

Henry James, "A Day of Days" (1866)

Mr Herbert Moore, a gentleman of the highest note in the scientific world, and a childless widower, finding himself at last unable to reconcile his sedentary habits with the management of a household, had invited his only sister to come and superintend his domestic affairs. Miss Adela Moore had assented the more willingly to his proposal as by her mother's death she had recently been left without a formal protector. She was twenty-five years of age, and was a very active member of what she and her friends called society. She was almost equally at home in the best company of three great cities, and she had encountered most of the adventures which await a young girl on the threshold of life. She had become rather hastily and imprudently engaged, but she had eventually succeeded in disengaging herself. She had spent a summer or two in Europe, and she had made a voyage to Cuba with a dear friend in the last stage of consumption, who had died at the hotel in Havana. Although by no means perfectly beautiful in person she was yet thoroughly pleasing, rejoicing in what young ladies are fond of calling an air; that is, she was tall and slender, with a long neck, a low forehead, and a handsome nose. Even after six years of the best company, too, she still had excellent manners. She was, moreover, mistress of a very pretty little fortune, and was accounted

clever without detriment to her amiability and amiable without detriment to her wit. These facts, as the reader will allow, might have ensured her the very best prospects; but he has seen that she had found herself willing to forfeit her prospects and bury herself in the country. It seemed to her that she had seen enough of the world and of human nature, and that a period of seclusion might yield a fine refreshment. She had begun to suspect that for a girl of her age she was unduly old and wise – and, what is more, to suspect that others suspected as much. A great observer of life and manners, so far as her opportunities went, she conceived that it behoved her to organise the results of her observation into principles of conduct and belief. She was becoming – so she argued – too impersonal, too critical, too intelligent, too contemplative, too just. A woman had no business to be so just. The society of nature, of the great expansive skies and the primeval woods, would check the morbid development of her brain-power. She would spend her time in the fields and merely vegetate; walk and ride, and read the old-fashioned books in Herbert's library.

She found her brother established in a very pretty house, at about a mile's distance from the nearest town, and at about six miles' distance from another town, the seat of a small but ancient college, before which he delivered a weekly lecture. She had seen so little of him of late years that his acquaintance was almost to make; but there

were no barriers to break down. Herbert Moore was one of the simplest and least aggressive of men, and one of the most patient and conscientious of students. He had had a vague notion that Adela was a young woman of extravagant pleasures, and that, somehow, on her arrival, his house would be overrun with the train of her attendant revellers. It was not until after they had been six months together that he became aware that his sister had led almost an ascetic life. By the time six months more had passed Adela had recovered a delightful sense of youth and naïveté. She learned, under her brother's tuition, to walk – nay, to climb, for there were great hills in the neighbourhood – to ride and to botanise. At the end of a year, in the month of August, she received a visit from an old friend, a girl of her own age, who had been spending July at a watering-place, and who was now about to be married. Adela had begun to fear that she had declined into an almost irreclaimable rusticity and had rubbed off the social facility, the 'knowledge of the world' for which she was formerly distinguished; but a week spent in intimate conversation with her friend convinced her not only that she had not forgotten much that she had feared, but had also not forgotten much that she had hoped. For this, and other reasons, her friend's departure left her slightly depressed. She felt lonely and even a little elderly – she had lost another illusion. Laura Benton, for whom a year ago she had entertained a serious regard, now impressed her as a very

flimsy little person, who talked about her lover with almost indecent flippancy.

Meanwhile, September was slowly running its course. One morning Mr Moore took a hasty breakfast and started to catch the train for Slowfield, whither a scientific conference called him, which might, he said, release him that afternoon in time for dinner at home, or might, on the other hand, detain him until the night. It was almost the first time during the term of Adela's rustication that she had been left alone for several hours. Her brother's quiet presence was inappreciable enough; yet now that he was at a distance she felt a singular sense of freedom: a return of that condition of early childhood when, through some domestic catastrophe, she had for an infinite morning been left to her own devices. What should she do? she asked herself, with the smile that she reserved for her maidenly monologues. It was a good day for work, but it was a still better one for play. Should she drive into town and call on a lot of tiresome local people? Should she go into the kitchen and try her hand at a pudding for dinner? She felt a delectable longing to do something illicit, to play with fire, to discover some Bluebeard's closet. But poor Herbert was no Bluebeard; if she were to burn down his house he would exact no amends. Adela went out to the verandah, and, sitting down on the steps, gazed across the country. It was apparently the last day of summer. The sky was faintly blue; the woody hills were putting on the morbid colours of autumn; the great pine-grove

