

YOU NEVER CAN TELL

George Bernard Shaw

- VALENTINE: (*panting*) What's the matter? (*Looking round*) Where's Crampton?
- GLORIA: Gone (*Valentine's face lights up with sudden joy, dread, and mischief as he realizes that he is alone with Gloria. She continues indifferently*) I thought he was ill; but he recovered himself. He wouldn't wait for you. I am sorry. (*She goes for her book and parasol*).
- VALENTINE: So much the better. He gets on my nerves after a while. (*Pretending to forget himself*) How could that man have so beautiful a daughter!
- GLORIA: (*taken aback for a moment; then answering him with polite but intentional contempt*) That seems to be an attempt at what is called pretty speech. Let me say at once, Mr Valentine, that pretty speeches make very sickly conversation. Pray let us be friends, if we are to be friends, in a sensible and wholesome way. I have no intention of getting married; and unless you are content to accept that state of things, we had much better not cultivate each other's acquaintance.
- VALENTINE: (*cautiously*) I see. May I ask just this one question? Is your objection an objection to marriage as an institution, or merely an objection to marrying me personally?
- GLORIA: I do not know you well enough, Mr Valentine, to have an opinion on the subject of your personal merits. (*She turns away from him with infinite indifference, and sits down with her book on the garden seat*). I do not think the conditions of marriage at present are such as any self-respecting woman can accept.
- VALENTINE: (*instantly changing his tone for one of cordial sincerity, as if he frankly accepted her terms and was delighted and reassured by her principles*) Oh, then that's a point of sympathy between us already. I quite agree with you: the conditions are most unfair. (*He takes off his hat and throws it gaily on the iron table*) No: what I want is to get rid of all that nonsense. (*He sits down besides her, so naturally that she does not think of objecting, and proceeds, with enthusiasm*) Don't you think it a horrible thing that a man and a woman can hardly know one another without being supposed to have designs of that kind? As if there were no other interests! No other subjects of conversation! As if women were capable of nothing better!
- GLORIA: (*interested*) Ah, now you are beginning to talk humanly and sensibly, Mr Valentine.
- VALENTINE: (*with a gleam in his eye at the success of his hunter's guile*) Of course! Two intelligent people like us! Isn't it pleasant, in this stupid conversation-ridden world, to meet with someone on the same plane? Someone with an unprejudiced enlightened mind?
- GLORIA: (*earnestly*) I Hope to meet many such people in England.
- VALENTINE: (*dubiously*) Hm! There are a good many people here: nearly forty millions. They're not all consumptive members of the highly educated classes like the people

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in Madeira.

GLORIA: *(now full of her subject)* Oh, everybody is stupid and prejudiced in Madeira; weak sentimental creatures. I hate weakness; and I hate sentiment.

VALENTINE: That's what makes you so inspiring.

GLORIA: *(with a slight laugh)* Am I inspiring?

VALENTINE: Yes. Strength's infectious.

GLORIA: Weakness is, I know.

VALENTINE: *(with conviction)* You're strong. Do you know that you changed the world for me this morning? I was in the dumps, thinking of my unpaid rent, frightened about the future. When you came in, I was dazzled. *(Her brow clouds a little. He goes on quickly)* That was silly, of course; but really and truly something happened to me. Explain it how you will, my blood got - *(he hesitates, trying to think of a sufficiently unimpassioned word)* - oxygenated: my muscles braced; my mind cleared; my courage rose. That's odd, isn't it? Considering that I am not at all a sentimental man.

GLORIA: *(uneasily rising)* Let us go back to the beach.

VALENTINE: *(darkly: looking up at her)* What! You feel it too?

GLORIA: Feel what?

VALENTINE: Dread.

GLORIA: Dread?

VALENTINE: As if something were going to happen. It came over me suddenly just before you proposed that we should run away to the others.

GLORIA: *(amazed)* That's strange; very strange I had the same presentiment.

VALENTINE: *(solemnly)* How extraordinary. *(Rising)* Well: shall we run away?

GLORIA: Run away? Oh no; that would be childish. *(She sits down again. He resumes his seat beside her, and watches her with a gravely sympathetic air. She is thoughtful and a little troubled as she adds)* I wonder what is the scientific explanation of those fancies that cross us occasionally!

VALENTINE: Ah, I wonder! It's a curiously helpless sensation: isn't it?

GLORIA: *(rebellious against the word)* Helpless?

VALENTINE: Yes, helpless. As if Nature, after letting us belong to ourselves and do what we judged right and reasonable for all these years, were suddenly lifting her great hand to take us - her two little children - by the scruffs of our little necks, and use us, in spite of ourselves for her own purposes, in her own way.

GLORIA: Isn't that rather fanciful?

VALENTINE: *(with a new and startling transition to a time of utter recklessness)* I don't know. I don't care. *(Bursting out reproachfully)* Oh, Miss Clandon, Miss Clandon: how could you?

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GLORIA: What have I done?

VALENTINE: Thrown this enchantment on me. I'm honestly trying to be sensible and scientific and everything that you wish me to be. But - but - oh, don't you see what you have set to work in my imagination?

GLORIA: I hope you are not going to be so childish and vulgar - as to say love.

