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SF PERUSALS

HOBSON'S CHOICE

A Lancashire comedy in four acts

by Harold Brighouse

SAMUEL FRENCH

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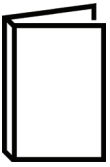
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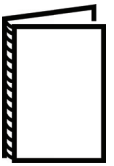
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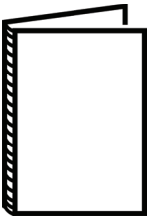
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HOBSON'S CHOICE

Hobson's Choice was originally produced in America. Its first English production took place on the 22nd June 1916, at the Apollo Theatre, London, with the following cast:

ALICE HOBSON . . . . . *Miss Lydia Bilbrooke*
MAGGIE HOBSON. . . . . *Miss Edyth Goodall*
VICKEY HOBSON . . . . . *Miss Hilda Davies*
ALBERT PROSSER . . . . . *Mr Reginald Fry*
HENRY HORATIO HOBSON . . . . . *Mr Norman McKinnel*
MRS HEPWORTH . . . . . *Miss Dora Gregory*
TIMOTHY WADLOW (TUBBY) . . . . . *Mr Sydney Paxton*
WILLIAM MOSSOP . . . . . *Mr Joe Nightingale*
JIM HEELER. . . . . *Mr J. Cooke Beresford*
ADA FIGGINS . . . . . *Miss Mary Byron*
FRED BEENSTOCK . . . . . *Mr Jefferson Gore*
DR MACFARLANE. . . . . *Mr J. Fisher White*

The play produced by Mr Norman McKinnel

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The scene is Salford, Lancashire, and the period is 1880

ACT I

Interior of Hobson's shop in Chapel Street

ACT II

The same scene

ACT III

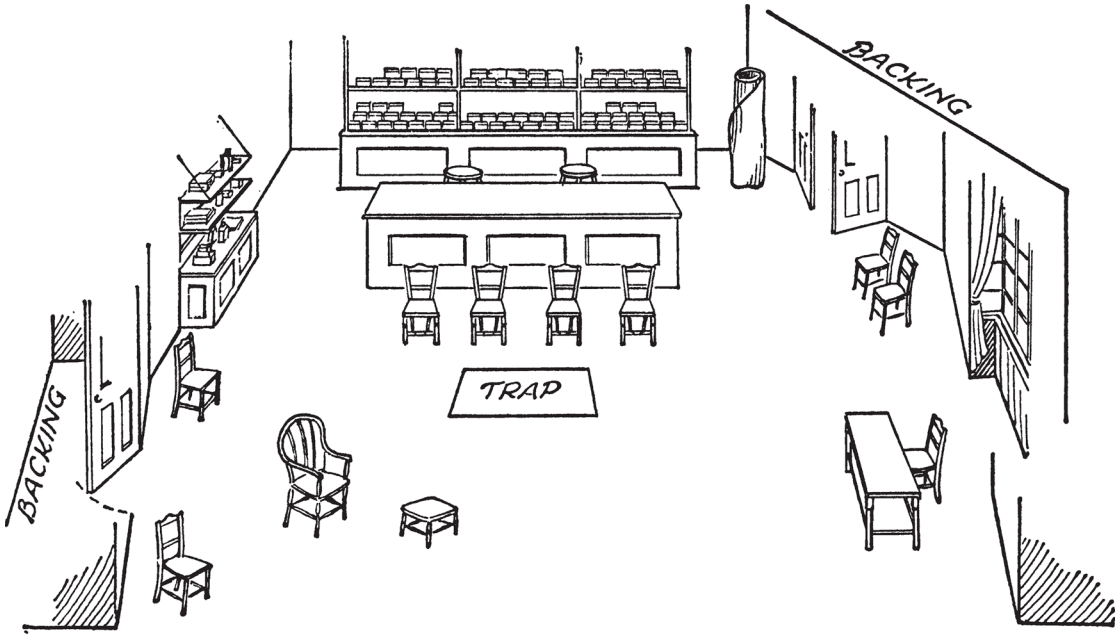
Will Mossop's shop

ACT IV

Living-room of Hobson's shop

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Acknowledgements are made to Mr William Armstrong, Director of the Liverpool Repertory Company, for allowing his prompt copy to be used in preparing this acting edition.