behind the house seemed to have caught and imprisoned the protesting breezes. Looking down the road toward the village, it occurred to Adela that she might have a visit, and so human was her mood that if any of the local people were to come to her she felt it was in her to humour them. As the sun rose higher she went in and established herself with a piece of embroidery in a deep bow-window, in the second storey, which, betwixt its muslin curtains and its external frame-work of high-creeping plants, commanded most insidiously the principal approach to the house. While she drew her threads she surveyed the road with a deepening conviction that she was destined to have a caller. The air was warm, yet not hot; the dust had been laid during the night by a gentle rain. It had been from the first a source of complaint among Adela's new friends that she was equally gracious to all men, and, what was more remarkable, to all women. Not only had she dedicated herself to no friendships, but she had committed herself to no preferences. Nevertheless, it was with an imagination by no means severely impartial that she sat communing with her open casement. She had very soon made up her mind that, to answer the requirements of the hour, her visitor must be of a sex as different as possible from her own; and as, thanks to the few differences in favour of any individual she had been able to discover among the young males of the country-side, her roll-call in this her hour of need was limited to a single name, so her thoughts were now

centred upon the bearer of that name, Mr Weatherby Pynsent, the Unitarian minister.

If instead of being Miss Moore's story this were Mr Pynsent's, it might easily be condensed into the simple statement that he was very far gone indeed. Although affiliated to a richer ceremonial than his own she had been so well pleased with one of his sermons, to which she had allowed herself to lend a tolerant ear, that, meeting him some time afterward, she had received him with what she considered a rather knotty doctrinal question; whereupon, gracefully waiving the question, he had asked permission to call upon her and talk over her 'difficulties'. This short interview had enshrined her in the young minister's heart; and the half a dozen occasions on which he had subsequently contrived to see her had each contributed another candle to her altar.

It is but fair to add, however, that, although a captive, Mr Pynsent was as yet no captor. He was simply an honourable young parson, who happened at this moment to be the most sympathetic companion within reach. Adela, at twenty-five years of age, had both a past and a future. Mr Pynsent reminded her of the one and gave her a foretaste of the other.

So, at last, when, as the morning waned toward noon, Adela descried in the distance a man's figure treading the grassy margin of the road, and swinging his stick as he came, she smiled to herself with some complacency. But even while she smiled she

became conscious that her heart was beating quite idiotically. She rose, and, resenting her gratuitous emotion, stood for a moment half resolved to see no one at all. As she did so she glanced along the road again. Her friend had drawn nearer, and as the distance lessened she began to perceive that he was not her friend. Before many moments her doubts were removed; the gentleman was a stranger. In front of the house three roads went their different ways, and a spreading elm, tall and slim, like the feathery sheaf of a gleaner, with an ancient bench beneath it, made an informal rond-point. The stranger came along the opposite side of the highway, and when he reached the elm stopped and looked about him, as if to verify some direction that had been given him. Then he deliberately crossed over. Adela had time to see, unseen, that he was a robust young man, with a bearded chin and a soft white hat. After the due interval Becky the maid came up with a card somewhat rudely superscribed in pencil:

THOMAS LUDLOW,

New York.

Turning it over in her fingers, Adela saw the gentleman had made use of the reverse of a pasteboard abstracted from the basket on her own drawing-room table. The printed name on the other side was dashed out; it ran: Mr Weatherby Pynsent.

“He asked me to give you this, ma’am,” said Becky. “He helped himself to it out of

the tray.”

“Did he ask for me by name?”

“No, ma’am; he asked for Mr Moore. When I told him Mr Moore was away, he asked for some of the family. I told him you was all the family, ma’am.”

“Very well,” said Adela, “I will go down.” But, begging her pardon, we will precede her by a few steps.

Tom Ludlow, as his friends called him, was a young man of twenty-eight, concerning whom you might have heard the most various opinions; for, as far as he was known (which, indeed, was not very far), he was at once one of the best liked and one of the best hated of men. Born in one of the lower walks of New York life, he still seemed always to move in his native element. A certain crudity of manner and aspect proved him to belong to the great vulgar, muscular, popular majority. On this basis, however, he was a sufficiently good-looking fellow: a middle-sized, agile figure, a head so well shaped as to be handsome, a pair of inquisitive, responsive eyes, and a large, manly mouth, constituting the most expressive part of his equipment. Turned upon the world at an early age, he had, in the pursuit of a subsistence, tried his head at everything in succession, and had generally found it to be quite as hard as the opposing substance; and his person may have been thought to reflect this experience in an air of taking



