

OLD FRIENDS

J. M. Barrie

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CHARACTERS

Stephen Brand
Mrs. Agnes Brand
Carry
Mr. Carroll



OLD FRIENDS

It is a winter evening, and Mr. and Mrs. Brand and their daughter with one guest are sitting round the fire in their small country house near London. He is a prosperous man of about sixty who goes by car to his work in the city daily, and is generally liked. Mrs. Brand, somewhat younger, is knitting and

is as quiet as her husband is cheery; she has perhaps used up her emotions long ago. They are both devoted to their daughter, Carry, an engaging girl of twenty, who is very animated at present; she has only been "engaged" since five o'clock. The visitor is a gentle, elderly clergyman, Mr. Carroll, much loved by his parishioners because he never looks trouble in the face. They have been dining together in honour of the engagement, and Mr. Carroll is sipping a mild glass of whisky and water.

STEPHEN (*in his best jocular manner*). Well, well, all I can say, Carroll, is, Be thankful that you never had a daughter. Just when one is getting used to them, they give notice.

CARROLL (*in the same spirit*). Ah me!

CARRY (*all impetuosity*). Mother, they are laughing at me.

MRS. BRAND (*all placidity*). I wouldn't torment her, Stephen. An engagement ring is quite enough excitement for one evening; and she isn't strong.

STEPHEN (*immediately solicitous*). There, there, Carry; but you are strong now, aren't you?

CARRY (*displaying her muscles, or the want of them*). I am frightfully strong now.

CARROLL. You haven't been bothered by those headaches lately, Carry?

CARRY. Not for ever so long.

STEPHEN. Ah, we mustn't boast. Less than a month ago, wasn't it, Agnes, that one kept her in bed all day?

MRS. BRAND. Yes, less than a month.

(CARRY puts her hand in her mother's, who presses it softly to her breast.)

CARRY *(cajoling)*. You are fond of Dick, aren't you, father?

STEPHEN. He is great. *(She fondles his face.)* Not that he is worthy of my Carry—no man could be quite that—eh, Agnes?

(MRS. BRAND does not answer.)

Agnes?

MRS. BRAND. No, of course we think that. *(She rises.)* It is past our bed-time, Carry.

CARROLL. And I must be stepping across to the rectory.

STEPHEN. Stay a bit, Carroll.

MRS. BRAND. Do, if you will excuse our leaving you. Stephen sits late, you know.

STEPHEN. I am a bad sleeper, and I use this room now *(indicating a door on the right)*, so as not to disturb the house. I'll be glad of your company, Carroll. It's a gloomy house when one is alone.

CARRY. It is the darlinest house.

STEPHEN. But it is gloomy. It isn't well lit.

CARRY (*mischievously*). Just think, Mr. Carroll, father is afraid of the dark.

CARROLL. Eh, what?

STEPHEN. That is her fun.

MRS. BRAND (*not liking the subject*). Come, Carry, say good night.

CARRY (*to CARROLL*). But he is! He sleeps with the lamp burning.

STEPHEN. How do you know that?

CARRY. I have seen it.

STEPHEN. You have been downstairs in the night-time?

(*CARRY looks at her mother.*)

MRS. BRAND (*as quietly as ever*). Yes, it was once I couldn't sleep, and I sent her down for a book. (*To CARROLL*) Carry sleeps in my room.

STEPHEN (*hardly aware yet that she is grown up*). It gives me the creeps to think of Carry wandering about the house in the night.

MRS. BRAND. It was only the once.

STEPHEN. I should think so.

CARRY (*to CARROLL*). Good night, my dears.

(She has a loving moment with her father, kissing him impulsively on different parts of his head, which she carefully selects.)

STEPHEN. Excuse me, Carroll; she is my only child. (*Affectionately to his wife*) Good night, Agnes. (*He kisses her, but she does not respond.*) We shall still have each other, Agnes.

MRS. BRAND. Yes.

(She and CARRY go out by the door at the back, CARRY flitting like a butterfly.)

CARROLL (*looking after them*). A very happy picture—very—very. By the way, what did Carry mean by saying you were afraid of the dark?

