

# English Made Simple

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*English Made Simple* examines the first encounter of a single couple at a café. Their meeting examines the possibilities of long life together through varying sequences of circumstance. Through a journey of logistics of the structure of English conversation, this one-act deals with dating and relationship issues that many of us might have experienced. The waiter in the scene acts as a mediator who dictates between sequences and give the couple advice about how to communicate in their interaction. Each sequence marks a different fate of their union: should they actually go out for a cup of coffee and if they do will the meeting lead to disaster or eternal bliss?

*The WAITER serves coffee to café patrons as JILL enters, followed by JACK and they do not notice each other at first. The WAITER rings a call bell to signal the start of the scene in which JACK and JILL face each other.*

WAITER: English Made Simple. Chapter Three. The Café. Section One: Saying Hello.

JACK AND JILL: Hello! *(They shake)*

WAITER: But remember before you begin-The first three minutes of conversation between two people can determine their relationship for the rest of eternity. So watch your language!

JACK: Hello.

JILL: Hi.

JACK: How are you?

JILL: Good.

JACK: I don't think I know you.

JILL: My name is Jill.

JACK: I'm Jack.

JACK AND JILL: How do you do.

JACK: Come here often?

JILL: Not so much really.

JACK: Oh. So...

JILL: Well...

JACK: Great café! (*They freeze*)

WAITER: Excellent. But let's look at the underlying rhythm of this interchange.

JACK: Ba-bump.

JILL: Beep.

JACK: Buh-buh-beep?

JILL: Boop.

JACK: Bee da dee dadump bop.

JILL: Da da da Bop.

JACK: Bop Bop.

JILL: Ba dadoo wop.

JACK: Bee dada beep?

JILL: Bee dada beep-beep.

JACK: Oh. Baaa...

JILL: Booo...

JACK AND JILL: Da wop bop!

JILL: Hello hello hello, it's always hello.

JACK: You are the most wonderful woman at this café.

JILL: And then good-bye good-bye.

JACK: You have a light that surrounds you.

JILL: Every time I hear the word "hello" it's like a magic incantation. An open sesame.

JACK: Hello, I say to her.

JILL: Abracadabra.

JACK: My name is Jack.

JILL: And I expect a whole new universe to open up in front of me, full of joy.

JACK: Hello hello.

JILL: And then good-bye good-bye. (*They freeze*)

WAITER: Section Two. The structure of English Conversation.

JILL: Fred!

WAITER: First name.

JACK: Mary!

WAITER: First name.

JACK AND JILL: Hello!

WAITER: Salutation. (They kiss) Social display of affection, followed by-

JILL: I didn't know you were here.

WAITER: Friendly observation, answered by-

JACK: I'm here.

WAITER: Statement of the obvious.

JILL: How are you?

WAITER: Superficial question about health.

JACK: Good.

WAITER: Superficial answer. Occupational question.

JACK: How's the job?

WAITER: And-

JILL: Terrific.

WAITER: Acceptable falsehood.

JACK: So...

WAITER: Meaningless monosyllable while searching for topic.

JILL: Quite a smorgasbord.

WAITER: Attempt at new topic.

JACK: Mmmmmm.

WAITER: Noncommittal noise, to reject the topic. And-

JACK AND JILL: Well!

WAITER: Exclamation, to signal the approaching end of the interchange. Well done.

JACK: I was in love with you, once upon a time.

JILL: You asked me about my job, and I lied to you.

JACK: You who looked so self-possessed and mature.

JILL: I would have answered you honestly, once upon a time.

JACK: Once upon a time you cried on my shoulder like a little child.

JILL: We would have talked like two people who love each other. Then we would have gone home and lain in bed.

JACK: We used to go to places like this all the time.

JILL: Together.

JACK: So happy...

JACK AND JILL: Well!

JILL: Nice seeing you, Fred. (*Kisses his cheek*)

WAITER: Expression of pleasure. First name.