success too much for granted. He was a man of strong faculties and a strong will, but it is doubtful whether his feelings were stronger than he. People liked him for his directness, his good-humour, his general soundness and serviceableness, and disliked him for the same qualities under different names; that is, for his impudence, his offensive optimism, his inhuman avidity for facts. When his friends insisted upon his noble disinterestedness, his enemies were wont to reply it was all very well to ignore, to suppress, one's own sensibilities in the pursuit of knowledge, but to trample the rest of mankind at the same time betrayed an excess of zeal. Fortunately for Ludlow, on the whole, he was no great listener, and even if he had been, a certain plebeian thick-skinnedness would always have saved his tenderer parts; although it must be added that, if, like a genuine democrat, he was very insensitive, like a genuine democrat, too, he was unexpectedly proud. His tastes, which had always been for the natural sciences, had recently led him to the study of fossil remains, the branch cultivated by Herbert Moore; and it was upon business connected with this pursuit that, after a short correspondence, he had now come to see him.

As Adela went to him he came out from the window, where he had been looking at the lawn. She acknowledged the friendly nod which he apparently intended for a greeting.

“Miss Moore, I believe,” said Ludlow.

“Miss Moore,” said Adela.

“I beg your pardon for this intrusion, but as I have come from a distance to see Mr Moore, on business, I thought I might venture either to ask at headquarters how he may most easily be reached, or even to give you a message for him.” These words were accompanied with a smile under the influence of which it had been written on the scroll of Adela’s fate that she was to descend from her pedestal.

“Pray make no apologies,” she said. “We hardly recognise such a thing as intrusion in this simple little place. Won’t you sit down? My brother went away only this morning, and I expect him back this afternoon.”

“This afternoon? indeed. In that case I believe I’ll wait. It was very stupid of me not to have dropped a word beforehand. But I have been in the city all summer long, and I shall not be sorry to squeeze a little vacation out of this business. I’m tremendously fond of the country, and I have been working for many months in a musty museum.”

“It’s possible that my brother may not come home until the evening,” Adela said.

“He was uncertain. You might go to him at Slowfield.”

Ludlow reflected a moment, with his eyes on his hostess. “If he does return in the afternoon, at what hour will he arrive?”

“Well, about three.”

“And my own train leaves at four. Allow him a quarter of an hour to come from town and myself a quarter of an hour to get there (if he would give me his vehicle back). In that case I should have about half an hour to see him. We couldn’t do much talk, but I could ask him the essential questions. I wish chiefly to ask him for some letters – letters of recommendation to some foreign scientists. He is the only man in this country who knows how much I know. It seems a pity to take two superfluous – that is, possibly superfluous – railway-journeys, of an hour apiece; for I should probably come back with him. Don’t you think so?” he asked, very frankly.

“You know best,” said Adela. “I am not particularly fond of the journey to Slowfield, even when it’s absolutely necessary.”

“Yes; and then this is such a lovely day for a good long ramble in the fields. That’s a thing I haven’t had since I don’t know when. I guess I’ll remain.” And he placed his hat on the floor beside him.

“I am afraid, now that I think of it,” said Adela, “that there is no train until so late an hour that you would have very little time left on your arrival to talk with my brother, before the hour at which he himself might have determined to start for home. It’s true that you might induce him to stop over till the evening.”

“Dear me! I shouldn’t want to do that. It might be very inconvenient for Mr Moore, don’t you see? Besides, I shouldn’t have time. And then I always like to see a man in his home – or at some place of my own; a man, that is, whom I have any regard for – and I have a very great regard for your brother, Miss Moore. When men meet at a half-way house neither feels at his ease. And then this is such an attractive country residence of yours,” pursued Ludlow, looking about him.

“Yes, it’s a very pretty place,” said Adela.

Ludlow got up and walked to the window. “I want to look at your view,” he remarked. “A lovely little spot. You are a happy woman, Miss Moore, to have the beauties of nature always before your eyes.”

“Yes, if pretty scenery can make one happy, I ought to be happy.” And Adela was glad to regain her feet and stand on the other side of the table, before the window.

“Don’t you think it can?” asked Ludlow, turning around. “I don’t know, though; perhaps it can’t. Ugly sights can’t make you unhappy, necessarily. I have been working for a year in one of the narrowest, darkest, dirtiest, busiest streets in New York, with rusty bricks and muddy gutters for scenery. But I think I can hardly set up to be miserable. I wish I could! It might be a claim on your benevolence.” As he said these words he stood leaning against the window-shutter, outside the curtain, with folded

arms. The morning light covered his face, and, mingled with that of his radiant laugh, showed Adela that his was a nature very much alive.