STEPHEN (*looking at him as if about to answer, then turning away from the subject*). Make yourself comfortable, Carroll; fill up again.

CARROLL (*resuming his seat*). No, thank you—I've not finished yet, and besides I never exceed the one glass. (*Reminiscent*) Ah, Brand, do you remember when you came to live here how I wouldn't take even the one glass in this house?

STEPHEN (*genially*). You thought that in keeping it here for my friends I was doing an unwise thing; putting temptation in my own way.

CARROLL. I didn't know how strong you were.

STEPHEN (*thankfully*). I haven't touched it once in these three years, Carroll. I haven't the smallest desire to do so.

CARROLL (*sipping*). A splendid victory.

STEPHEN (*holding up the decanter*). Luddy me, to look at the thing, and think it had me for the best part of my life! Ugh! Well, if you're sure you won't have any more I'll lock it away. I always do that in case the servants—I wouldn't like to think I left it in their way.

CARROLL (*finishing his glass*). Quite right. I do the same thing myself.

(STEPHEN *locks up the decanter in a cupboard and returns the key to his pocket.*)

STEPHEN (*grimly*). I can remember a time when, wherever this key had been hidden, I would have found it!

CARROLL (*to avoid unpleasant subjects*). I wouldn't rake up the past, Brand; it's all dead and done with long ago.

STEPHEN (*also settling down by the fire*). Yes, yes. Dead and done with. It was a big thing I did, Carroll.

CARROLL. A great self-conquest.

STEPHEN. Not many men have done it.

CARROLL. Very few.

STEPHEN. Wonderful, isn't it, that the thing has left no mark on me?

CARROLL. Very wonderful.

STEPHEN. It hasn't, you know.

CARROLL. Not that I can see.

STEPHEN (*quite prepared to take offence if it is given*). I've got off almost too cheaply—eh?

CARROLL. True repentance——

STEPHEN. That's it. True repentance. (*Half triumphantly*) Very few of my friends ever knew what a slave I was to it. You see what my home life is. I haven't even suffered in business. Why, even when I was a clerk——

CARROLL. Was it going on even then? Of course I didn't know you at that time.

STEPHEN (*lowering his voice*). Carroll, it was then that it began. I had no predilection for it. No, none. I ordered my glass because the others did—a piece of swagger—but at first it was nauseous to me, and I remember wondering whether

they really liked it.

CARROLL. Evil companions.

STEPHEN. They weren't so bad, and they never exceeded as I did, but as it got grip of me I dropped them, I became secretive. I could keep from it almost easily for stretches of time, and then—then—it was as if something came over me that there was no resisting. That is the best description I can give of it—something came over me. Yet I was forging ahead at the office. It is a strange thing to say, but those bouts seemed to do me no harm—they were like a fillip to me.

CARROLL (*uncomfortable*). I don't like you to say that, Brand.

STEPHEN. I know it's not according to the preachers, but it is how I felt.

CARROLL (*sonorously*). Your conscience, 'the still small voice of conscience.'

STEPHEN (*somehow confidential to-night*). Do you know, I don't think conscience worried me as much as it disturbs people in the books. Not nearly so much as fear. I have held my breath at the narrowness of some of my escapes. But I got off so often that I grew to have a mighty faith in my luck. I backed it.

CARROLL. Not luck, no, no. (*Happily*) You were being reserved for a great end.

STEPHEN. I see that now. But at the time—— Then when I was in the thirties—I met Agnes.

CARROLL (*beaming*). Ah, that is what I want to hear of, and how your love for her made you a new man.

STEPHEN (*emphatic*). My love was there all right, but, Carroll, I was still the same man.

CARROLL. Not you, Brand. No, no! And if ever afterwards you yielded—at least you told her?

STEPHEN. By no means. I gave it up for a time—I tried. But we hadn't been long married before I was as bad as ever. For two years or more I contrived to keep it from her. The cunning of me! My real reason for taking a house in the country was that I could stay a night in town now and again—a night with *it*, Carroll.

CARROLL. Please, please!

