains her and they remain after the others have gone.)

ARTHUR (as the last guest is leaving). Just a moment, Mary. I want to see you. I must see you.

MARY. Well, what is it, Mr. Swift?

ARTHUR. You know what it is, Mary. I love you, and I just had to tell you, that's all. If you hadn't stayed here, I would have told you in there in front of them all. You are the only girl for me, and the only one there ever will be.

MARY. Why, you've hardly known me a week.

ARTHUR. I know, but it seems as if I had known you forever. I used to make fun of love at first sight, but the moment I met you I understood what poets meant about meeting your fate.

MARY. We must get back. They will miss us.

ARTHUR. What does it matter? What does anything matter but love? I don't listen to what they say. I can hardly see them. All I realize is you, you, you.

MARY. Dear me, this is serious.

ARTHUR. Serious? I should say it is serious. This is the biggest thing I ever had happen to me. Mary, you ought to see me at the office.

MARY. I have, I think —

ARTHUR. But not since you've known me. I hustle around as though inspired, and I am, as far as that goes. They've given me one raise already and promised me another.

MARY. I'm glad.

ARTHUR. So I think I'm perfectly justified in telling you I love you. Will you marry me?

MARY. Why, Mr. Swift —

ARTHUR. Why not Arthur?

MARY. Arthur, then. We've known each other only a week. I may not be at all the girl you think I am.

ARTHUR. Oh, yes, you are.

MARY. Now, Mr. Pollin's different. (Laughs.) He's making a careful study of me to see if I am what he took me to be. He not only studies me, but the whole family and all our ancestors as far back as he can find out.

ARTHUR. Yes, and if you wait for Pollin to figure it out,

you'll get married in another incarnation. What does he know about love—with all his scientific theories of fitness?

MARY. Mr. Pollin is a very fine man, and he has been very attentive.

ARTHUR. Bother! If I had been attentive to another woman fifty years and then saw you, I would drop her like a hot coal.

MARY. Why, Arthur, how derelict in your duty!

ARTHUR. It's no use teasing me, Mary; I love you, always have—for a week—and always will. I'll keep on asking you until you say yes.

MARY. Well, you're a very precipitate young man. Anyway, we won't talk about it any more just now.

ARTHUR. I am not indifferent to you?

MARY (*hesitating*). Why, no, not indifferent——

ARTHUR. I don't see how you could help liking me a little when I love you such a lot.

MARY. Do you know Bertha Smylie?

ARTHUR (*with a wry face*). Yes. Why?

MARY. She might love you a lot. Would that make you love her?

ARTHUR. That's altogether different.

MARY. Oh, no——

ARTHUR. Well, it is, and I want you to tell me I can hope.

MARY. Dear me, how impetuous! I must be going now.

(*Exit, hurriedly, L. ARTHUR lingers a moment. He sees a picture of MARY on the table and kisses it rapturously.*)

(*Enter SHARPE, C.*)

SHARPE. Ah, ha, my boy, caught in the act. What are you doing out here when Mrs. Smith is singing?

ARTHUR. Is Mrs. Smith singing?

SHARPE (*opening the door*). Not at all. (Mrs. S.'s booming voice is heard.) I know what you were doing. A certain young lady——

ARTHUR. Isn't she a peach, Julius?

SHARPE. With cream, my boy, and you're not allowing any grass to grow under your feet, I observe. Let me see, how long have you known this fair damsel?

ARTHUR (*seriously*). I met Mary a week ago to-night. I shall never forget it as long as I live.

SHARPE. Quite so. But remember the race is not always to the swift.

ARTHUR. If she says no, I shall never marry.

SHARPE (*laughing*). And you've known her a whole week.

ARTHUR. I can never know her better.

SHARPE. Why, Pollin has made a scientific study of her for nearly two years, and he doesn't know her yet.

ARTHUR. Poor Pollin. He is doomed to disappointment.

SHARPE. Won't find her the proper party, eh?

ARTHUR. Oh, he'll decide to marry her all right, but too late.

SHARPE. Dear me, how impetuous is young love!

ARTHUR. Now, that's all right. But just watch me.

SHARPE. With both eyes. Come, let's go back. Bad form, sneaking away the moment Mrs. Smith opens her mouth.

ARTHUR. I had other business.

SHARPE. I see. (*Exeunt, c. After a moment, POLLIN enters, c., and taking up his book, is quickly absorbed.*

SHARPE *enters, c.* SHARPE, *excitedly.*) Say, better make up your mind, old man.

POLLIN. I have—almost.

SHARPE. Swift is after your girl—after her like a house afire.

POLLIN. Swift? Dear me, that frivolous fellow. Why, Mary would never give him a second thought.

SHARPE. Don't you be too sure. I've seen a thing or two.

POLLIN. Still, it may be as well to accelerate matters a trifle. I have practically decided that Mary and I are temperamentally fitted to form a proper marriage. Her family history is satisfactory—yes, I think I shall mention the matter at the first convenient opportunity.

SHARPE. Oh, hop to it! Love should make its own opportunities.

