

RUTH.

Oh, take me with you! I cannot live if I am left behind.

FRED.

Ruth, I will be quite candid with you. You are very dear to me, as you know, but I must be circumspect. You see, you are considerably older than I. A lad of twenty-one usually looks for a wife of seventeen.

RUTH.

A wife of seventeen! You will find me a wife of a thousand!

FRED.

No, but I shall find you a wife of forty-seven, and that is quite enough. Ruth, tell me candidly and without reserve: compared with other women – how are you?

RUTH.

I will answer you truthfully, master – I have a slight cold, but otherwise I am quite well.

FRED.

I am sorry for your cold, but I was referring rather to your personal appearance. Compared with other women, are you beautiful?

RUTH.

(bashfully) I have been told so, dear master.

FRED.

Ah, but lately?

RUTH.

Oh, no; years and years ago.

FRED.

What do you think of yourself?

RUTH.

It is a delicate question to answer, but I think I am a fine woman.

FRED.

That is your candid opinion?

RUTH.

Yes, I should be deceiving you if I told you otherwise.

FRED. Thank you, Ruth. I believe you, for I am sure you would not practice on my inexperience. I wish to do the right thing, and if – I say if – you are really a fine woman, your age shall be no obstacle to our union! (Chorus of Girls heard in the distance.) Hark! Surely I hear voices! Who has ventured to approach our all but inaccessible lair? Can it be Custom House? No, it does not sound like Custom House.

RUTH.

(aside) Confusion! it is the voices of young girls! If he should see them I am lost.

FRED.

(looking off) By all that's marvellous, a bevy of beautiful maidens!

RUTH. (aside) Lost! lost! lost!

FRED.

How lovely, how surpassingly lovely is the plainest of them! What grace – what delicacy – what refinement! And Ruth – Ruth told me she was beautiful!