

GALSWORTHY

JOHN

WINDOWS

John Galsworthy

Windows

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John Galsworthy

Windows

ACT I

The MARCH'S dining-room opens through French windows on one of those gardens which seem infinite, till they are seen to be coterminous with the side walls of the house, and finite at the far end, because only the thick screen of acacias and sumachs prevents another house from being seen. The French and other windows form practically all the outer wall of that dining-room, and between them and the screen of trees lies the difference between the characters of Mr and Mrs March, with dots and dashes of Mary and Johnny thrown in. For instance, it has been formalised by MRS MARCH but the grass has not been cut by MR MARCH, and daffodils have sprung up there, which MRS MARCH desires for the dining-room, but of which MR MARCH says: "For God's sake, Joan, let them grow." About half therefore are now in a bowl on the breakfast table, and the other half still in the grass, in the compromise essential to lasting domesticity. A hammock under the acacias shows that MARY lies there sometimes with her eyes on the gleam of sunlight that comes through: and a trail in the longish grass, bordered with cigarette ends, proves that JOHNNY tramps there with his eyes on the ground or the stars, according. But all this is by the way, because except for a yard or two of gravel terrace outside the windows, it is all painted on the backcloth. The MARCHES have been at breakfast, and the round table, covered with blue linen, is thick with remains, seven baskets full. The room is gifted with old oak furniture: there is a door, stage Left, Forward; a hearth, where a fire is burning, and a high fender on which one can sit, stage Right, Middle; and in the wall below the fireplace, a service hatch covered with a sliding shutter, for the passage of dishes into the adjoining pantry. Against the wall, stage Left, is an old oak dresser, and a small writing table across the Left Back corner. MRS MARCH still sits behind the coffee pot, making up her daily list on tablets with a little gold pencil fastened to her wrist. She is personable, forty-eight, trim, well-dressed, and more matter-of-fact than seems plausible. MR MARCH is sitting in an armchair, sideways to the windows, smoking his pipe and reading his newspaper, with little explosions to which no one pays any attention, because it is his daily habit. He is a fine-looking man of fifty odd, with red-grey moustaches and hair, both of which stiver partly by nature and partly because his hands often push them up. MARY and JOHNNY are close to the fireplace, stage Right. JOHNNY sits on the fender, smoking a cigarette and warming his back. He is a commonplace looking young man, with a decided jaw, tall, neat, soulful, who has been in the war and writes poetry. MARY is less ordinary; you cannot tell exactly what is the matter with her. She too is tall, a little absent, fair, and well-looking. She has a small china dog in her hand, taken from the mantelpiece, and faces the audience. As the curtain rises she is saying in her soft and pleasant voice: "Well, what is the matter with us all, Johnny?"

JOHNNY. Stuck, as we were in the trenches – like china dogs. [He points to the ornament in her hand.]

MR MARCH. [Into his newspaper] Damn these people!

MARY. If there isn't an ideal left, Johnny, it's no good pretending one.

JOHNNY. That's what I'm saying: Bankrupt!

MARY. What do you want?

MRS MARCH. [To herself] Mutton cutlets. Johnny, will you be in to lunch? [JOHNNY shakes his head] Mary? [MARY nods] Geof?

MR MARCH. [Into his paper] Swine!

MRS MARCH. That'll be three. [To herself] Spinach.

JOHNNY. If you'd just missed being killed for three blooming years for no spiritual result whatever, you'd want something to bite on, Mary.

MRS MARCH. [Jotting] Soap.

JOHNNY. What price the little and weak, now? Freedom and self-determination, and all that?

MARY. Forty to one – no takers.

JOHNNY. It doesn't seem to worry you.

MARY. Well, what's the good?

JOHNNY. Oh, you're a looker on, Mary.

MR MARCH. [To his newspaper] Of all Godforsaken time-servers!

MARY is moved so far as to turn and look over his shoulder a minute.

JOHNNY. Who?

MARY. Only the Old-Un.

MR MARCH. This is absolutely Prussian!

MRS MARCH. Soup, lobster, chicken salad. Go to Mrs Hunt's.