POLLIN. I shall find a way.

SHARPE. You do love Mary.

POLLIN. Why, I——

SHARPE. Of course you do.

POLLIN. I suppose I do, when it comes to that.

SHARPE. Swift says she is a peach.

POLLIN. I cannot conceive any resemblance.

SHARPE. Anyway, take my advice and pop the question.

POLLIN. Pop the question?

SHARPE. Yes, that's always the proper order. First, pop the question, then question the pop. Remember, I'm looking for action, my boy!

(*Exeunt, c.*)

(*Enter MARY and MRS. R., L.*)

MRS. R. Has he proposed yet?

MARY. Who?

MRS. R. Who? Mr. Pollin, of course. How many offers are you expecting?

MARY. Why, no, he hasn't exactly.

MRS. R. Exactly? What do you mean, child? Either a man proposes or he doesn't.

MARY. He hinted that he might some day.

MRS. R. Some day? I've seen a mule that you couldn't move without lighting a fire under him. I made your father start a fire under Mr. Pollin.

MARY. Why, mother, I don't want to be forced on Mr. Pollin.

MRS. R. (*astonished*). You always told us you liked Mr. Pollin.

MARY. I do. He's a fine man.

MRS. R. Maybe, but if he gets into this family, he'll step livelier. I'll see to that.

(*Exit MRS. R., c.*)

MARY (*calling*). Oh, mother! (MRS. R. *reappears*.) Don't you like Arthur Swift?

MRS. R. Oh, so that's what you're thinking about, is it? Well, I must say he has some get up and go to him, anyway.

MARY. He seems so clever and—and so much in earnest.

MRS. R. If you love him, honey, I'll back you up.

(*Exit MRS. R., c. MARY pauses a second as though looking over the books.*)

(*Enter ARTHUR, c.*)

ARTHUR. Isn't this just great? I thought you might be here, and you are and alone. This is great luck.

MARY. We must join the others.

ARTHUR. Others? There are no others, just you and me. That's the way I feel. And there's not a whole lot of me, either.

MARY (*demurely*). You look like quite a little.

ARTHUR. A hundred and seventy-five pounds. But, Mary, I feel as though just you and I are facing a great big crisis. Nothing else matters, only us. (*He endeavors to put an arm around her, but she gently discourages him.*) I've known you only a week, but I know I'll love you as long as I live, and if you care for me a tenth part as much as I care for you, you'll love me an awful lot —

MARY. But, Arthur, consider —

ARTHUR. Consider? When you see a diamond lying around loose, you don't consider. You grab it, if you can. I want you, I need you, I don't have to take a university course to teach me it is you I want. Tell me you're not indifferent.

MARY. I did —

(*The door, c., opens slightly and Miss S.'s face is seen.*)

ARTHUR and MARY are unconscious of it.)

ARTHUR. Say you love me a little bit.

MARY. Why, you impudent —

ARTHUR. Impudent? Yes, but you like me. Now, little girl, learn your little lesson. Say, "I love you a little bit."

MARY. I'm not sure.

ARTHUR. Honest?

MARY. Well, I guess maybe —

ARTHUR. Of course you do. Hurray-de-boom-de-dah! Come on, everybody.

(*MARY hastily claps a hand over his mouth.*)

MARY. Whatever are you thinking about? I didn't admit a thing.

ARTHUR. Yes, you did. Going to tell all the folks. Can't keep the good news to myself. I'm just bubbling over.

MARY. We'll keep quiet about it for a while, anyway.

ARTHUR. You can't keep me quiet unless you padlock my oratorical apparatus.

MARY. Better be careful, young man. Remember, I only said I loved you a little bit.

(Miss S.'s face is withdrawn.)

ARTHUR. I'll be so quiet a clam might call me brother.

MARY (*with mock severity*). See that you do. Let us go back before they begin talking —

ARTHUR. I hope —

MARY. And don't you look so ridiculously happy. Anybody could guess something was up. (ARTHUR *turns down the corners of his mouth, but a smile conquers and he laughs again.*) Now, you do as you're told, or I'll take back everything I said.

(*She takes him by the arm and they exeunt, c.*)

(*Enter POLLIN and SHARPE, L.*)

SHARPE. A word to the wise is plenty. If you want the girl, you'd better step lively.

POLLIN. What is the emergency?

SHARPE. Swift is buzzing around her as busy as a bee, I tell you.

POLLIN. Surely you don't take Swift seriously.

SHARPE. Never mind what I think. It's what Mary thinks.

POLLIN. But logically —

SHARPE. I know—logically, but remember, my dear fellow, we are discussing a lady.

POLLIN. I utterly decline to recognize this absurd—eh—ah—Mr. Speed —

SHARPE. Swift.

POLLIN. Swift, then, and his ridiculous pretensions. However, perhaps it will be for the best, now that I am practically certain of my ground, to take a positive position.

SHARPE. Take it from me, I would. And I hope she gives her gracious consent.

POLLIN. Mary understands the situation perfectly.