VALENTINE: No, no, no, no. Not love: we know better than that. Let's call it chemistry. You can't deny that there is such a thing as chemical action, chemical attitude chemical combination: the most irresistible of all natural forces. Well, you're attracting me irresistibly. Chemically.

GLORIA: (*contemptuously*) Nonsense!

VALENTINE: Of course it's nonsense, you stupid girl (*Gloria recoils in outraged surprise*) Yes stupid girl; that's a scientific fact, anyhow. You're a prig; a feminine prig that's what you are. (*Rising*) Now I suppose you've done with me for ever. (*He goes to the iron table and takes his hat*).

GLORIA: (*with elaborate calm, sitting up like a High-school mistress posing to be photographed*) That shows how very little you understand my real character. I am not in the least offended. (*He pauses and puts his hat down again*). I am always willing to be told my own defects, Mr Valentine, by my friends, even when they are as absurdly mistaken about me as you are. I have many faults - very serious faults - of character and temper; but if there is one thing that I am not, it is what you call a prig. (*She closes her lips trimly and looks steadily and challengingly at him as she sits more collectedly than ever*).

VALENTINE: (*returning to the end of the garden seat to confront her more emphatically*) Oh yes, you are. My reason tells me so: my knowledge and your experience tells me so.

GLORIA: Excuse my reminding you that your reason and your knowledge and your experience are not infallible. At least I hope not.

VALENTINE: I must believe them. Unless you wish me to believe my eyes, my heart, my instincts, my imagination, which are all telling me the most monstrous lies about you.

GLORIA: (*the collectedness beginning to relax*) Lies!

VALENTINE: (*obstinately*) Yes, lies. (*He sits down again beside her*) Do you expect me to believe that you are the most beautiful woman in the world?

GLORIA: That is ridiculous, and rather personal.

VALENTINE: Of course it's ridiculous. Well, that's what my eyes tell me. (*Gloria makes a moment of contemptuous protest*). No: I'm not flattering. I tell you I don't believe it. (*She is ashamed to find that this does not quite please her either*). Do you think that if you were to turn away in disgust from my weakness, I should sit down here and cry like a child?

GLORIA: (*beginning to find that she must speak shortly and pointedly to keep her voice steady*) Why should you, pray?

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VALENTINE: Of course not: I'm not such an idiot. And yet my heart tells me I should: my fool heart. But I'll argue with my heart and bring reason. If I loved you a thousand times, I'll force myself to look the truth steadily in the face. After all, it's easy to be sensible: the facts are the facts. What's this place? It's not heaven: it's the Marine Hotel. What's the time? It's not eternity: it's about half past one in the afternoon. What am I? A dentist: a five shilling dentist!

GLORIA: And I am a feminine prig.

VALENTINE: (*passionately*) No, No: I can't face that: I must have one illusion left: the illusion about you. I love you (*he turns towards her as if the impulse to touch her were ungovernable: she rises and stands on her guard wrathfully. He springs up impatiently and retreats a step*) Oh, what a fool I am! An idiot! You don't understand; I might as well talk to the stones on the beach. (*He turns away discouraged*).

GLORIA: (*reassured by his withdrawal, and a little remorseful*) I am sorry. I do not mean to be unsympathetic, Mr Valentine; but what can I say?

VALENTINE: (*returning to her with all his recklessness of manner replaced by an engaging and chivalrous respect*) You can say nothing, Miss Clandon. I beg your pardon; it was my own fault, or rather my own bad luck. You see, it all depended on your naturally liking me. (*She is about to speak: he stops her deprecatingly*) Oh, I know you mustn't tell me whether you like me or not; but -

GLORIA: (*her principles up in arms at once*) Must not! Why not! I am a free woman: why should I not tell you?

VALENTINE: (*pleading in terror, and retreating*) Don't. I'm afraid to hear.

GLORIA: (*no longer scornful*) You need not to be afraid. I think you are sentimental, a little foolish; but I like you.

VALENTINE: (*dropping into the nearest chair as if crushed*) Then it's all over. (*He becomes a picture of despair*).

GLORIA: (*puzzled, approaching him*) But why?

VALENTINE: Because liking is not enough. Now that I think down into it seriously, I don't know whether I like you or not.

GLORIA: (*looking down at him with wondering concern*) I am sorry

VALENTINE: (*in an agony of restrained passion*) Oh, don't pity me. Your voice is tearing my heart to pieces. Let me alone, Gloria. You go down into the very depths of me, troubling and stirring me. I can't struggle with it. I can't tell you -

GLORIA: (*breaking down suddenly*) Oh, stop telling me what you feel: I can't bear it.

VALENTINE: (*springing up triumphantly, the agonised voice now solid, ringing, and jubilant*) Ah, it's come at last: my moment of courage. (*He seizes her hands: she looks at him in terror*). Our moment of courage! (*He draws her to him; kisses her with impetuous strength; and laughs boyishly*). Now you've done it, Gloria. It's all over: we're in love with one another. (*She can only gasp him*). But what a dragon you were! And how hideously afraid

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I was!

PHILIP'S VOICE: *(calling from the beach)* Valentine!

DOLLY'S VOICE: Mr Valentine!

VALENTINE: Goodbye. Forgive me. *(He rapidly kisses her hands and runs away to the steps, where he meets Mrs Clandon ascending)*