MR MARCH. And this fellow hasn't the nous to see that if ever there were a moment when it would pay us to take risks, and be generous – My hat! He ought to be – knighted! [Resumes his paper.]

JOHNNY. [Muttering] You see, even Dad can't suggest chivalry without talking of payment for it. That shows how we've sunk.

MARY. [Contemptuously] Chivalry! Pouf! Chivalry was "off" even before the war, Johnny. Who wants chivalry?

JOHNNY. Of all shallow-pated humbug – that sneering at chivalry's the worst. Civilisation – such as we've got – is built on it.

MARY. [Airily] Then it's built on sand. [She sits beside him on the fender.]

JOHNNY. Sneering and smartness! Pah!

MARY. [Roused] I'll tell you what, Johnny, it's mucking about with chivalry that makes your poetry rotten. [JOHNNY seizes her arm and twists it] Shut up – that hurts. [JOHNNY twists it more] You brute! [JOHNNY lets her arm go.]

JOHNNY. Ha! So you don't mind taking advantage of the fact that you can cheek me with impunity, because you're weaker. You've given the whole show away, Mary. Abolish chivalry and I'll make you sit up.

MRS MARCH. What are you two quarrelling about? Will you bring home cigarettes, Johnny – not Bogdogunov's Mamelukes – something more Anglo-American.

JOHNNY. All right! D'you want any more illustrations, Mary?

MARY. Pig! [She has risen and stands rubbing her arm and recovering her placidity, which is considerable.]

MRS MARCH. Geof, can you eat preserved peaches?

MR MARCH. Hell! What a policy! Um?

MRS MARCH. Can you eat preserved peaches?

MR MARCH. Yes. [To his paper] Making the country stink in the eyes of the world!

MARY. Nostrils, Dad, nostrils.

MR MARCH wriggles, half hearing.

JOHNNY. [Muttering] Shallow idiots! Thinking we can do without chivalry!

MRS MARCH. I'm doing my best to get a parlourmaid, to-day, Mary, but these breakfast things won't clear themselves.

MARY. I'll clear them, Mother.

MRS MARCH. Good! [She gets up. At the door] Knitting silk.

She goes out.

JOHNNY. Mother hasn't an ounce of idealism. You might make her see stars, but never in the singular.

MR MARCH. [To his paper] If God doesn't open the earth soon —

MARY. Is there anything special, Dad?

MR MARCH. This sulphurous government. [He drops the paper] Give me a match, Mary.

As soon as the paper is out of his hands he becomes a different — an affable man.

MARY. [Giving him a match] D'you mind writing in here this morning, Dad? Your study hasn't been done. There's nobody but Cook.

MR MARCH. [Lighting his pipe] Anywhere.

He slews the armchair towards the fire.

MARY. I'll get your things, then.

She goes out.

JOHNNY. [Still on the fender] What do you say, Dad? Is civilisation built on chivalry or on self-interest?

MR MARCH. The question is considerable, Johnny. I should say it was built on contract, and jerry-built at that.

JOHNNY. Yes; but why do we keep contracts when we can break them with advantage and impunity?

MR MARCH. But do we keep them?

JOHNNY. Well — say we do; otherwise you'll admit there isn't such a thing as civilisation at all. But why do we keep them? For instance, why don't we make Mary and Mother work for us like Kafir women? We could lick them into it. Why did we give women the vote? Why free slaves; why anything decent for the little and weak?

MR MARCH. Well, you might say it was convenient for people living in communities.

JOHNNY. I don't think it's convenient at all. I should like to make Mary sweat. Why not jungle law, if there's nothing in chivalry.

MR MARCH. Chivalry is altruism, Johnny. Of course it's quite a question whether altruism isn't enlightened self-interest!

JOHNNY. Oh! Damn!

The lank and shirt-sleeved figure of MR BLY, with a pail of water and cloths, has entered, and stands near the window, Left.

BLY. Beg pardon, Mr March; d'you mind me cleanin' the winders here?

MR MARCH. Not a bit.

JOHNNY. Bankrupt of ideals. That's it!

MR BLY stares at him, and puts his pail down by the window. MARY has entered with her father's writing materials which she puts on a stool beside him.

