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She Stoops to Conquer

Oliver Goldsmith · *1773 · original English text*

Young Marlow, easy with barmaids and frozen before ladies of reputation, is sent to court Miss Hardcastle. Tony Lumpkin directs him to the house as if it were an inn. The lady of the house therefore stoops to the part of a barmaid, and the mistakes of a night become a courtship. Goldsmith's comedy is generous, not cruel.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What does a young woman have to stoop to in order to be seen, and can a house that is treated as an inn still become a home?

"I love everything that's old: old friends, old times, old manners, old books, old wine;"

Mr. Hardcastle · Act I, with Mrs. Hardcastle

Marlow's bashfulness is a real fault of class and vanity: he can speak to a woman he thinks his inferior and not to one he thinks his equal. Kate uses the mistake Tony has made and meets him on the ground where he can talk. Meanwhile Hastings and Constance try to steal away with the jewels Mrs. Hardcastle hoards, and Tony, appearing a lumpkin, is sharper than his mother. The play ends in true matches and a laugh at the inn-that-was-a-house. Old manners, in Hardcastle's sense, include hospitality—even to guests who have been very free with Liberty-hall.

KEY CHARACTERS

Kate Hardcastle
The host's daughter, who stoops to a barmaid's part in order to know and win Marlow.

Charles Marlow
A young man modest to a fault with ladies and rash with those he takes for inferiors.

Mr. Hardcastle
A hospitable gentleman, fond of old manners, and a more patient host than the joke deserves.

Tony Lumpkin
The stepson, rustic and sly, whose misdirection starts the play and whose last ride ends it.

Hastings, Constance Neville, and Mrs. Hardcastle
The second lovers, and the fashionable mother who stands in their way.

LIBERTY-HALL

> *"I love everything that's old: old friends, old times, old manners, old books, old wine;"*
> **Mr. Hardcastle** · Act I

> *"This is Liberty-hall, gentlemen. You may do just as you please here."*
> **Mr. Hardcastle** · Act II

Grades 8–12
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01
Old Friends, and a Direction
ACT THE FIRST

Hardcastle loves what is old; his wife loves town fashion and her son Tony. Marlow and Hastings, sent to the house, are pointed by Tony to it as an inn.

- The opening contrast of tastes is the household's comic engine.
- Tony's alehouse song and trick set the whole night in motion.
- Kate agrees with her father to meet Marlow honestly, then has to meet him otherwise.

> *"This is Liberty-hall, gentlemen. You may do just as you please here."*
> **Mr. Hardcastle** · Act the Second, taking the 'inn' guests at their ease

02
Liberty-Hall
ACT THE SECOND

The young men treat Hardcastle as an innkeeper and Kate as a barmaid. Hastings finds Constance and plots an elopement; Marlow cannot look Miss Hardcastle in the face.

- The insult to the host is comic because he keeps his temper longer than most men would.
- Marlow's two manners are the play's diagnosis of him.
- Jewels and a proposed flight start the second intrigue.

03
A Barmaid's Courage
ACT THE THIRD

Kate, stooping to the maid's part, draws Marlow into speech and liking. Tony and Mrs. Hardcastle wrangle over Constance's jewels.

- The stooping is a tactic and also a kindness: she meets him where he is able to be true.
- Mrs. Hardcastle's greed is the other vanity in the house.
- Tony's 'blunders' begin to look like design.

04
A Letter, and a Scare
ACT THE FOURTH

A letter exposes Hastings's plan. Hardcastle's patience with the 'inn' guests finally breaks. Marlow learns, too late, whose house this is, and is ashamed.

- Shame is the beginning of his cure.
- The parents' authority and the young people's plots collide.
- The house is no longer an inn, and no one quite knows how to behave.

05
The Garden, and a Clearing
ACT THE FIFTH

Tony drives his mother in a circle and 'rescues' her from a nearby garden. Identities and fortunes are righted; Marlow, facing Kate as herself, is accepted. The mistakes of the night are confessed as a comedy.

- Tony's last trick frees Constance and himself from his mother's management.
- Kate's father tests Marlow and is satisfied.
- The title is fulfilled: she stooped, and the conquest is mutual.

Hospitality | Pride and Bashfulness | A Kind Trick | Old Manners | True Matches

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 8–12

1. The hosted text is the original English of Project Gutenberg #383, She Stoops to Conquer; Or, The Mistakes of a Night: A Comedy, in five acts (here headed Act the First, and so on).
2. Exact: "I love everything that's old: old friends, old times, old manners, old books, old wine;" And: "This is Liberty-hall, gentlemen. You may do just as you please here." (This Gutenberg text often uses two spaces after periods; spacing will not matter once normalized.)
3. The play is a comedy of class manners, not a farce against the countryside. Tony looks clownish and is not a fool.
4. Goldsmith's humor is good-natured. The 'stooping' is a temporary disguise in service of a truthful courtship, not a lasting humiliation.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #383: She Stoops to Conquer; Or, The Mistakes of a Night, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/she-stoops-to-conquer/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.