ACT I

Red walls. Brown oaken dado. T gas bracket over counter. Turkey-red curtains half up window. No carpet. Small rug at door R. Shoes on counter and showcases. Hanging laces. Advertisements. Boot polishes. Brushes. Brown paper on counter. Clogs in rows under shelves RC. Black cane furniture and rush-bottomed. Heavy leather armchair. Piece of rough leather on shelves. The trap is eminently desirable. However, should the stage used have no trap, the workroom may be supposed to be off-stage, with a door up R.

ACT I

The scene represents the interior of **HOBSON***'s boot shop in Chapel Street, Salford.*

The shop windows and entrance from the street occupy the left side. Facing the audience is the counter, with exhibits of boots and slippers, behind which the wall is filled with racks containing boot boxes. There are cane chairs in front of the counter. There is a desk down left with a chair. A door right leads up to the house. In the centre of the stage is a trap leading to the cellar where work is done. There are no elaborate fittings. There are gas brackets in the windows and walls. The business is prosperous, but to prosper in Salford in 1880 you did not require the elaborate accessories of a later day. A very important customer goes for fitting into **HOBSON***'s sitting-room. The rank and file use the cane chairs in the shop, which is dingy but business-like. The windows exhibit little stock, and amongst what there is clogs figure prominently. Through the windows comes the bright light of noon.*

Sitting behind the counter are **HOBSON***'s two younger daughters,* **ALICE***, right, who is twenty-three, and* **VICKEY***, left, who is twenty-one, and very pretty.* **ALICE** *is knitting and* **VICKEY** *is reading. They are in black, with neat black aprons. The door right opens, and* **MAGGIE** *enters. She is* **HOBSON***'s eldest daughter, thirty.*

ALICE Oh, it's you. I hoped it was father going out.

MAGGIE It isn't. *(She crosses and takes her place at the desk left)*

ALICE He *is* late this morning.

MAGGIE He got up late. *(She busies herself with an account book)*

VICKEY *(reading)* Has he had breakfast yet, Maggie?

MAGGIE Breakfast! With a Masons' meeting last night?

VICKEY He'll need reviving.

ALICE Then I wish he'd go and do it.

VICKEY Are you expecting anyone, Alice?

ALICE Yes, I am, and you know I am, and I'll thank you both to go when he comes.

VICKEY Well, I'll oblige you, Alice, if father's gone out first, only you know I can't leave the counter till he goes.

ALBERT PROSSER *enters from the street. He is twenty-six, nicely dressed, as the son of an established solicitor would be. He crosses to right and raises his hat to* **ALICE.**

ALBERT Good morning, Miss Alice.

ALICE Good morning, Mr Prosser. *(She leans across the counter)* Father's not gone out yet. He's late.

ALBERT Oh! *(He turns to go, and is half-way to the door, when* **MAGGIE** *rises)*

MAGGIE *(coming centre)* What can we do for you, Mr Prosser?

ALBERT *(stopping)* Well, I can't say that I came in to buy anything, Miss Hobson.

MAGGIE This is a shop, you know. We're not here to let people go out without buying.

ALBERT Well, I'll just have a pair of bootlaces, please. *(He moves slightly to right)*

MAGGIE What size do you take in boots?

ALBERT Eights. I've got small feet. *(He simpers, then perceives that* **MAGGIE** *is by no means smiling)* Does that matter to the laces?

MAGGIE *(putting a mat in front of the armchair right centre)* It matters to the boots. *(She pushes him slightly)* Sit down, Mr Prosser.

ALBERT *(sitting in the armchair right centre)* Yes, but—

MAGGIE *is on her knees and takes off his boot.*

MAGGIE It's time you had a new pair. These uppers are disgraceful for a professional man to wear. Number eights from the third rack, Vickey, please.

ALICE *(moving down a little)* Mr Prosser didn't come in to buy boots, Maggie.

VICKEY *comes down to* **MAGGIE** *with a box which she opens.*

MAGGIE I wonder what does bring him in here so often?

