

# WHILE THE AUTO WAITS

by O. HENRY

adapted for the stage by WALTER WYKES

## CHARACTERS

GIRL  
YOUNG MAN  
WAITRESS  
CHAUFFEUR

## TIME

1920s

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# WHILE THE AUTO WAITS

*[Twilight. The quiet corner of a city park. A GIRL in gray sits alone on a bench, reading her book. A large-meshed veil hangs over her face, which nevertheless shines through with a calm and unconscious beauty. When she turns a page, the book slips from her hand, and a YOUNG MAN, who has been hovering nearby, pounces upon it. He returns it to her with a gallant and hopeful air.]*

GIRL  
Oh, thank you.

YOUNG MAN  
Nice weather we're having.

GIRL  
Yes.  
*[Pause.]*

YOUNG MAN  
Well ...

GIRL  
You may sit down, if you like.

YOUNG MAN  
*[Eagerly.]*  
Are you sure? I don't want to interrupt your reading.

GIRL  
Really, sit. I would like very much to have you do so. The light is too bad for reading. I would prefer to talk.

YOUNG MAN  
Well, if you insist.  
*[He slides hopefully onto the seat next to her.]*  
You know, you've got to be the stunningest girl I've ever seen. Honest. I had my eye on you since yesterday.

GIRL

Yesterday?

YOUNG MAN

Didn't know somebody was bowled over by those pretty lamps of yours, did you, honeysuckle?

GIRL

Whoever you are, you must remember that I am a lady. I will excuse the remark you have just made because the mistake was, doubtless, not an unnatural one—in your circle. I asked you to sit down; if the invitation must constitute me your honeysuckle, consider it withdrawn.

YOUNG MAN

Sorry. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to offend you. I just thought ... well, I mean, there are girls in parks, you know—that is, of course, you don't know, but—

GIRL

Abandon the subject, if you please. Of course I know.

YOUNG MAN

Right.

GIRL

Now, tell me about these people passing and crowding, each way, along these paths. Where are they going? Why do they hurry so? Are they happy?

YOUNG MAN

It is interesting to watch them—isn't it? The wonderful drama of life. Some are going to supper and some to—er—other places. One can't help but wonder what their histories are.

GIRL

Yes! How fascinating they seem to me—rushing about with their petty little dreams and their common worries! I come here to sit because here, only, can I be near the great, common, throbbing heart of humanity. My part in life is cast where its beating is never felt. Can you surmise why I spoke to you, Mr.—?

YOUNG MAN

Parkenstacker. And your name...?

*[He waits, eager and hopeful, but she only holds up a slender finger and smiles slightly.]*

## GIRL

No, you would recognize it immediately. It is simply impossible to keep one's name out of the papers. Or even one's portrait. This veil and this hat—my maid's, of course—are my only protection. They furnish me with an incog. You should have seen the chauffeur staring when he thought I did not see. Candidly, there are five or six names that belong in the holy of holies, and mine, by the accident of birth, is one of them. I spoke to you, Mr. Stackenpot—

## YOUNG MAN

Parkenstacker.

## GIRL

—Mr. Parkenstacker, because I wanted to talk, for once, with a natural man—a real man—one unspoiled by the despicable gloss of wealth and supposed social superiority. Oh! You have no idea how weary I am of it—money, money, money! And of the men who surround me, dancing like little marionettes all cut from the same pattern. I am sick of pleasure, of jewels, of travel, of society, of luxuries of all kinds!

## YOUNG MAN

I always had the idea that money must be a pretty good thing.

## GIRL

A competence is to be desired, certainly. But when you have so many millions that—!

*[She concludes the sentence with a gesture of despair.]*

It is the monotony of it that palls. Drives, dinners, theatres, balls, suppers, balls, dinners, more balls, followed of course by dinners and suppers, with the gilding of superfluous wealth over it all. Sometimes the very tinkle of the ice in my champagne glass nearly drives me mad.

## YOUNG MAN

You know ... I've always liked to read up on the habits and customs of the wealthy class. I consider myself a bit of a connoisseur on the subject. But I like to have my information accurate. Now, I had formed the opinion that champagne is cooled in the bottle and not by placing ice in the glass.

*[The GIRL gives a musical laugh of genuine amusement.]*

## GIRL

You must understand that we of the non-useful class depend for our amusement upon departure from precedent. Just now it is a fad to put ice in champagne. The idea was originated by a visiting Prince of Tartary while dining at the Waldorf. It will soon give way to some other whim. Just as, at a dinner party this week on

Madison Avenue, a green kid glove was laid by the plate of each guest to be put on and used while eating olives.

YOUNG MAN

*[Humbly.]*

I see.

GIRL

These special diversions of the inner circle do not become familiar to the common public, of course.

YOUNG MAN

Of course. It's all quite fascinating. I've always wanted to participate in, or at least witness first hand, the rituals of the elite.

GIRL

We are drawn to that which we do not understand.

YOUNG MAN

I guess that's true.

GIRL

For my part, I have always thought that if I should ever love a man it would be one of lowly station. One who is a worker and not a drone. But, doubtless, the claims of caste and wealth will prove stronger than my inclination. Just now I am besieged by two suitors. One is Grand Duke of a German principality. I think he has, or has had, a wife, somewhere, driven mad by his intemperance and cruelty. The other is an English Marquis, so cold and mercenary that I prefer even the diabolical nature of the Duke. What is it that impels me to tell you these things, Mr. Packenwacker?

YOUNG MAN

Parkenstacker.

GIRL

Of course.