SHARPE. I'll tell her you wish to see her.

(*He exits rapidly, c. POLLIN is not at all disturbed, but awaits her coming in complete calmness.*)

(*Enter MARY, c.*)

MARY. Mr. Sharpe says you wish to see me.

POLLIN. I do. Mary, I have given the matter we spoke of my most earnest consideration.

MARY (*anxious*). Oh, have you?

POLLIN. Yes. I have reached a conclusion.

MARY (*faintly*). Indeed.

POLLIN. I am convinced, after a thorough study of the harmonious elements in human nature and a rigid analysis of your traits and my own that we are approximately fit and logical life companions for each other.

MARY. Oh, do you think so?

POLLIN. Yes. I arrived at this decision not because of any mere casual liking or hasty infatuation, but by a most scientific examination of the deepest currents of human life. I ask you to corroborate my finding. Will you be my wife?

MARY. Oh, Mr. Pollin, I —

POLLIN. Let us be sensible, Mary. This is no time for sentimental hesitation. We must face these questions as they arise.

MARY. I cannot marry you.

POLLIN. Cannot? Let me present the matter again.

MARY. No. I cannot, must not let you say anything more. Listen—a month ago, had you asked me this question, I do not know what my answer might have been. I have always liked you. You know that. I respected your ideas and theories, though I hardly felt I completely understood them.

POLLIN. Let me explain —

MARY. Not now. Don't you remember what I told you? Love counts more than all the investigation.

POLLIN. I know, Mary, but I do love you.

MARY. Perhaps you think you do, Mr. Pollin, but when love really comes, you don't think about it. You know it. I thought perhaps I liked you well enough to say yes to your question, but when love really came, I knew it and saw that it was greater than all the scientific theories in the world.

POLLIN. But I do love you, Mary. I do, really. I am sure of it. In fact, I am willing to admit that love is very important —

MARY. Don't you understand, Mr. Pollin? I am pledged to some one else.

POLLIN (*aghast*). Whom, may I ask?

MARY. Why, yes. It's Arthur Swift.

POLLIN. Arthur Swift! Why, you told me you met him only a week ago ——

MARY. That is true, but ——

POLLIN. A week! How could he really know you, know whether you are at all fitted for each other, even were he inclined to investigate, which I very much doubt.

MARY. He seems to know.

POLLIN. Mary, I am more disappointed than I can say. I realize now how much you really are to me. Accept my superior judgment in this matter. Do not let a hasty action spoil your entire life. Let me examine Mr. Swift's character and report. You can trust me to be impartial. Then and not till then make your final decision.

MARY (*kindly but firmly*). No. I'm sorry, Mr. Pollin, but it must be no. Some day you will meet the real woman of your choice, and you won't spend five minutes analyzing her character. You will just know—that's all.

POLLIN. Pleasant, but hardly reasonable—or scientific, Mary.

(*Enter all the other guests excitedly, c., and MRS. R. at L.*)

MISS S. Isn't it perfectly delicious! And when will you be married?

MARY. Who?

SEVERAL. Why, you and Arthur, of course.

ARTHUR (*to MARY*). I didn't breathe a word, honest, I didn't.

MARY. Who did, then?

ARTHUR. Miss Simplin says she happened to be in the next room ——

MARY. Well, when she knows, everybody knows.

MRS. R. (*going to MARY*). My dearest child.

MRS. S. What I want to know is, is it true?

MARY. We have nothing for publication.

MRS. S. But you don't deny it?

MARY. } No-o.

ARTHUR. }

RANDALL (*going to them*). Well, here's my blessing, right off the bat.

POLLIN (*to SHARPE*). A year and a half wasted. I'll have to begin again on some girl a great deal like Mary ——

ARTHUR (*overhearing*). There isn't any girl like Mary in the whole world.

POLLIN (*to SHARPE*). Do you know, Miss Simplin seems to me quite a remarkable woman?

SHARPE. Very—remarkable.

RANDALL (*to SHARPE*). Better congratulate the boy, Julius.

(*POLLIN has turned to Miss S.*)

SHARPE. I guess not. It makes my ten dollars look bad.

JAMES. Might as well pay up, Julius. He bet ten dollars that Pollin would be married in a year.

SHARPE (*looking at POLLIN and Miss S. significantly*). I'm not giving up yet. To you, my boy (*to ARTHUR*), let me warn you, marriage is a grab bag; more blanks than prizes, too.

ARTHUR. I'm lucky, then. I'm getting a first prize.

(*He puts an arm around MARY.*)

SHARPE. Maybe. Tell me ten years from now. And to you, my dear friend Pollin, let me say, he that investigates is lost; or in other words you must fire while the bird is still in the air.

RANDALL (*to ARTHUR*). Say, son, what I like about you is that you do move suddenly!

(*All crowd around ARTHUR and MARY, congratulating them.*)

POLLIN (*to Miss S.*). Will you be home next Tuesday evening?

Miss S. Oh, Mr. Pollin!

(*She gurglingly assents as the curtain falls.*)

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