

**WHEN A MAN'S  
SINGLE; A TALE OF  
LITERARY LIFE**

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When a man's single; a tale of literary life by J. M. Barrie

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A Tale of Literary Life

BY

J. M. BARRIE

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## CONTENTS

	PAGE
CHAPTER I	
ROB ANGUS IS NOT A FREE MAN . . . . .	1
CHAPTER II	
ROB BECOMES FREE . . . . .	17
CHAPTER III	
ROB GOES OUT INTO THE WORLD . . . . .	27
CHAPTER IV	
'THE SCORN OF SCORNS' . . . . .	43
CHAPTER V	
ROB MARCHES TO HIS FATE . . . . .	62
CHAPTER VI	
THE ONE WOMAN . . . . .	80
CHAPTER VII	
THE GRAND PASSION ? . . . . .	99
CHAPTER VIII	
IN FLEET STREET . . . . .	113
CHAPTER IX	
MR. NOBLE SIMMS . . . . .	129

## WHEN A MAN'S SINGLE

	PAGE
CHAPTER X	
THE WIGWAM . . . . .	189
CHAPTER XI	
ROB IS STRUCK DOWN . . . . .	156
CHAPTER XII	
THE STUPID SEX . . . . .	169
CHAPTER XIII	
THE HOUSE-BOAT 'TAWNY OWL' . . . . .	188
CHAPTER XIV	
MARY OF THE STONY HEART . . . . .	195
CHAPTER XV	
COLONEL ABINGER TAKES COMMAND . . . . .	210
CHAPTER XVI	
THE BARBER OF ROTTEN ROW . . . . .	222
CHAPTER XVII	
ROB PULLS HIMSELF TOGETHER . . . . .	234
CHAPTER XVIII	
THE AUDACITY OF ROB ANGUS . . . . .	245
CHAPTER XIX	
THE VERDICT OF THRUMS . . . . .	254

## CHAPTER I

### ROB ANGUS IS NOT A FREE MAN

ONE still Saturday afternoon some years ago a child pulled herself through a small window into a kitchen in the kirk-wynd of Thrums. She came from the old graveyard, whose only outlet, when the parish church gate is locked, is the windows of the wynd houses that hoop it round. Squatting on a three-legged stool she gazed wistfully at a letter on the chimney-piece, and then, tripping to the door, looked up and down the wynd.

Snecky Hobart, the bellman, hobbled past, and, though Davy was only four years old, she knew that as he had put on his blue top-coat he expected the evening to be fine. Tammas McQuhatty, the farmer of T'nowhead, met him at the corner, and they came to a standstill to say, 'She 's hard, Sneck,' and 'She is so, T'nowhead,' referring to the weather. Observing that they had stopped they moved on again.

Women and children and a few men squeezed through their windows into the kirkyard, the women to knit stockings on fallen tombstones, and the men to dander pleasantly from grave to grave reading the inscriptions. All the men were well up in years, for though, with the Auld Lights, the Sabbath began to come on at six o'clock on Saturday evening, the young men were now washing themselves cautiously



## WHEN A MAN'S SINGLE

in tin basins before going into the square to talk about women.

The clatter of more than one loom could still have been heard by Davy had not her ears been too accustomed to the sound to notice it. In the adjoining house Bell Mealmaker was peppering her newly-washed floor with sand, while her lodger, Hender Robb, with a rusty razor in his hand, looked for his chin in a tiny glass that was peeling on the wall. Jinny Tosh had got her husband, Aundra Lunan, who always spoke of her as She, ready, so to speak, for church eighteen hours too soon, and Aundra sat stiffly at the fire, putting his feet on the ribs every minute, to draw them back with a scared look at Her as he remembered that he had on his blacks. In a bandbox beneath the bed was his silk hat, which had been knocked down to him at Jamie Ramsay's roup, and Jinny had already put his red handkerchief, which was also a pictorial history of Scotland, into a pocket of his coat-tails, with a corner hanging gracefully out. Her puckered lips signified that, however much her man might desire to do so, he was not to carry his handkerchief to church in his hat, where no one could see it. On working days Aundra held his own, but at six o'clock on Saturday nights he passed into Her hands.

Across the wynd, in which a few hens wandered, Pete Todd was supping in his shirt-sleeves. His blacks lay ready for him in the coffin-bed, and Pete, glancing at them at intervals, supped as slowly as he could. In one hand he held a saucer, and in the other a chunk of bread, and they were as far apart as Pete's outstretched arms could put them. His chair was a

## ROB ANGUS IS NOT A FREE MAN

yard from the table, on which, by careful balancing, he rested a shoeless foot, and his face was twisted to the side. Every time Easie Whamond, his wife, passed him she took the saucer from his hand, remarking that when a genteel man sat down to tea he did not turn his back on the table. Pete took this stolidly, like one who had long given up trying to understand the tantrums of women, and who felt that, as a lord of creation, he could afford to let it pass.

Davy sat on her three-legged stool keeping guard over her uncle Rob the saw-miller's letter, and longing for him to come. She screwed up her eyebrows as she had seen him do when he read a letter, and she felt that it would be nice if every one would come and look at her taking care of it. After a time she climbed up on her stool and stretched her dimpled arms toward the mantelpiece. From a string suspended across this, socks and stockings hung drying at the fire, and clutching one of them Davy drew herself nearer. With a chuckle, quickly suppressed, lest it should bring in Kitty Wilkie, who ought to have been watching her instead of wandering down the wynd to see who was to have salt-fish for supper, the child clutched the letter triumphantly, and, toddling to the door, slipped out of the house.

For a moment Davy faltered at the mouth of the wynd. There was no one there to whom she could show the letter. A bright thought entered her head, and immediately a dimple opened on her face and swallowed all the puckers. Rob had gone to the Whunny muir for wood, and she would take the letter to him. Then when Rob saw her he would look all around him, and if there was no one there to take

## WHEN A MAN'S SINGLE

note he would lift her to his shoulder, when they could read the letter together.

Davy ran out of the wynd into the square, thinking she heard Kitty's Sabbath voice, which reminded the child of the little squeaking saw that Rob used for soft wood. On week-days Kitty's voice was the big saw that puled and rasped, and Mag Wilkie shivered at it. Except to her husband Mag spoke with her teeth closed, so politely that no one knew what she said.

Davy stumbled up the steep brae down which men are blown in winter to their work, until she reached the rim of the hollow in which Thrums lies. Here the road stops short, as if frightened to cross the common of whin that bars the way to the north. On this common there are many cart-tracks over bumpy sward and slippery roots, that might be the ribs of the carth showing, and Davy, with a dazed look in her eyes, ran down one of them, the whins catching her frock to stop her, and then letting go, as if, after all, one child more or less in the world was nothing to them.

By and by she found herself on another road, along which Rob had trudged earlier in the day with a saw on his shoulder, but he had gone east, and the child's face was turned westward. It is a muddy road even in summer, and those who use it frequently get into the habit of lifting their legs high as they walk, like men picking their way through beds of rotting leaves. The light had faded from her baby face now, but her mouth was firm-set, and her bewildered eyes were fixed straight ahead.

The last person to see Davy was Tammas Haggart,