‘Whatever else he may be,’ she said to herself, as she stood within the shade of the other curtain, playing with the paper-knife, which she had plucked from the table, ‘I think he is honest. I am afraid he isn’t a gentleman – but he isn’t a bore.’ She met his eye, freely, for a moment. “What do you want of my benevolence?” she asked, with an abruptness of which she was perfectly conscious. ‘Does he wish to make friends,’ she pursued, tacitly, ‘or does he merely wish to pay me a vulgar compliment? There is bad taste, perhaps, in either case, but especially in the latter.’ Meanwhile her visitor had already answered her.

“What do I want of your benevolence? Why, what does one want of any pleasant thing in life?”

“Dear me, if you never have anything pleasanter than that!” our heroine exclaimed.

“It will do very well for the present occasion,” said the young man, blushing, in a large masculine way, at his own quickness of repartee.

Adela glanced toward the clock on the chimney-piece. She was curious to measure the duration of her acquaintance with this breezy invader of her privacy, with whom she

so suddenly found herself bandying jokes so personal. She had known him some eight minutes.

Ludlow observed her movement. "I am interrupting you and detaining you from your own affairs," he said; and he moved toward his hat. "I suppose I must bid you good-morning." And he picked it up.

Adela stood at the table and watched him cross the room. To express a very delicate feeling in terms comparatively crude, she was loth to see him depart. She divined, too, that he was very sorry to go. The knowledge of this feeling on his side, however, affected her composure but slightly. The truth is – we say it with all respect – Adela was an old hand. She was modest, honest and wise; but, as we have said, she had a past – a past of which importunate swains in the guise of morning-callers had been no inconsiderable part; and a great dexterity in what may be called outflanking these gentlemen was one of her registered accomplishments. Her liveliest emotion at present, therefore, was less one of annoyance at her companion than of surprise at her own mansuetude, which was yet undeniable. 'Am I dreaming?' she asked herself. She looked out of the window, and then back at Ludlow, who stood grasping his hat and stick, contemplating her face. Should she give him leave to remain? 'He is honest,' she repeated; 'why should not I be honest for once?' "I am sorry you are in a hurry," she said,

aloud.

“I am in no hurry,” he answered.

Adela turned her face to the window again, and toward the opposite hills. There was a moment's pause.

“I thought you were in a hurry,” said Ludlow.

Adela shifted her eyes back to where they could see him. “My brother would be very glad that you should stay as long as you like. He would expect me to offer you what little hospitality is in my power.”

“Pray, offer it then.”

“That is very easily done. This is the parlour, and there, beyond the hall, is my brother's study. Perhaps you would like to look at his books and his collections. I know nothing about them, and I should be a very poor guide. But you are welcome to go in and use your discretion in examining what may interest you.”

“This, I take it, would be but another way of separating from you.”

“For the present, yes.”

“But I hesitate to take such liberties with your brother's things as you recommend.”

“Recommend? I recommend nothing.”

“But if I decline to penetrate into Mr Moore’s sanctum, what alternative remains?”

“Really – you must make your own alternative.”

“I think you mentioned the parlour. Suppose I choose that.”

“Just as you please. Here are some books, and if you like I will bring you some periodicals. There are ever so many scientific papers. Can I serve you in any other way? Are you tired by your walk? Would you like a glass of wine?”

“Tired by my walk? – not exactly. You are very kind, but I feel no immediate desire for a glass of wine. I think you needn’t trouble yourself about the scientific periodicals either. I am not exactly in the mood to read.” And Ludlow pulled out his watch and compared it with the clock. “I am afraid your clock is fast.”

“Yes,” said Adela; “very likely.”

“Some ten minutes. Well, I suppose I had better be walking.” And, coming toward Adela, he extended his hand.

She gave him hers. “It is a day of days for a long, slow ramble,” she said.

Ludlow’s only rejoinder was his hand-shake. He moved slowly toward the door, half accompanied by Adela. ‘Poor fellow!’ she said to herself. There was a summer-door, composed of lattices painted green, like a shutter; it admitted into the hall a cool, dusky light, in which Adela looked pale. Ludlow pushed its wings apart with his stick, and



disclosed a landscape, long, deep, and bright, framed by the pillars of the porch. He stopped on the threshold, swinging his cane. "I hope I shall not lose my way," he said.