STEPHEN (*considering*). Yet in all other matters I was a truthful man, scrupulously honest in business, and there was a high moral tone about me. That seems strange, but it's true.

CARROLL (*fidgeting*). Don't dwell on that. Tell me of the awakening.

STEPHEN. At last she found out. It was one night—— (*He shudders.*) We won't go into that.

CARROLL (*hastily*). Much better not.

STEPHEN. I told her everything then. And I said I couldn't alter myself.

CARROLL. Come, come! But she——?

STEPHEN. She was fine. She insisted that we should fight it together.

CARROLL (*relieved*). And so it was love that did it after all!

STEPHEN (*rather puzzled*). No. Carroll, it wasn't. I made big efforts, but they failed. It's odd to think that I succeeded long after she had abandoned all attempts to help me. For in the end I did it alone.

CARROLL. Masterful! What was it that gave you strength? Ah, I know.

STEPHEN. No, you don't. What I feel is that I must just have tried harder than before, and finding myself winning I got fresh courage.

CARROLL. I like to hear that.

STEPHEN. At first I didn't dare to tell Agnes. I couldn't be sure of myself. And when at last I did tell her she doubted me. But time convinced her. I haven't touched it these three years. I haven't wanted to.

CARROLL. She must be proud of you, Brand, as I am.

STEPHEN. Yes, she is.

CARROLL. As you must be of yourself.

STEPHEN. I don't pretend not to know that I have done a big thing. (*Mystified nevertheless*) Yet, you know, it wasn't so difficult as you might think. In the end it was almost easy.

CARROLL. What an encouragement to others!

STEPHEN. Yes, that's so.

CARROLL. Of course Carry knows nothing about this?

STEPHEN. Not a breath.

CARROLL. Tell me now, what did she mean by saying you were afraid of the dark?

STEPHEN. Oh, that! It was only her fun.

CARROLL. Of course, of course.

(*But there is something on BRAND'S mind.*)

STEPHEN. Carroll, do you ever sit up late at the rectory alone?

CARROLL. Often.

STEPHEN (*not so casual as he affects to be*). Odd the way the shadows go creeping about the walls and floors of old houses, isn't it?

CARROLL. You mean shadows from the fire?

STEPHEN. Of course. (*Sharply*) What else could I mean? (*Losing hold of himself*) There is something devilish about them, Carroll!

CARROLL. In what way?

STEPHEN. They know me. They have some connection with me. I don't know what it is.

CARROLL (*soothingly*). You have been working too hard. What connection could they have with you?

STEPHEN. I don't know—(*huskily*) I don't want to know. But they know. Perhaps I'll know some night, Carroll!

CARROLL. What do you mean by that? What is the matter with you, Brand? (*He wishes he had gone home.*) Have you spoken of this to anyone?

STEPHEN. Only to Agnes.

CARROLL. I mean, to a doctor.

STEPHEN (*irritably*). No, I'm quite well.

CARROLL. You are not. A long holiday——

STEPHEN. All baby talk. I'm past that now. In the daytime it doesn't worry me at all. I'm doing my work as well as ever.

CARROLL. That is good, very good. You'll soon be all right. Turn your back on the thing, Brand, and it will cease to exist.

STEPHEN (*turning his back on CARROLL*). You are no help to me, my friend.

CARROLL (*weakly*). What do you want me to say?

STEPHEN. It is no use your saying only what I want you to say; it has gone beyond that. That is why you are no help to me.

CARROLL. Brand, I—— (*He finds no inspiration.*)

STEPHEN (*roughly*). See here, man, can it have anything to do—with the past? (*Scared*) They are so familiar with me—as if they were old friends come back.

CARROLL (*clinging to this*). Nerves, merely nerves.

STEPHEN (*eager*). Yes, yes—that is what I wanted you to say, that is just—— Ah, Carroll, you merely say it because it is what I wanted you to say.

CARROLL. Not at all, I—I—— (*He stretches out a weak kindly hand.*)

STEPHEN. I won't keep you any longer. I'll come with you and lock up.