JACK: Take care of yourself, Mary.

WAITER: Parting wish. First name.

JACK AND JILL: 'Bye!

WAITER: Valediction. (*They freeze*)

WAITER: Section Three. Simultaneous Translation, or: The secret meaning of common English words.

JILL: Well, well, well.

WAITER: In this context: "oh, shit."

JACK: I didn't know you were here.

WAITER: "What the fuck are you doing here?"

JILL: How are you, Hank?

WAITER: "Wasn't five years enough?"

JACK: I'm good.

WAITER: "Fuck you, Agnes."

JILL: Nice place.

WAITER: "Asshole."

JACK: Very nice.

WAITER: "Fuck you, Agnes."

JILL: So what are you doing with yourself?

WAITER: "Are you still sleeping with that slut from the community college?"

JACK: Same old thing.

WAITER: "It's none of your fucking business."

JILL: Have you tried the chicken?

WAITER: "Have some salmonella?"

JACK: I'm sticking with liquids.

WAITER: "I know you have problems with your mother, but you don't have to poison me."

JILL: See you, Hank.

WAITER: "Up yours."

JACK: Take care.

WAITER: "Fuck you, Agnes."

JACK AND JILL: 'Bye! (*They freeze*)

WAITER: Section Seven. Fill In The Blank, or: The arbitrariness of information.

JACK: Excuse me, but don't I know you? My name is Jack.

JILL: Hello.

JACK: My name is Bill.

JILL: How are you.

JACK: My name is Ted.

JILL: How do you do.

JACK: Melvin. And you are...?

JILL: Jill.

JACK: Hello, Jill.

JILL: Monica.

JACK: How are you, Monica.

JILL: Denise.

JACK: Could we have gone to college together?

JILL: I went to Stanford.

JACK: Ah.

JILL: Bennington.

JACK: Oh.

JILL: Chicago.

JACK: And-I'm sorry-your name is...?

JILL: Louise. And you are?

JACK: Barney.

JILL: Where did you grow up, Bob?

JACK: Well...

JILL: Jim?

JACK: Well...

JILL: Stanley?

JACK: Well I grew up in Washington.

JILL: Oh.

JACK: St. Louis.

JILL: Great place.

JACK: Santa Fe.

JILL: Nice.

JACK: What about you, Jane?

JILL: My name is Jill.

JACK: I'm sorry. Jill.

JILL: And yet really my name could be anything...

JACK: Anyway, I went to med school.

JILL: I wasn't born with a name.

JACK: Went to law school.

JILL: I was given a name.

JACK: Went to plumbing school.

JILL: My name could just as easily be Beth, or Phyllis, or Jane.

JACK: Quite a smorgasbord, isn't it?

JILL: Or Gertrude, or Natasha.

JACK: Do you know what the trouble with a smorgasbord is? There are just too many choices.

JILL: A hummingbird doesn't have a name.

JACK: Do I want the chicken, or the roast beef?

JILL: A fish doesn't have a name.

JACK: Pâté, or cheese?

JILL: A hedgehog doesn't have a name.

JACK: It's just like life that way.

JILL: It's just this nameless thing, a handful of skin and fur and a heart beating inside it.

JACK: Should I work, should I read, should I listen to music?

JILL: Completely anonymous.

JACK: Should I go to this café, or should I go to the movies?

JILL: A hedgehog doesn't even know it has a name.

JACK: Sometimes there are just so many choices, I don't do anything!

JILL: With a name you're just an example of something.

JACK: I thought to myself, this café could be a total waste.

JILL: But I'm not an example of something.

JACK: But I came to this café because I thought I might meet the love of my life.

JILL: I'm some body.

JACK: Do you think she's here?

JILL: I'm Jill.

JACK: I'm Jack.

JACK AND JILL: Hello. *(They freeze)*

WAITER: Section Twenty-six. The Conditional Tense, or: Should, Would, Could.

JACK: Okay, so we meet at this café.