"I hope not. My brother will not forgive me if you do."

Ludlow's brows were slightly contracted by a frown, but he contrived to smile with his lips. "When shall I come back?" he asked, abruptly.

Adela found but a low tone – almost a whisper – at her command to answer – "Whenever you please."

The young man turned about, with his back to the bright doorway, and looked into Adela's face, which was now covered with light. "Miss Moore," said he, "it's very much against my will that I leave you at all!"

Adela stood debating within herself. After all, what if her companion should stay with her? It would, under the circumstances, be an adventure; but was an adventure necessarily a criminal thing? It lay wholly with herself to decide. She was her own mistress, and she had hitherto been a just mistress. Might she not for once be a generous one? The reader will observe in Adela's meditation the recurrence of this saving clause 'for once'. It was produced by the simple fact that she had begun the day in a romantic mood. She was prepared to be interested; and now that an interesting phenomenon had presented itself, that it stood before her in vivid human – nay, manly –

shape, instinct with reciprocity, was she to close her hand to the liberality of fate? To do so would be only to expose herself the more, for it would imply a gratuitous insult to human nature. Was not the man before her redolent of good intentions, and was that not enough? He was not what Adela had been used to call a gentleman; at this conviction she had arrived by a rapid diagonal, and now it served as a fresh starting-point. 'I have seen all the gentlemen can show me' (this was her syllogism): 'let us try something new!' "I see no reason why you should run away so fast, Mr Ludlow," she said, aloud.

"I think it would be the greatest piece of folly I ever committed!" cried the young man.

"I think it would be rather a pity," Adela remarked.

"And you invite me into your parlour again? I come as your visitor, you know. I was your brother's before. It's a simple enough matter. We are old friends. We have a solid common ground in your brother. Isn't that about it?"

"You may adopt whatever theory you please. To my mind it is indeed a very simple matter."

"Oh, but I wouldn't have it too simple," said Ludlow, with a genial smile.

"Have it as you please!"

Ludlow leaned back against the doorway. “Look here, Miss Moore; your kindness makes me as gentle as a little child. I am passive; I am in your hands; do with me what you please. I can’t help contrasting my fate with what it might have been but for you. A quarter of an hour ago I was ignorant of your existence; you were not in my programme. I had no idea your brother had a sister. When your servant spoke of ‘Miss Moore’, upon my word I expected something rather elderly – something venerable – some rigid old lady, who would say ‘exactly’ and ‘very well, sir’, and leave me to spend the rest of the morning tilting back in a chair on the piazza of the hotel. It shows what fools we are to attempt to forecast the future.”

“We must not let our imagination run away with us in any direction,” said Adela, sententiously.

“Imagination? I don’t believe I have any. No, madam,” – and Ludlow straightened himself up – “I live in the present. I write my programme from hour to hour – or, at any rate, I will in the future.”

“I think you are very wise,” said Adela. “Suppose you write a programme for the present hour. What shall we do? It seems to me a pity to spend so lovely a morning in-doors. There is something in the air – I can’t imagine what – which seems to say it is the last day of summer. We ought to commemorate it. How should you like to take a

walk?" Adela had decided that, to reconcile her aforesaid benevolence with the proper maintenance of her dignity, her only course was to be the perfect hostess. This decision made, very naturally and gracefully she played her part. It was the one possible part; and yet it did not preclude those delicate sensations with which so rare an episode seemed charged: it simply legitimated them. A romantic adventure on so conventional a basis would assuredly hurt no one.

"I should like a walk very much," said Ludlow; "a walk with a halt at the end of it."

"Well, if you will consent to a short halt at the beginning of it," Adela rejoined, "I will be with you in a very few minutes." When she returned, in her little hat and jacket, she found her friend seated on the steps of the verandah. He arose and gave her a card.

"I have been requested, in your absence, to hand you this."

Adela read with some compunction the name of Mr Weatherby Pynsent.

"Has he been here?" she asked. "Why didn't he come in?"

"I told him you were not at home. If it wasn't true then, it was going to be true so soon that the interval was hardly worth taking account of. He addressed himself to me, as I seemed from my position to be quite in possession; that is, I put myself in his way, as it were, so that he had to speak to me: but I confess he looked at me as if he doubted my word. He hesitated as to whether he should confide his name to me, or whether he

should ring for the servant. I think he wished to show me that he suspected my veracity, for he was making rather grimly for the door-bell when I, fearing that once inside the house he might encounter the living truth, informed him in the most good-humoured tone possible that I would take charge of his little tribute, if he would trust me with it.”