ALICE *moves back to behind the counter.*

ALBERT I'm terrible hard on bootlaces, Miss Hobson.

MAGGIE *puts a new boot on him and laces it.*

MAGGIE Do you get through a pair a day? You must be strong.

ALBERT I keep a little stock of them. It's as well to be prepared for accidents.

MAGGIE And now you'll have boots to go with the laces, Mr Prosser. How does that feel?

ALBERT Very comfortable.

MAGGIE Try it standing up.

ALBERT *(trying and walking a few steps)* Yes, that fits all right.

MAGGIE I'll put the other on.

ALBERT Oh, no, I really don't want to buy them.

MAGGIE *(pushing him)* Sit down, Mr Prosser. You can't go through the streets in odd boots.

ALICE *comes down again.*

ALBERT What's the price of these?

MAGGIE A pound.

ALBERT A pound! I say—

MAGGIE They're good boots, and you don't need to buy a pair of laces today, because we give them in as discount.

VICKEY *goes back to the counter.*

Braid laces, that is. Of course, if you want leather ones, you being so strong in the arm and breaking so many pairs, you can have them, only it's tuppence more.

ALBERT These...these will do.

MAGGIE Very well, you'd better have the old pair mended and I'll send them home to you with the bill. *(She has laced the second boot, rises, and moves towards the desk left, throwing the boot box at* **VICKEY***, who gives a little scream at the interruption of her reading)*

ALBERT *gasps.*

ALBERT Well, if anyone had told me I was coming in here to spend a pound I'd have called him crazy.

MAGGIE It's not wasted. Those boots will last. Good morning, Mr Prosser. *(She holds the door open)*

ALBERT Good morning.

ALBERT *looks blankly at* **ALICE** *and goes out.*

ALICE Maggie, we know you're a pushing sales-woman, but—

MAGGIE *(returning to right she picks up the old boots and puts them on the rack up right)* It'll teach him to keep out of here a bit. He's too much time on his hands.

ALICE You know why he comes.

MAGGIE I know it's time he paid a rent for coming. A pair of laces a day's not half enough. Coming here to make sheep's eyes at you. I'm sick of the sight of him. *(She crosses in front of the counter to left)*

ALICE It's all very well for an old maid like you to talk, but if father won't have us go courting, where else can Albert meet me except here when father's out?

MAGGIE If he wants to marry you why doesn't he do it?

ALICE Courting must come first.

MAGGIE It needn't. *(She picks up a slipper on the desk left)* See that slipper with a fancy buckle on to make it pretty? Courting's like that, my lass. All glitter and no use to nobody. *(She replaces the slipper and sits at her desk)*

HENRY HORATIO HOBSON *enters from the house. He is fifty-five, successful, coarse, florid, and a parent of the period. His hat is on. It is one of those felt hats which are half-way to tall hats in shape. He has a heavy gold chain and Masonic emblems on it. His clothes are bought to wear.*

HOBSON Maggie, I'm just going out for a quarter of an hour. *(He moves over to the doors left)*

MAGGIE Yes, father. Don't be late for dinner. There's liver.

HOBSON It's an hour off dinner-time. *(Going)*

MAGGIE So that, if you stay more than an hour in the Moonraker's Inn, you'll be late for it.

HOBSON Moonraker's? Who said—? *(Turning)*

VICKEY If your dinner's ruined, it'll be your own fault.

HOBSON Well, I'll be eternally—

ALICE Don't swear, father.

HOBSON *(putting his hat on the counter)* No. I'll sit down instead. *(He moves to right centre and sits in the armchair*

right centre facing them) Listen to me, you three. I've come to conclusions about you. And I won't have it. Do you hear that? Interfering with my goings out and comings in. The idea! I've a mind to take measures with the lot of you.

MAGGIE I expect Mr Heeler's waiting for you in Moonraker's, father.

HOBSON He can go on waiting. At present, I'm addressing a few remarks to the rebellious females of this house, and what I say will be listened to and heeded. I've noticed it coming on ever since your mother died. There's been a gradual increase of uppishness towards me.