CARROLL (*at the door, anxious to get into the more salubrious night*). Of course if I could—but it is getting late; I'll see you to-morrow. It's nothing, I assure you; it will pass away, pass away. You look tired and dead sleepy, Brand.

STEPHEN. Yes, I am.

CARROLL. A good night's rest is my prescription. You will laugh at this in the morning, laugh at it.

STEPHEN. Morning is all right.

CARROLL (*cheerily*). The man who won that great fight isn't going to be worried by shadows!

STEPHEN (*eager*). After what I have done, it wouldn't be fair on me, would it?

CARROLL. Ignore them. Let the dead bury their dead.

STEPHEN. Yes—but do they? Carroll, in those old days when I so often escaped the consequences, I had sometimes a dread that I was only being saved for some worse punishment: I have never paid, you know; don't you preach that everything has to be paid for?

CARROLL (*clutching his hat*). Take the word of a clergyman that you have nothing to fear.

STEPHEN (*less perturbed*). Thank you, Carroll. I think I feel a bit better.

CARROLL. How balmy is the night! A good omen.

(After seeing him out BRAND returns and stands staring at the fire. He opens a book, and puts it away. He lights a lamp and carries it into the bedroom,

shutting the door. The room is now only dimly lit by the fire. He reappears without the lamp, looking like one who had just been beginning to undress and has changed his mind. He leaves the door ajar, and we see a little light coming from the bedroom, which shows that he has left the lamp burning there. He hesitates, then sits in his chair by the fire. He is tired out. Soon he is asleep. A coal in the fire falls, and a flame shoots up. Moving shadows are cast against the walls. They flicker and fall. The door at the back opens covertly, and CARRY is seen in her night-gown, carrying a lighted taper. The back of the chair would prevent her seeing STEPHEN, but it never strikes her to look for him there. She makes sure that she is not being followed, otherwise her attention is fixed on the bedroom door. She lingers at this door. Then she pushes it open inch by inch and enters noiselessly. In a second she is out again, startled, bewildered, sees STEPHEN asleep in the chair and blows out the taper, intent on stealing away. In her hurry she has left the bedroom door half open, and this lights the sitting-room to an extent. She hesitates, and beats her hands together, then, like one who must go on with what she has to do, she comes softly to STEPHEN, cautiously takes his keys from his pocket—she knows which pocket to find them in—then steals hurriedly to the cupboard in which he had locked the decanter, and she is on her knees opening the door when STEPHEN wakes up. He sits staring at her, and as it comes to him what the situation means he rises and cries out. CARRY starts

to her feet, frightened, and then is immediately cunning in self-defence.)

CARRY (*brightly*). Oh, father, how you startled me. I thought you were in bed.

STEPHEN. What are you doing, Carry?

CARRY. Mother couldn't sleep. I came down to look for the smelling-salts for her. She left them on the table.

STEPHEN. I'll take them to her.

CARRY (*afraid*). No. (*Cunning again*) I promised not to disturb you.

STEPHEN. Carry!

CARRY (*terrified lest any noise brings down her mother*). Don't! You'll wake her. (*She has exposed herself.*)

STEPHEN. My child!

CARRY (*beating her hands*). Oh!

STEPHEN. What were you doing there?

CARRY (*shrinking*). Father, don't look at me so.

STEPHEN. What did you come down for?

CARRY. I don't know; I couldn't help it.

STEPHEN. What is that in your hand?

CARRY. In my hand? Nothing.

STEPHEN. What is it, Carry?

(She has to show the keys; he takes them.)

CARRY. Father!

STEPHEN. I see!

CARRY. I couldn't help it. What are you to do to me?

(He takes her in his arms.)

STEPHEN. Carry, you'll tell me the truth, won't you?

CARRY *(a child again)*. Yes.

STEPHEN. Has this ever happened before?

CARRY. No.

STEPHEN. That night you—said you came down for a book for your mother?

CARRY. That once—only that once.

STEPHEN. Your headaches—was that what they meant?

CARRY. No.

STEPHEN (*stroking her hair*). My little Carry, you used to come into my room, didn't you—while I was asleep—and get that key?