JILL: And we like each other.

JACK: We like each other instantly. (*Extend hand*) I'm Zeno.

JILL: Miranda. (*They shake*) Did you know that the first three minutes of a conversation can determine your relationship to the other person for all eternity?

JACK: But we pass the three minute mark! We meet, and we mesh!

JILL: Oy, what a mesh.

JACK: And it all begins right here on this spot. In a single moment, all things seem possible.

JILL: All things are possible.

JACK: The infinite smorgasbord lies before us. But what do we do?

JILL: The café is closing.

JACK: The crowd is thinning.

JILL: But the question of the moment is...

JACK: Do I ask you out?

JILL: Do I ask *you* out?

JACK: And if you do-

JACK AND JILL: Should I accept?

JACK: This could be one of those glorious and intoxicating meetings best left to memory.

JILL: Or it might be the start of eternal love.

JACK: So I say: Would you like to get a cup of coffee sometime? And you say-

JILL: Sorry. But thanks anyway.

JACK AND JILL: 'Bye!

JACK: And that's the road of no-thank-you.

JILL: A dead end.

JACK: But possibly a happy dead end. While down this road here, is...

JILL: Would you like to get a cup of coffee sometime?

JACK: Sure!

JILL: So we go out for coffee.

JACK: And we have a horrible time.



JILL: Dead end.

JACK: Or a wonderful time. In which case-

JILL: We get a second cup.

JACK: And stop right there.

JILL: Dead end.

JACK: Or we go out for a third cup and a fourth cup and a fifth cup.

JILL: Would we have made love by now?

JACK: Maybe we would have.

JILL: I say we should have.

JACK: We certainly could have.

JILL: Let's say we did.

JACK: And it was horrible.

JACK AND JILL: Dead end.

JILL: Or it was wonderful. Which means-

JACK: More coffee. And-

JILL: We move in with each other.

JACK: Mistake.

JILL: Dead end.

JACK: Or it could be wonderful.

JILL: And so we get engaged!

JACK: Marriage.

JILL: Children.

JACK: Bliss! (*Both sigh slightly*)

JILL: And on to divorce.

JACK: Or-the other road-maybe we're down the road of no-thank-you we took years and years ago, and years and years pass.

JILL: And we meet each other at a café. And you say-

JACK: Hello, I'm Zeno.

JILL: Miranda.

JACK: Don't I know you from somewhere?

JILL: And a whole universe opens up in front of us-

JACK: Full of joy.

JILL: All things are possible.

JACK: And they start right on this spot.

JILL: Dead end.

JACK: Or bliss.

JILL: Should, would, could. *(Small pause)*

JACK: Well it was nice meeting you, Miranda.

JILL: Yes. Nice meeting you, Zeno.

WAITER: Section Seventy-eight. Saying Good-bye.

JACK: Listen, I only have a few minutes.

WAITER: Let's practice a typical interchange.

JACK: The café is closing and the crowd is thinning. Coats are disappearing from the rack...

WAITER: A typical interchange, please!

JACK: I just wanted to say, while I have this chance, that you are the most wonderful woman at this café.

WAITER: Typical, please!

JACK: On this street. In this city. In the country. On this planet.

JILL: You're the most wonderful man I've met in years.

JACK: You have a light that surrounds you.

JILL: You're intoxicating.

JACK: You're radiant. I came to this café one thing and I leave it transformed.

JILL: I came to this café to meet the love of my life.

JACK: And you're her.

WAITER: You are she.

JACK: You're *her!* You're the love of my life!

JILL: My name could be anything

JACK: But it's Jill.

JILL: I could have gone anywhere tonight.

JACK: But you came to this café.

JILL: Hello, hello.

JACK: Abracadabra. My name is Jack.

JILL: Would you like to get a cup of coffee sometime, Jack?

JACK: Yes, Jill, I would like that very much.

JILL: And it all happens right here. *(They exit arm-in-arm)*

WAITER: A-plus.