VICKEY Father, you'd have more time to talk after we've closed tonight. *(She is anxious to resume her reading)*

HOBSON I'm talking now, and you're listening. Providence has decreed that you should lack a mother's hand at the time when single girls grow bumptious and must have somebody to rule. But I'll tell you this, you'll none rule me.

VICKEY I'm sure I'm not bumptious, father.

HOBSON Yes, you are. You're pretty, but you're bumptious, and I hate bumptiousness like I hate a lawyer.

ALICE If we take trouble to feed you it's not bumptious to ask you not to be late for your food.

VICKEY Give and take, father.

HOBSON I give and you take, and it's going to end.

MAGGIE How much a week do you give us?

HOBSON That's neither here nor there. *(He rises and moves to the doors left)* At moment I'm on uppishness, and I'm warning you your conduct towards your parent's got to change. *(He turns to the counter)* But that's not all. That's private conduct, and now I pass to broader aspects and I speak of public conduct. I've looked upon my household as they go about the streets, and I've been disgusted. The fair

name and fame of Hobson have been outraged by members of Hobson's family, and uppishness has done it.

VICKEY I don't know what you're talking about.

HOBSON Vickey, you're pretty, but you can lie like a gas-meter. Who had new dresses on last week?

ALICE I suppose you mean Vickey and me?

HOBSON I do.

VICKEY We shall dress as we like, father, and you can save your breath.

HOBSON I'm not stopping in from my business appointment for the purpose of saving my breath.

VICKEY You like to see me in nice clothes.

HOBSON I do. I like to see my daughters nice. *(He crosses right)* That's why I pay Mr Tudsbury, the draper, ten pounds a year a head to dress you proper. It pleases the eye and it's good for trade. But, I'll tell you, if some women could see themselves as men see them, they'd have a shock, and I'll have words with Tudsbury an' all for letting you dress up like guys. *(He moves left)* I saw you and Alice out of the Moonraker's parlour on Thursday night and my friend Sam Minns— *(He turns)*

ALICE A publican.

HOBSON Aye, a publican. As honest a man as God Almighty ever set behind a bar, my ladies. My friend, Sam Minns, asked me who you were. And well he might. You were going down Chapel Street with a hump added to nature behind you.

VICKEY *(scandalized)* Father!

HOBSON The hump was wagging, and you put your feet on pavement as if you'd got chilblains – aye, stiff neck above and weak knees below. It's immodest!

ALICE It is not immodest, father. It's the fashion to wear bustles.

HOBSON Then to hell with the fashion.

MAGGIE Father, you are not in the Moonraker's now.

VICKEY You should open your eyes to what other ladies wear. *(She rises)*

HOBSON If what I saw on you is any guide, I should do nowt of kind. I'm a decent-minded man. I'm Hobson. I'm British middle class and proud of it. I stand for common sense and sincerity. You're affected, which is bad sense and insincerity. You've over stepped nice dressing and you've tried grand dressing—

VICKEY *sits.*

—which is the occupation of fools and such as have no brains. You forget the majesty of trade and the unparalleled virtues of the British Constitution which are all based on the sanity of the middle classes, combined with the diligence of the working classes. You're losing balance, and you're putting the things which don't matter in front of the things which do, and if you mean to be a factor in the world in Lancashire or a factor in the house of Hobson, you'll become sane.

VICKEY Do you want us to dress like mill girls?

HOBSON No. Nor like French madams, neither. It's un-English, I say.

ALICE We shall continue to dress fashionably, father.

HOBSON Then I've a choice for you two. Vickey, you I'm talking to, and Alice. You'll become sane if you're going on living here. You'll control this uppishness that's growing on you. And if you don't, you'll get out of this, and exercise your gifts on someone else than me. You don't know when you're well off. But you'll learn it when I'm done with you. I'll choose a pair of husbands for you, my girls. That's what I'll do.

ALICE Can't we choose husbands for ourselves?

HOBSON I've been telling you for the last five minutes you're not even fit to choose dresses for yourselves.

MAGGIE You're talking a lot to Vickey and Alice, father. Where do I come in?

