



How Shall I Know You?: A Short Story

Hilary Mantel

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"She looked up and smiled. She had a face of feral sweetness, its color yellow; her eyes were long and dark, her mouth a taut bow, her nostrils upturned as if she were scenting the wind."

In "How Shall I Know You?," a melancholic and ailing writer reluctantly travels east of London to give a lecture before a literary society. Mr. Simister, the organization's secretary, lures the world-weary novelist turned biographer with promises of a modest stipend and lodging at a charming bed-and-breakfast for her trouble. Nevertheless, on that rainy day she meets Mr. Simister at the train station, she wonders why she ever agreed to come in the first place. Driving past steel-shuttered windows and Day-Glo banners, Mr. Simister takes the writer to her hotel for the evening, which turns out to be crumbling and isolated rather than picturesque. As she crosses the threshold into the dank stench of Eccles House she is faced with the feral porter, Louise, and suffers through an evening that may be more than she bargained for.

From Hilary Mantel's brilliant and darkly comic collection of contemporary stories, *The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher*, comes a tale told with her distinctive blend of subversive wit and gimlet-eyed characterization. "How Shall I Know You?" showcases the extraordinary genius of Hilary Mantel, called one of our "greatest living novelists" (NPR).

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