MARY. Here you are, Dad! I've filled up the ink pot. Do be careful! Come on, Johnny!

She looks curiously at MR BLY, who has begun operations at the bottom of the left-hand window, and goes, followed by JOHNNY.

MR MARCH. [Relighting his pipe and preparing his materials] What do you think of things, Mr Bly?

BLY. Not much, sir.

MR MARCH. Ah! [He looks up at MR BLY, struck by his large philosophical eyes and moth-eaten moustache] Nor I.

BLY. I rather thought that, sir, from your writin's.

MR MARCH. Oh! Do you read?

BLY. I was at sea, once – formed the 'abit.

MR MARCH. Read any of my novels?

BLY. Not to say all through – I've read some of your articles in the Sunday papers, though. Make you think!

MR MARCH. I'm at sea now – don't see dry land anywhere, Mr Bly.

BLY. [With a smile] That's right.

MR MARCH. D'you find that the general impression?

BLY. No. People don't think. You 'ave to 'ave some cause for thought.

MR MARCH. Cause enough in the papers.

BLY. It's nearer 'ome with me. I've often thought I'd like a talk with you, sir. But I'm keepin' you. [He prepares to swab the pane.]

MR MARCH. Not at all. I enjoy it. Anything to put off work.

BLY. [Looking at MR MARCH, then giving a wipe at the window] What's drink to one is drought to another. I've seen two men take a drink out of the same can – one die of it and the other get off with a pain in his stomach.

MR MARCH. You've seen a lot, I expect.

BLY. Ah! I've been on the beach in my day. [He sponges at the window] It's given me a way o' lookin' at things that I don't find in other people. Look at the 'Ome Office. They got no philosophy.

MR MARCH. [Pricking his ears] What? Have you had dealings with them?

BLY. Over the reprieve that was got up for my daughter. But I'm keepin' you.

He swabs at the window, but always at the same pane, so that he does not advance at all.

MR MARCH. Reprieve?

BLY. Ah! She was famous at eighteen. The Sunday Mercury was full of her, when she was in prison.

MR MARCH. [Delicately] Dear me! I'd no idea.

BLY. She's out now; been out a fortnight. I always say that fame's ephemereal. But she'll never settle to that weavin'. Her head got turned a bit.

MR MARCH. I'm afraid I'm in the dark, Mr Bly.

BLY. [Pausing – dipping his sponge in the pail and then standing with it in his hand] Why! Don't you remember the Bly case? They sentenced 'er to be 'anged by the neck until she was dead, for smotherin' her baby. She was only eighteen at the time of speakin'.

MR MARCH. Oh! yes! An inhuman business!

BLY. All! The jury recommended 'er to mercy. So they reduced it to Life.

MR MARCH. Life! Sweet Heaven!

BLY. That's what I said; so they give her two years. I don't hold with the Sunday Mercury, but it put that over. It's a misfortune to a girl to be good-lookin'.

MR MARCH. [Rumpling his hair] No, no! Dash it all! Beauty's the only thing left worth living for.

BLY. Well, I like to see green grass and a blue sky; but it's a mistake in a 'uman bein'. Look at any young chap that's good-lookin' – 'e's doomed to the screen, or hair-dressin'. Same with the girls. My girl went into an 'airdresser's at seventeen and in six months she was in trouble. When I saw 'er with a rope round her neck, as you might say, I said to meself: "Bly," I said, "you're responsible for this. If she 'adn't been good-lookin' – it'd never 'eve 'appened."

During this speech MARY has come in with a tray, to clear the breakfast, and stands unnoticed at the dining-table, arrested by the curious words of MR BLY.

MR MARCH. Your wife might not have thought that you were wholly the cause, Mr Bly.

BLY. Ah! My wife. She's passed on. But Faith – that's my girl's name – she never was like 'er mother; there's no 'eredity in 'er on that side.

MR MARCH. What sort of girl is she?

BLY. One for colour – likes a bit o' music – likes a dance, and a flower.

MARY. [Interrupting softly] Dad, I was going to clear, but I'll come back later.

MR MARCH. Come here and listen to this! Here's a story to get your blood up! How old was the baby, Mr Bly?