HOBSON You? *(He turns on her, astonished)*

MAGGIE If you're dealing husbands round, don't I get one?

HOBSON Well, that's a good one! *(He laughs)* You with a husband! *(He goes down in front of the desk)*

MAGGIE Why not?

HOBSON Why not? I thought you'd sense enough to know. But if you want the brutal truth, you're past the marrying age. You're a proper old maid, Maggie, if ever there was one.

MAGGIE I'm thirty.

HOBSON *(facing her)* Aye, thirty and shelved. Well, all the women can't get husbands. But you others, now. I've told you. I'll have less uppishness from you or else I'll shove you off my hands on to some other men. You can just choose which way you like. *(He picks up his hat and makes for the door)*

MAGGIE One o'clock dinner, father.

HOBSON See here, Maggie... *(Going back again down to in front of the desk)* I set the hours at this house. It's one o'clock dinner because I say it is, and not because you do.

MAGGIE Yes, father.

HOBSON So long as that's clear I'll go. *(He is by the door)* Oh, no, I won't. Mrs Hepworth's getting out of her carriage. *(He puts his hat on the counter again)*

MAGGIE *rises and opens the door.*

Enter **MRS HEPWORTH**, *an old lady with a curt manner and good clothes.*

Good morning, Mrs Hepworth. What a lovely day. *(He crosses right and places a chair)*

MRS HEPWORTH *(sitting in the armchair right centre)* Morning, Hobson. *(She raises her skirt)* I've come about those boots you sent me home.

HOBSON *(kneeling on* **MRS HEPWORTH***'s right, and fondling her foot;* **MAGGIE** *is centre)* Yes, Mrs Hepworth. They look very nice.

MRS HEPWORTH Get up, Hobson.

HOBSON *scrambles up, controlling his feelings.*

You look ridiculous on the floor. Who made these boots?

HOBSON We did. Our own make.

MRS HEPWORTH Will you answer a plain question? Who made these boots?

HOBSON They were made on the premises.

MRS HEPWORTH *(to* **MAGGIE***)* Young woman, you seemed to have some sense when you served me. Can you answer me?

MAGGIE I think so, but I'll make sure for you, Mrs Hepworth. *(She opens the trap and calls)* Tubby!

HOBSON *(down right)* You wish to see the identical workman, madam?

MRS HEPWORTH I said so.

HOBSON I am responsible for all work turned out here.

MRS HEPWORTH I never said you weren't.

TUBBY WADLOW *comes up the trap. He is a white-haired little man with thin legs and a paunch, in dingy clothes with no collar and a coloured cotton shirt. He has no coat on.*

TUBBY Yes, Miss Maggie? *(He stands half out of the trap, not coming right up)*

MRS HEPWORTH Man, did you make these boots? *(She rises and advances one pace towards him)*

TUBBY No, ma'am.

MRS HEPWORTH Then who did? Am I to question every soul in the place before I find out? *(She looks round)*

TUBBY They're Willie's making, those.

MRS HEPWORTH Then tell Willie I want him.

TUBBY Certainly, ma'am. *(He goes down the trap and calls 'WILLIE!')*

MRS HEPWORTH Who's Willie?

HOBSON Name of Mossop, madam. But if there is anything wrong I assure you I'm capable of making the man suffer for it. I'll—

WILLIE MOSSOP *comes up the trap. He is a lanky fellow, about thirty, not naturally stupid but stunted mentally by a brutalised childhood. He is a raw material of a charming man, but, at present, it requires a very keen eye to detect his potentialities. His clothes are an even poorer edition of* **TUBBY***'s. He comes half-way up the trap.*

MRS HEPWORTH *(standing right of the trap)* Are you Mossop?

WILLIE Yes, mum.

MRS HEPWORTH You made these boots?

WILLIE *(peering at them)* Yes, I made them last week.

MRS HEPWORTH Take that.

WILLIE, *bending down, rather expects 'that' to be a blow. Then he raises his head and finds she is holding out a visiting card. He takes it.*

See what's on it?

WILLIE *(bending over the card)* Writing?

MRS HEPWORTH Read it.