“It seems to me, Mr Ludlow, that you are a strangely unscrupulous man. How did you know that Mr Pynsent’s business was not urgent?”

“I didn’t know it! But I knew it could be no more urgent than mine. Depend upon it, Miss Moore, you have no case against me. I only pretend to be a man; to have admitted that sweet little cleric – isn’t he a cleric, eh? – would have been the act of an angel.”

Adela was familiar with a sequestered spot, in the very heart of the fields, as it seemed to her, to which she now proposed to conduct her friend. The point was to select a goal neither too distant nor too near, and to adopt a pace neither too rapid nor too slow. But, although Adela’s happy valley was at least two miles away, and they had dawdled immensely over the interval, yet their arrival at a certain little rustic gate, beyond which the country grew vague and gently wild, struck Adela as sudden. Once on the road she felt a precipitate conviction that there could be no evil in an excursion so purely pastoral and no guile in a spirit so deeply sensitive to the influences of nature, and to the melancholy aspect of incipient autumn, as that of her companion. A man with

an unaffected relish for small children is a man to inspire young women with a confidence; and so, in a less degree, a man with a genuine feeling for the unsophisticated beauties of a casual New England landscape may not unreasonably be regarded by the daughters of the scene as a person whose motives are pure. Adela was a great observer of the clouds, the trees and the streams, the sounds and colours, the transparent airs and blue horizons of her adopted home; and she was reassured by Ludlow's appreciation of these modest phenomena. His enjoyment of them, deep as it was, however, had to struggle against the sensuous depression natural to a man who has spent the summer looking over dry specimens in a laboratory, and against an impediment of a less material order – the feeling that Adela was a remarkably attractive woman. Still, naturally a great talker, he uttered his various satisfactions with abundant humour and point. Adela felt that he was decidedly a companion for the open air – he was a man to make use, even to abuse, of the wide horizon and the high ceiling of nature. The freedom of his gestures, the sonority of his voice, the keenness of his vision, the general vivacity of his manners, seemed to necessitate and to justify a universal absence of resisting surfaces. They passed through the little gate and wandered over empty pastures, until the ground began to rise, and stony surfaces to crop through the turf; when, after a short ascent, they reached a broad plateau, covered

with boulders and shrubs, which lost itself on one side in a short, steep cliff, whence fields and marshes stretched down to the opposite river, and on the other, in scattered clumps of cedar and maple, which gradually thickened and multiplied, until the horizon in that quarter was purple with mild masses of forest. Here was both sun and shade – the unobstructed sky, or the whispering dome of a circle of trees which had always reminded Adela of the stone-pines of the Villa Borghese. Adela led the way to a sunny seat among the rocks which commanded the course of the river, where the murmuring cedars would give them a kind of human company.

“It has always seemed to me that the wind in the trees is always the voice of coming changes,” Ludlow said.

“Perhaps it is,” Adela replied. “The trees are for ever talking in this melancholy way, and men are for ever changing.”

“Yes, but they can only be said to express the foreboding of coming events – that is what I mean – when there is some one there to hear them; and more especially some one in whose life a change is, to his knowledge, about to take place. Then they are quite prophetic. Don’t you know Longfellow says so?”

“Yes, I know Longfellow says so. But you seem to speak from your own inspiration.”

“Well, I rather think I do.”

“Is there some great change hanging over you?”

“Yes, rather an important one.”

“I believe that’s what men say when they are going to be married,” said Adela.

“I am going to be divorced, rather. I am going to Europe.”

“Indeed! soon?”

“To-morrow,” said Ludlow, after an instant’s pause.

“Oh!” exclaimed Adela. “How I envy you!”

Ludlow, who sat looking over the cliff and tossing stones down into the plain, observed a certain inequality in the tone of his companion’s two exclamations. The first was nature, the second art. He turned his eyes upon her, but she had directed hers away into the distance. Then, for a moment, he retreated within himself and thought. He rapidly surveyed his position. Here was he, Tom Ludlow, a hard-headed son of toil; without fortune, without credit, without antecedents, whose lot was cast exclusively with vulgar males, and who had never had a mother, a sister, nor a well-bred sweetheart, to pitch his voice for the feminine tympanum, who had seldom come nearer an indubitable lady than, in a favouring crowd, to receive a mechanical ‘thank you’ (as if he were a policeman) for some accidental assistance: here he found himself up to his