BLY. Two days – 'ardly worth mentionin'. They say she 'ad the 'ighstrikes after – an' when she comes to she says: "I've saved my baby's life." An' that's true enough when you come to think what that sort o' baby goes through as a rule; dragged up by somebody else's hand, or took away by the Law. What can a workin' girl do with a baby born under the rose, as they call it? Wonderful the difference money makes when it comes to bein' outside the Law.

MR MARCH. Right you are, Mr Bly. God's on the side of the big battalions.

BLY. Ah! Religion! [His eyes roll philosophically] Did you ever read 'Aigel?

MR MARCH. Hegel, or Haekel?

BLY. Yes; with an aitch. There's a balance abart 'im that I like. There's no doubt the Christian religion went too far. Turn the other cheek! What oh! An' this Anti-Christ, Neesha, what came in with the war – he went too far in the other direction. Neither of 'em practical men. You've got to strike a balance, and foller it.

MR MARCH. Balance! Not much balance about us. We just run about and jump Jim Crow.

BLY. [With a perfunctory wipe] That's right; we 'aven't got a faith these days. But what's the use of tellin' the Englishman to act like an angel. He ain't either an angel or a blond beast. He's between the two, an 'ermumphradite. Take my daughter – If I was a blond beast, I'd turn 'er out to starve; if I was an angel, I'd starve meself to learn her the piano. I don't do either. Why? Becos my instincts tells me not.

MR MARCH. Yes, but my doubt is whether our instincts at this moment of the world's history are leading us up or down.

BLY. What is up and what is down? Can you answer me that? Is it up or down to get so soft that you can't take care of yourself?

MR MARCH. Down.

BLY. Well, is it up or down to get so 'ard that you can't take care of others?

MR MARCH. Down.

BLY. Well, there you are!

MARCH. Then our instincts are taking us down?

BLY. Nao. They're strikin' a balance, unbeknownst, all the time.

MR MARCH. You're a philosopher, Mr Bly.

BLY. [Modestly] Well, I do a bit in that line, too. In my opinion Nature made the individual believe he's goin' to live after'e's dead just to keep 'im livin' while 'es alive – otherwise he'd 'a died out.

MR MARCH. Quite a thought – quite a thought!

BLY. But I go one better than Nature. Follow your instincts is my motto.

MR MARCH. Excuse me, Mr Bly, I think Nature got hold of that before you.

BLY. [Slightly chilled] Well, I'm keepin' you.

MR MARCH. Not at all. You're a believer in conscience, or the little voice within. When my son was very small, his mother asked him once if he didn't hear a little voice within, telling him what was right. [MR MARCH touches his diaphragm] And he said "I often hear little voices in here, but they never say anything." [MR BLY cannot laugh, but he smiles] Mary, Johnny must have been awfully like the Government.

BLY. As a matter of fact, I've got my daughter here – in obedience.

MR MARCH. Where? I didn't catch.

BLY. In the kitchen. Your Cook told me you couldn't get hold of an 'ouse parlour-maid. So I thought it was just a chance – you bein' broadminded.

MR MARCH. Oh! I see. What would your mother say, Mary?

MARY. Mother would say: "Has she had experience?"

BLY. I've told you about her experience.

MR MARCH. Yes, but – as a parlour-maid.

BLY. Well! She can do hair. [Observing the smile exchanged between MR MARCH and MARY] And she's quite handy with a plate.

MR MARCH. [Tentatively] I'm a little afraid my wife would feel —

BLY. You see, in this weavin' shop – all the girls 'ave 'ad to be in trouble, otherwise they wouldn't take 'em. [Apologetically towards MARY] It's a kind of a disorderly 'ouse without the disorders. Excusin' the young lady's presence.

MARY. Oh! You needn't mind me, Mr Bly.

MR MARCH. And so you want her to come here? H'm!

BLY. Well I remember when she was a little bit of a thing – no higher than my knee – [He holds out his hand.]

MR MARCH. [Suddenly moved] My God! yes. They've all been that. [To MARY] Where's your mother?

MARY. Gone to Mrs Hunt's. Suppose she's engaged one, Dad?