WILLIE I'm trying. *(His lips move as he tries to spell it out)*

MRS HEPWORTH Bless the man. Can't you read?

WILLIE I do a bit. Only it's such funny print.

MRS HEPWORTH It's the usual italics of a visiting card, my man. Now listen to me. I heard about this shop, and what I heard brought me here for these boots. I'm particular about what I put on my feet.

HOBSON *(moving slightly towards her)* I assure you it shall not occur again, Mrs Hepworth.

MRS HEPWORTH What shan't?

HOBSON *(crestfallen)* I...I don't know.

MRS HEPWORTH Then hold your tongue. Mossop, I've tried every shop in Manchester, and these are the best-made pair of boots I've ever had. Now, you'll make my boots in future. You hear that, Hobson?

MAGGIE, *down left centre, is taking it all in.*

HOBSON Yes, madam, of course he shall.

MRS HEPWORTH You'll keep that card, Mossop, and you won't dare leave here to go to another shop without letting me know where you are.

HOBSON Oh, he won't make a change.

MRS HEPWORTH How do you know? The man's a treasure, and I expect you underpay him.

HOBSON That'll do, Willie. You can go.

WILLIE Yes, sir.

WILLIE *dives down the trap,* **MAGGIE** *closes it.*

MRS HEPWORTH He's like a rabbit.

MAGGIE Can I take your order for another pair of boots, Mrs Hepworth?

MRS HEPWORTH Not yet, young woman. But I shall send my daughters here. And, mind you, that man's to make the boots. *(She crosses left)*

MAGGIE *(up at the doors and opening them)* Certainly, Mrs Hepworth.

MRS HEPWORTH Good morning.

HOBSON Good morning, Mrs Hepworth. Very glad to have the honour of serving you, madam. *(Following her up)*

MRS HEPWORTH *goes out.*

(angry) I wish some people would mind their own business. What does she want to praise a workman to his face for? *(He moves down left and then to centre)*

MAGGIE I suppose he deserved it.

HOBSON Deserved be blowed! Making them uppish. That's what it is. Last time she puts her foot in my shop, I give you my word.

MAGGIE Don't be silly, father.

HOBSON I'll show her. Thinks she owns the earth because she lives at Hope Hall.

Enter from the street **JIM HEELER**, *who is a grocer, and* **HOBSON**'*s boon companion.*

JIM *(looking down the street as he enters)* That's a bit of a startler.

HOBSON *(swinging round)* Eh? Oh, morning, Jim.

JIM You're doing a good class trade if the carriage folk come to you, Hobson. *(He moves down left centre)*

HOBSON What?

JIM Wasn't that Mrs Hepworth?

HOBSON Oh, yes. Mrs Hepworth's an old and valued customer of mine.

JIM It's funny you deal with Hope Hall and never mentioned it.

HOBSON Why, I've made boots for her and all her circle for... how long, Maggie? Oh, I dunno.

JIM You kept it dark. Well, aren't you coming round yonder? *(He moves up left)*

HOBSON *(reaching for his hat)* Yes. That is, no.

JIM Are you ill?

HOBSON No. Get away, you girls. I'll look after the shop. I want to talk to Mr Heeler.

JIM Well, can't you talk in the Moonraker's?

The girls go out right to the house, **MAGGIE** *last.*

HOBSON Yes, with Sam Minns, and Denton and Tudsbury there.

JIM It's private, then. What's the trouble, Henry?

HOBSON *waves* **JIM** *into the armchair right centre and sits in front of the counter.*

HOBSON They're the trouble. *(He indicates the door to the house)* Do your daughters worry you, Jim?

JIM Nay... *(He sits right centre)* They mostly do as I bid them, and the missus does the leathering if they don't.

HOBSON Ah, Jim, a wife's a handy thing, and you don't know it proper till she's taken from you. I felt grateful for the quiet when my Mary fell on rest, but I can see my mistake now. I used to think I was hard put to it to fend her off when she wanted summat out of me, but the dominion of one woman is Paradise to the dominion of three.

JIM It sounds a sad case, Henry.