YOUNG MAN

I don't know why you should bare your soul to a common man like me, but you can't know how much I appreciate your confidences.

*[The girl contemplates him with the calm, impersonal regard that befits the difference in their stations.]*

GIRL

What is your line of business, if you don't mind my asking?

YOUNG MAN

A very humble one. But I hope to rise in the world someday.

GIRL

You have aspirations?

YOUNG MAN

Oh, yes. There's so much I want to do.

GIRL

I admire your enthusiasm. I, myself, can find very little to be enthused about, burdened, as I am, by the constant pleasures and diversions of my class.

YOUNG MAN

Did you really mean it, before, when you said you could love a man of lowly station?

GIRL

Indeed I did. But I said "might."

YOUNG MAN

Why only "might?"

GIRL

Well, there is the Grand Duke and the Marquis to think of, you know.

YOUNG MAN

But you've said yourself—they're so cold.

GIRL

I am sure you understand when I say there are certain expectations of a young lady in my position. It would be such a disappointment to certain members of my family if I were to marry a commoner as we like to call them. You simply cannot imagine the scandal it would cause. All the magazines would remark upon it. I might even be cut off from the family fortune. And yet ... no calling could be too humble were the man I loved all that I wish him to be.

YOUNG MAN

I work in a restaurant.

*[The girl shrinks slightly.]*

GIRL

Not as a *waiter*? Labor is noble, but personal attendance, you know—valets and—

YOUNG MAN

Not a waiter. I'm a cashier in ... in that restaurant over there.

GIRL

*[With a strange, suspicious look.]*

That ... that one there?

*[He nods.]*

*That one?*

YOUNG MAN

Yes.

GIRL

*[Confused.]*

*Are you sure?*

YOUNG MAN

Quite sure.

GIRL

But—

*[Suddenly the GIRL consults a tiny watch set in a bracelet of rich design upon her wrist. She rises with a start.]*

Oh!

YOUNG MAN

What is it? What's wrong?

GIRL

I ... I am late for an important engagement.

YOUNG MAN

An engagement?

GIRL

Yes!

YOUNG MAN

Some sort of ball or—

GIRL

Yes, yes!

YOUNG MAN

Will I see you again?

GIRL

I do not know. Perhaps—but the whim may not seize me again. I must go quickly now. There is a dinner, and a box at the play—and, oh! The same old round! Perhaps you noticed an automobile at the upper corner of the park as you came. One with a white body.

YOUNG MAN

*[Knitting his brow strangely.]*

And red running gear?

GIRL

Yes. I always come in that. Pierre waits for me there. He supposes me to be shopping in the department store across the square. Conceive of the bondage of the life wherein we must deceive even our chauffeurs. Good-night.

YOUNG MAN

Wait! It's getting dark, and the park is full of questionable characters. Can't I walk you to your—

GIRL

*[Quickly.]*

No! I mean ... no. If you have the slightest regard for my wishes, you will remain on this bench for ten minutes after I have left. I do not mean to question your intentions, but you are probably aware that autos generally bear the monogram of their owner. Again, good-night.

*[Suddenly a WAITRESS approaches, wearing a soiled, dirty uniform—evidently just coming off her shift.]*

WAITRESS

Mary-Jane! Mary-Jane Parker! What on earth are you doing out here?! Don't you know what time it is?!

GIRL

*[A little flustered.]*

To whom are you speaking, Madame?



WAITRESS

To whom am I ... to you! Who do you think, you ninny?!

GIRL

Then I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about.

WAITRESS

You're shift started fifteen minutes ago! Mr. Witherspoon's in a rage! This is the third time this month you've been late! You'd better get yourself over there and into uniform before he cuts you loose for good!

GIRL

I—

WAITRESS

Go on, now! I know you can't afford to miss a paycheck!

GIRL

*[Attempting to maintain her dignity.]*

You must have me confused with—with someone else.

WAITRESS

Confused with—why, Mary-Jane Parker, we've known each other for three years! We swap shifts! Have you been drinking?! Why are you wearing that ridiculous hat?!

GIRL

*[To the YOUNG MAN.]*

I ... I'm sorry, Mr. Porckenblogger—

YOUNG MAN

Parckenstacker.

GIRL

Parckenstacker.

WAITRESS

*Parckenstacker?*

YOUNG MAN

Yes, Parckenstacker.

WAITRESS

As in THE Parkenstackers?! From the society pages?!

GIRL

*The society pages?*

YOUNG MAN

If only I were so fortunate.

GIRL

You ... you must excuse me. My chauffeur is waiting.

WAITRESS

*Chauffeur?! What kind of crazy airs are you putting on?! You've never had a chauffeur in your life! You don't even own an automobile!*

GIRL

I do so!

WAITRESS

Since when?!

GIRL

Since ... Oh, get away from me! I don't know you!

WAITRESS

Don't know me?! You *have* been drinking! I'm going to tell your mother!  
*[The GIRL rushes off, followed closely by the WAITRESS. The YOUNG MAN picks up her book where she has dropped it.]*

YOUNG MAN

Wait! You forgot your—

*[But they are gone. After a few moments, a CHAUFFEUR approaches cautiously.]*

CHAUFFEUR

Begging your pardon, sir.

YOUNG MAN

Yes, Henri?

CHAUFFEUR

I don't mean to intrude, but your dinner reservation—shall I cancel or—

YOUNG MAN

No ... I'm coming.

CHAUFFEUR

Very good, sir. The auto is waiting.

*[The CHAUFFEUR exits and leaves the YOUNG MAN standing alone for a moment as the lights fade.]*

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