neck in a sudden pastoral with a young woman who was evidently altogether superior. That it was in him to enjoy the society of such a person (provided, of course, she were not a chit) he very well knew; but he had never happened to suppose that he should find it open to him. Was he now to infer that this brilliant gift was his – the gift of what is called in the relation between the sexes success? The inference was at least logical. He had made a good impression. Why else should an eminently discriminating girl have fraternised with him at such a rate? It was with a little thrill of satisfaction that Ludlow reflected upon the directness of his course. 'It all comes back to my old theory that a process can't be too simple. I used no arts. In such an enterprise I shouldn't have known where to begin. It was my ignorance of the regular way that saved me. Women like a gentleman, of course; but they like a man better.' It was the little touch of nature he had detected in Adela's tone that set him thinking; but as compared with the frankness of his own attitude it betrayed after all no undue emotion. Ludlow had accepted the fact of his adaptability to the idle mood of a cultivated woman in a thoroughly rational spirit, and he was not now tempted to exaggerate its bearings. He was not the man to be intoxicated by a triumph after all possibly superficial. 'If Miss Moore is so wise – or so foolish – as to like me half an hour for what I am, she is welcome,' he said to himself. 'Assuredly,' he added, as he glanced at her intelligent profile, 'she will not like me for

what I am not.' It needs a woman, however, far more intelligent than (thank heaven!) most women are – more intelligent, certainly, than Adela was – to guard her happiness against a clever man's consistent assumption of her intelligence; and doubtless it was from a sense of this general truth that, as Ludlow continued to observe his companion, he felt an emotion of manly tenderness. 'I wouldn't offend her for the world,' he thought. Just then Adela, conscious of his contemplation, looked about; and before he knew it, Ludlow had repeated aloud, "Miss Moore, I wouldn't offend you for the world."

Adela eyed him for a moment with a little flush that subsided into a smile. "To what dreadful impertinence is that the prelude?" she inquired.

"It's the prelude to nothing. It refers to the past – to any possible displeasure I may have caused you."

"Your scruples are unnecessary, Mr Ludlow. If you had given me offence, I should not have left you to apologise for it. I should not have left the matter to occur to you as you sat dreaming charitably in the sun."

"What would you have done?"

"Done? nothing. You don't imagine I would have scolded you – or snubbed you – or answered you back, I take it. I would have left undone – what, I can't tell you. Ask yourself what I have done. I am sure I hardly know myself," said Adela, with some

intensity. "At all events, here I am sitting with you in the fields, as if you were a friend of years. Why do you speak of offence?" And Adela (an uncommon accident with her) lost command of her voice, which trembled ever so slightly. "What an odd thought! why should you offend me? Do I seem so open to that sort of thing?" Her colour had deepened again, and her eyes had brightened. She had forgotten herself, and before speaking had not, as was her wont, sought counsel of that staunch conservative, her taste. She had spoken from a full heart – a heart which had been filling rapidly, since the outset of their walk, with a feeling almost passionate in its quality, and which that little puff of the actual conveyed in Mr Ludlow's announcement of his departure had caused to overflow. The reader may give this feeling whatever name he chooses. We will content ourselves with saying that Adela had played with fire so effectually that she had been scorched. The slight violence of the speech just quoted may represent her sensation of pain.

"You pull one up rather short, Miss Moore," said Ludlow. "A man says the best he can."

Adela made no reply – for a moment she hung her head. Was she to cry out because she was hurt? Was she to thrust her injured heart into a company in which there was, as yet at least, no question of hearts? No! here our reserved and

contemplative heroine is herself again. Her part was still to be the youthful woman of the world, the perfect young lady. For our own part, we can imagine no figure more engaging than this civilised and disciplined personage under such circumstances; and if Adela had been the most accomplished of coquettes she could not have assumed a more becoming expression than the air of judicious consideration which now covered her features. But having paid this generous homage to propriety, she felt free to suffer in secret. Raising her eyes from the ground, she abruptly addressed her companion.

“By the way, Mr Ludlow, tell me something about yourself.”

Ludlow burst into a laugh. “What shall I tell you?”

“Everything.”

“Everything? Excuse me, I’m not such a fool. But do you know that’s a very tempting request you make? I suppose I ought to blush and hesitate; but I never yet blushed or hesitated in the right place.”

“Very good. There is one fact. Continue. Begin at the beginning.”

“Well, let me see. My name you know. I am twenty-eight years old.”

“That’s the end,” said Adela.