HOBSON I'm a talkative man by nature, Jim. You know that.

JIM You're an orator, Henry. I doubt John Bright himself is better gifted of the gab than you.

HOBSON Nay, that's putting it a bit too strong. A good case needs no flattery.

JIM Well, you're the best debater in the Moonraker's parlour.

HOBSON And that's no more than truth. Yes, Jim, in the estimation of my fellow-men, I give forth words of weight. In the eyes of my daughters, I'm a windbag. *(He rises and moves down left)*

JIM Nay. Never!

HOBSON I am. *(He turns)* They scorn my wisdom, Jim. They answer back. I'm landed in a hole – a great and undignified hole. My own daughters have got the upper hand of me.

JIM Women are worse than men for getting above themselves.

HOBSON A woman's foolishness begins where man's leaves off.

JIM They want a firm hand, Henry.

HOBSON I've lifted up my voice and roared at them.

JIM Beware of roaring at women, Henry. Roaring is mainly hollow sound. It's like trying to defeat an army with banging drums instead of cold steel. And it's steel in a man's character that subdues the women.

HOBSON I've tried all ways, and I'm fair moithered. I dunno what to do. *(He scratches his head)*

JIM Then you quit roaring at 'em and get 'em wed. *(He rises)*

HOBSON I've thought of that. Trouble is to find the men.

JIM Men's common enough. Are you looking for angels in breeches?

HOBSON I'd like my daughters to wed temperance young men, Jim.

JIM You keep your ambitions within reasonable limits, Henry. You've three daughters to find husbands for.

HOBSON Two, Jim, two.

JIM Two?

HOBSON Vickey and Alice are mostly window dressing in the shop. But Maggie's too useful to part with. And she's a bit on the ripe side for marrying, is our Maggie.

JIM I've seen 'em do it at double her age. Still, leaving her out, you've two.

HOBSON One'll do for a start, Jim. *(He crosses to right)* It's a thing I've noticed about wenches. Get one wedding in a family and it goes through the lot like measles. *(He moves round the chair to up right)*

JIM Well, you want a man, and you want him temperance. It'll cost you a bit, you know. *(He sits in the chair below the left side of the counter)*

HOBSON *(going to him)* Eh? Oh, I'll get my hand down for the wedding all right.

JIM A warm man like you 'ull have to do more than that. There's things called settlements.

HOBSON Settlements?

JIM Aye. You've to bait your hook to catch fish, Henry.

HOBSON Then I'll none go fishing. *(He sits)*

JIM But you said—

HOBSON I've changed my mind. I'd a fancy for a bit of peace, but there's luxuries a man can buy too dear. Settlements indeed!

JIM I had a man in mind.

HOBSON You keep him there, Jim. I'll rub along and chance it. Settlements indeed!

JIM You save their keep.

HOBSON They work for that. And they're none of them big eaters.

JIM And their wages.

HOBSON Wages? Do you think I pay wages to my own daughters? *(He rises and goes to the desk left)* I'm not a fool.

JIM Then it's all off? *(He rises)*

HOBSON *(turning)* From the moment that you breathed the word 'settlements' it was dead off, Jim. Let's go to the Moonraker's and forget there's such a thing as women in the world. *(He takes up his hat and rings the bell on the counter)* Shop! Shop!

MAGGIE *enters from right.*

I'm going out, Maggie.

MAGGIE *(remaining by the door)* Dinner's at one, remember.

HOBSON Dinner will be when I come in for it. I'm master here. *(He moves to go)*

MAGGIE Yes, father. One o'clock.

HOBSON *(disgusted)* Come along, Jim.

JIM *and* **HOBSON** *go out to the street.* **MAGGIE** *turns to speak inside the right door.*

MAGGIE Dinner at half-past one, girls. We'll give him half an hour. *(She closes the door, turns the armchair facing centre and moves to the trap, which she raises)* Willie, come here.

In a moment **WILLIE** *appears, and stops half-way up.*

WILLIE Yes, Miss Maggie?

MAGGIE *(left of the trap)* Come up, and put the trap down, I want to talk to you.

WILLIE *comes, reluctantly.*

WILLIE We're very busy in the cellar.