CARRY. Don't—don't!

STEPHEN. No, dear, I won't. Your mother—if she were to know!

CARRY (*simply*). Mother knows.

STEPHEN. What?

CARRY. That is why I sleep in her room. Father, I didn't mean to come to-night. But all at once—it—it came over me.

STEPHEN (*listening to his own phrases*). Came over you!

CARRY. I held my breath till she was asleep, and then—then—I don't know how I can be your daughter.

(*He shudders.*)

Here is mother.

(*MRS. BRAND in a wrapper appears with a candle, which lights the room a little more.*)

STEPHEN. Agnes, Agnes!

MRS. BRAND (*quietly*). So you know now, Stephen.

STEPHEN. I know now.

(*She puts down the candle.*)

Why did you keep it from me?

CARRY. Mother said it would be so awful to you to know.

STEPHEN. Not more awful than to you, Agnes.

CARRY. She said you have always been so good all your life.

STEPHEN. You said that, Agnes?

MRS. BRAND. Yes.

STEPHEN (*overcome*). To have kept it from me—and to have given her such a reason—the love of woman!

MRS. BRAND (*still quietly*). 'The love of woman!' You think it was my love for you that made me spare you?

STEPHEN. What else?

MRS. BRAND. When after I married you I found out what you were, I—yes, the love of woman still made me forgive you, pity you, try to help you. But from the day when I discovered what legacy you had given my child—the love of woman changed into something harsher.

CARRY (*bewildered*). Legacy?

MRS. BRAND. She doesn't know what I mean. The only

reason I haven't told her is that I believed she might be able to fight it better if she thought the blame was hers.

STEPHEN. She must know now. Carry, what your mother means—and it is all true—is that for many years I was as you are, but a hundred times worse.

CARRY (*unable to grasp it*). You, father—not you—oh, no.

STEPHEN. Yes. And what your mother means is that you get it from me; can that be possible!

MRS. BRAND. That is the only way I can reason it out.

CARRY (*clinging to MRS. BRAND*). Mother!

MRS. BRAND. You are not to blame, my own; he never gave you a chance. I have no pity left for you, Stephen; it has all gone to her.

STEPHEN. Let her have every drop of it.

CARRY. Father, do you think there is any hope?

STEPHEN (*cheered*). Hope? Of course there is. Carry, *I* fought it long ago, and beat it.

CARRY (*wondering*). Are you sure?

STEPHEN. Your mother knows. Many times I failed, but at last I won. And listen to this, in the end I found it almost easy.

CARRY (*wondering still more*). Easy?

MRS. BRAND. So easy that you were sometimes puzzled, Stephen, just as you see it puzzles Carry now.

STEPHEN. Yes; I suppose it was my doggedness.

MRS. BRAND. Oh, Stephen!

CARRY. I don't see how it can have been easy.

MRS. BRAND. It was easy, Carry, because he didn't do it.

STEPHEN. Agnes!

MRS. BRAND. He thinks he did.

STEPHEN. Haven't I given it up?

MRS. BRAND. Not as I have thought the thing out, Stephen. I don't think you gave it up—I think it gave you up. I was looking on; I saw. It wearied of you, and left you. But it has come back now—for her. Easy enough to find a way back to the house—for such an old friend of yours. I may be wrong, but that is what I make of it.

CARRY. There is Dick—there is Dick.

STEPHEN. Dick, yes. Isn't it a shame, Agnes, to keep this from him?

MRS. BRAND. A shame? Of course it is a shame. But it is

her best chance, and I won't let it go.

CARRY. Mother, I want Dick to know.

MRS. BRAND. If all isn't well, dear, in a year's time he shall be told. That is why I said that the engagement must last a year. As for hope, my own, of course there is hope. It is just an ailment you have caught.

CARRY. Please always watch me. But do you think it will be any use? I feel I shall be watching you, and sometimes you will tire, but will I ever tire?

MRS. BRAND. You will tire before I do. Stephen, you will help us, won't you?

STEPHEN. I'll try.

CARRY (*stroking his arm*). Poor Carry, but poor father too.



Source:

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