MR MARCH. Well, it's only a month's wages.

MARY. [Softly] She won't like it.

MR MARCH. Well, let's see her, Mr Bly; let's see her, if you don't mind.

BLY. Oh, I don't mind, sir, and she won't neither; she's used to bein' inspected by now. Why! she 'ad her bumps gone over just before she came out!

MR MARCH. [Touched on the raw again] H'm! Too bad! Mary, go and fetch her.

MARY, with a doubting smile, goes out. [Rising] You might give me the details of that trial, Mr Bly. I'll see if I can't write something that'll make people sit up. That's the way to send Youth to hell! How can a child who's had a rope round her neck – !

BLY. [Who has been fumbling in his pocket, produces some yellow paper-cuttings clipped together] Here's her references – the whole literature of the case. And here's a letter from the chaplain in one of the prisons sayin' she took a lot of interest in him; a nice young man, I believe. [He suddenly brushes a tear out of his eye with the back of his hand] I never thought I could 'a felt like I did over her bein' in prison. Seemed a crool senseless thing – that pretty girl o' mine. All over a baby that hadn't got used to bein' alive. Tain't as if she'd been follerin' her instincts; why, she missed that baby something crool.

MR MARCH. Of course, human life – even an infant's —

BLY. I know you've got to 'ave a close time for it. But when you come to think how they take 'uman life in Injia and Ireland, and all those other places, it seems 'ard to come down like a cartload o' bricks on a bit of a girl that's been carried away by a moment's abiration.

MR MARCH. [Who is reading the cuttings] H'm! What hypocrites we are!

BLY. Ah! And 'oo can tell 'oo's the father? She never give us his name. I think the better of 'er for that.

MR MARCH. Shake hands, Mr Bly. So do I. [BLY wipes his hand, and MR MARCH shakes it] Loyalty's loyalty – especially when we men benefit by it.

BLY. That's right, sir.

MARY has returned with FAITH BLY, who stands demure and pretty on the far side of the table, her face an embodiment of the pathetic watchful prison faculty of adapting itself to whatever may be best for its owner at the moment. At this moment it is obviously best for her to look at the ground, and yet to take in the faces of MR MARCH and MARY without their taking her face in. A moment, for all, of considerable embarrassment.

MR MARCH. [Suddenly] We'll, here we are!

The remark attracts FAITH; she raises her eyes to his softly with a little smile, and drops them again.

So you want to be our parlour-maid?

FAITH. Yes, please.

MR MARCH. Well, Faith can remove mountains; but – er – I don't know if she can clear tables.

BLY. I've been tellin' Mr March and the young lady what you're capable of. Show 'em what you can do with a plate.

FAITH takes the tray from the sideboard and begins to clear the table, mainly by the light of nature. After a glance, MR MARCH looks out of the window and drums his fingers on the uncleaned pane. MR BLY goes on with his cleaning. MARY, after watching from the hearth, goes up and touches her father's arm.

MARY. [Between him and MR BLY who is bending over his bucket, softly] You're not watching, Dad.

MR MARCH. It's too pointed.

MARY. We've got to satisfy mother.

MR MARCH. I can satisfy her better if I don't look.

MARY. You're right.

FAITH has paused a moment and is watching them. As MARY turns, she resumes her operations. MARY joins, and helps her finish clearing, while the two men converse.

BLY. Fine weather, sir, for the time of year.

MR MARCH. It is. The trees are growing.

BLY. All! I wouldn't be surprised to see a change of Government before long. I've seen 'uge trees in Brazil without any roots – seen 'em come down with a crash.

MR MARCH. Good image, Mr Bly. Hope you're right!

BLY. Well, Governments! They're all the same – Butter when they're out of power, and blood when they're in. And Lord! 'ow they do abuse other Governments for doin' the things they do themselves. Excuse me, I'll want her dosseer back, sir, when you've done with it.

MR MARCH. Yes, yes. [He turns, rubbing his hands at the cleared table] Well, that seems all right! And you can do hair?

FAITH. Oh! Yes, I can do hair. [Again that little soft look, and smile so carefully adjusted.]

