

# ACT THE FOURTH.

Act IV of "She Stoops to Conquer" escalates the confusion and chaos that have underpinned the play's humor and social commentary. Hastings, aware that Sir Charles Marlow is expected soon, plans an elopement with Miss Neville, fearing that his presence and intentions will be discovered. Meanwhile, Marlow, befuddled by the mistaken identity of the Hardcastle's house as an inn, entrusts a casket of jewels meant for Miss Neville to the landlady for safekeeping, a decision that both he and Hastings believe prudent, despite the actual risk it presents to their plan.

Conflict arises as Marlow revels in what he perceives as his successful courtship of the bar-maid, who is in reality Miss Hardcastle. The conversation between Marlow and Hastings highlights Marlow's arrogance and misogyny, which is meant for humor but also critiques the social norms regarding class and gender. The impending arrival of Sir Charles adds urgency to the various schemes and misunderstandings.

As Hardcastle confronts Marlow about the behavior of his servants, Marlow's entitlement and disrespect toward Hardcastle are made plain, leading to a heated argument that culminates in Hardcastle demanding Marlow and his party leave his house. This confrontation is interrupted by the realization of Marlow and Miss Hardcastle regarding the true nature of the house and its occupants, prompting Marlow to reconsider his actions and express a rare moment of humility and tenderness towards Miss Hardcastle.

The subplot involving Tony, Miss Neville, and Mrs. Hardcastle provides comic relief while also moving the story towards its climax. Tony's manipulation and the mistaken letter from Hastings to Tony intended for Miss Neville create a farcical scenario where each character's folly and scheme seem to thwart their desires. Mrs. Hardcastle's intervention prevents the elopement, directing the story towards a resolution that

remains uncertain.

Throughout, Goldsmith plays with themes of deception, social class, and the pursuit of love, using mistaken identities and misunderstandings to critique and satirize the manners and mores of 18th-century British society. The act ends with relationships tangled, plans in jeopardy, and the characters' respective futures uncertain, setting the stage for a climactic resolution in the concluding act.