MAGGIE *points to the trap. He closes it.*

MAGGIE Show me your hands, Willie.

WILLIE They're dirty. *(He holds them out hesitatingly)*

MAGGIE Yes, they're dirty, but they're clever. They can shape the leather like no other man's that ever came into the shop. Who taught you, Willie?

MAGGIE *retains his hands.*

WILLIE Why, Miss Maggie, I learnt my trade here.

MAGGIE Hobson's never taught you to make boots the way you do.

WILLIE I've had no other teacher.

MAGGIE *(dropping his hands)* And needed none. You're a natural born genius at making boots. It's a pity you're a natural fool at all else.

WILLIE I'm not much good at owt but leather, and that's a fact.

MAGGIE When are you going to leave Hobson's?

WILLIE Leave Hobson's? I...I thought I gave satisfaction.

MAGGIE Don't you want to leave?

WILLIE Not me. I've been at Hobson's all my life, and I'm not for leaving till I'm made.

MAGGIE I said you were a fool.

WILLIE Then I'm a loyal fool.

MAGGIE Don't you want to get on, Will Mossop? You heard what Mrs Hepworth said. You know the wages you get and you know the wages a bootmaker like you could get in one of the big shops in Manchester.

WILLIE Nay, I'd be feared to go in them fine places.

MAGGIE What keeps you here? Is it the...the people?

WILLIE I dunno what it is. I'm used to being here.

MAGGIE Do you know what keeps this business on its legs? Two things: one's the good boots you make that sell themselves, the other's the bad boots other people make and I sell. We're a pair, Will Mossop.

WILLIE You're a wonder in the shop, Miss Maggie.

MAGGIE And you're a marvel in the workshop. Well?

WILLIE Well, what?

MAGGIE It seems to me to point one way.

WILLIE What way is that?

MAGGIE You're leaving me to do the work, my lad.

WILLIE I'll be getting back to my stool, Miss Maggie. *(He moves to the trap)*

MAGGIE *(stopping him)* You'll go back when I've done with you. I've watched you for a long time and everything I've seen, I've liked. I think you'll do for me.

WILLIE What way, Miss Maggie?

MAGGIE Will Mossop, you're my man. Six months I've counted on you and it's got to come out some time.

WILLIE But I never—

MAGGIE I know you never, or it 'ud not be left to me to do the job like this.

WILLIE I'll...I'll sit down. *(He sits in the armchair, mopping his brow)* I'm feeling queer-like. What dost want me for?

MAGGIE To invest in. You're a business idea in the shape of a man.

WILLIE I've got no head for business at all.

MAGGIE But I have. My brain and your hands 'ull make a working partnership.

WILLIE *(getting up, relieved)* Partnership! Oh, that's a different thing. I thought you were axing me to wed you. *(He moves upstage)*

MAGGIE I am.

WILLIE *(sitting in front of the counter)* Well, by gum! And you the master's daughter.

MAGGIE Maybe that's why, Will Mossop. *(She moves upstage)* Maybe I've had enough of father, and you're as different from him as any man I know. *(She sits left of him)*

WILLIE It's a bit awkward-like.

MAGGIE And you don't help me any, lad. What's awkward about it?

WILLIE You talking to me like this.

MAGGIE I'll tell you something, Will. It's a poor sort of woman who'll stay lazy when she sees her best chance slipping from her. A Salford life's too near the bone to lose things through the fear of speaking out.

WILLIE I'm your best chance?

MAGGIE You are that, Will.

WILLIE Well, by gum! *(He rises)* I never thought of this.

MAGGIE Think of it now.

WILLIE I am doing. Only the blow's a bit too sudden to think very clear. I've a great respect for you, Miss Maggie. You're a shapely body, and you're a masterpiece at selling in the shop, but when it comes to marrying, I'm bound to tell you that I'm none in love with you.

MAGGIE Wait till you're asked. *(She rises)* I want your hand in mine and your word for it that you'll go through life with me for the best we can get out of it.

WILLIE We'd not get much without there's love between us, lass.

MAGGIE I've got the love all right.

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