MR MARCH. That's important, don't you think, Mary? [MARY, accustomed to candour, smiles dubiously.] [Brightly] Ah! And cleaning plate? What about that?

FAITH. Of course, if I had the opportunity —

MARY. You haven't — so far?

FAITH. Only tin things.

MR MARCH. [Feeling a certain awkwardness] Well, I daresay we can find some for you. Can you — er — be firm on the telephone?

FAITH. Tell them you're engaged when you're not? Oh! yes.

MR MARCH. Excellent! Let's see, Mary, what else is there?

MARY. Waiting, and house work.

MR MARCH. Exactly.

FAITH. I'm very quick. I — I'd like to come. [She looks down] I don't care for what I'm doing now. It makes you feel your position.

MARY. Aren't they nice to you?

FAITH. Oh! yes — kind; but — [She looks up] it's against my instincts.

MR MARCH. Oh! [Quizzically] You've got a disciple, Mr Bly.

BLY. [Rolling his eyes at his daughter] Ah! but you mustn't 'ave instincts here, you know. You've got a chance, and you must come to stay, and do yourself credit.

FAITH. [Adapting her face] Yes, I know, I'm very lucky.

MR MARCH. [Deprecating thanks and moral precept] That's all right! Only, Mr Bly, I can't absolutely answer for Mrs March. She may think —

MARY. There is Mother; I heard the door.

BLY. [Taking up his pail] I quite understand, sir; I've been a married man myself. It's very queer the way women look at things. I'll take her away now, and come back presently and do these other winders. You can talk it over by yourselves. But if you do see your way, sir, I shan't forget it in an 'urry. To 'ave the responsibility of her — really, it's dreadful.

FAITH's face has grown sullen during this speech, but it clears up in another little soft look at MR MARCH, as she and MR BLY go out.

MR MARCH. Well, Mary, have I done it?

MARY. You have, Dad.

MR MARCH. [Running his hands through his hair] Pathetic little figure! Such infernal inhumanity!

MARY. How are you going to put it to mother?

MR MARCH. Tell her the story, and pitch it strong.

MARY. Mother's not impulsive.

MR MARCH. We must tell her, or she'll think me mad.

MARY. She'll do that, anyway, dear.

MR MARCH. Here she is! Stand by!

He runs his arm through MARY's, and they sit on the fender, at bay. MRS MARCH enters, Left.

MR MARCH. Well, what luck?

MRS MARCH. None.

MR MARCH. [Unguardedly] Good!

MRS MARCH. What?

MRS MARCH. [Cheerfully] Well, the fact is, Mary and I have caught one for 'you; Mr Bly's daughter —

MRS MARCH. Are you out of your senses? Don't you know that she's the girl who —

MR MARCH. That's it. She wants a lift.

MRS MARCH. Geof!

MR MARCH. Well, don't we want a maid?

MRS MARCH. [Ineffably] Ridiculous!

MR MARCH. We tested her, didn't we, Mary?

MRS MARCH. [Crossing to the bell, and ringing] You'll just send for Mr Bly and get rid of her again.

MR MARCH. Joan, if we comfortable people can't put ourselves a little out of the way to give a helping hand —

MRS MARCH. To girls who smother their babies?

MR MARCH. Joan, I revolt. I won't be a hypocrite and a Pharisee.

MRS MARCH. Well, for goodness sake let me be one.

MARY. [As the door opens]. Here's Cook!

COOK stands – sixty, stout, and comfortable with a crumpled smile.

COOK. Did you ring, ma'am?

MR MARCH. We're in a moral difficulty, Cook, so naturally we come to you.

COOK beams.

MRS MARCH. [Impatiently] Nothing of the sort, Cook; it's a question of common sense.

COOK. Yes, ma'am.

MRS MARCH. That girl, Faith Bly, wants to come here as parlour-maid. Absurd!

MARCH. You know her story, Cook? I want to give the poor girl a chance. Mrs March thinks it's taking chances. What do you say?

COCK. Of course, it is a risk, sir; but there! you've got to take 'em to get maids nowadays. If it isn't in the past, it's in the future. I daresay I could learn 'er.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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