“But you don’t want the history of my babyhood, I take it. I imagine that I was a very big, noisy, ugly baby – what’s called a ‘splendid infant’. My parents were poor, and,

of course, honest. They belonged to a very different set – or ‘sphere’, I suppose you call it – from any you probably know. They were working people. My father was a chemist, in a small way of business, and I suspect my mother was not above using her hands to turn a penny. But although I don’t remember her, I am sure she was a good, sound woman; I feel her occasionally in my own sinews. I myself have been at work all my life, and a very good worker I am, let me tell you. I am not patient, as I imagine your brother to be – although I have more patience than you might suppose – but I don’t let go easily. If I strike you as very egotistical, remember ’twas you began it. I don’t know whether I am clever, and I don’t much care; that’s a kind of metaphysical, sentimental, vapid word. But I know what I want to know, and I generally manage to find it out. I don’t know much about my moral nature; I have no doubt I am beastly selfish. Still, I don’t like to hurt peoples’ feelings, and I am rather fond of poetry and flowers. I don’t believe I am very ‘high-toned’, all the same. I should not be at all surprised to discover I was prodigiously conceited; but I am afraid the discovery wouldn’t cut me down much. I am remarkably hard to keep down, I know. Oh, you would think me a great brute if you knew me. I shouldn’t recommend any one to count too much on my being of an amiable disposition. I am often very much bored with people who are fond of me – because some of them are, really; so I am afraid I am ungrateful. Of course, as a man speaking to a

woman, there's nothing for it but to say I am very low; but I have to talk about things you can't prove. I have got very little 'general culture', you know, but first and last I have read a great many books – and, thank heaven, I remember things. And I have some tastes, too. I am very fond of music. I have a good young voice of my own: that I can't help knowing; and I am not one to be bullied about pictures. I know how to sit on a horse, and how to row a boat. Is that enough? I am conscious of a great inability to say anything to the point. To put myself in a nutshell, I am a greedy specialist – and not a bad fellow. Still, I am only what I am – a very common creature.”

“Do you call yourself a very common creature because you really believe yourself to be one, or because you are weakly tempted to disfigure your rather flattering catalogue with a great final blot?”

“I am sure I don't know. You show more subtlety in that one question than I have shown in a whole string of affirmations. You women are strong on asking embarrassing questions. Seriously, I believe I am second-rate. I wouldn't make such an admission to every one though. But to you, Miss Moore, who sit there under your parasol as impartial as the muse of history, to you I owe the truth. I am no man of genius. There is something I miss; some final distinction I lack; you may call it what you please. Perhaps it's humility. Perhaps you can find it in Ruskin, somewhere. Perhaps it's delicacy – perhaps

it's imagination. I am very vulgar, Miss Moore. I am the vulgar son of vulgar people. I use the word, of course, in its literal sense. So much I grant you at the outset, but it's my last concession!"

"Your concessions are smaller than they sound. Have you any sisters?"

"Not a sister; and no brothers, nor cousins, nor uncles, nor aunts."

"And you sail for Europe to-morrow?"

"To-morrow, at ten o'clock."

"To be away how long?"

"As long as I can. Five years, if possible."

"What do you expect to do in those five years?"

"Well, study."

"Nothing but study?"

"It will all come back to that, I guess. I hope to enjoy myself considerably, and to look at the world as I go. But I must not waste time; I am growing old."

"Where are you going?"

"To Berlin. I wanted to get some letters of introduction from your brother."

"Have you money? Are you well off?"

"Well off? Not I, heaven forgive me! I am very poor. I have in hand a little money

that has just come to me from an unexpected quarter: an old debt owing my father. It will take me to Germany and keep me for six months. After that I shall work my way."

"Are you happy? Are you contented?"

"Just now I am pretty comfortable, thank you."

"But shall you be so when you get to Berlin?"

"I don't promise to be contented; but I am pretty sure to be happy."

"Well," said Adela, "I sincerely hope you will succeed in everything."

"Thank you, awfully," said Ludlow.

Of what more was said at this moment no record may be given here. The reader has been put into possession of the key of our friends' conversation; it is only needful to say that in this key it was prolonged for half an hour more. As the minutes elapsed Adela found herself drifting further and further away from her anchorage. When at last she compelled herself to consult her watch and remind her companion that there remained but just time enough for them to reach home in anticipation of her brother's arrival, she knew that she was rapidly floating seaward. As she descended the hill at her companion's side she felt herself suddenly thrilled by an acute temptation. Her first instinct was to close her eyes upon it, in the trust that when she should open them again it would have vanished; but she found that it was not to be so uncompromisingly



dismissed. It pressed her so hard that before she walked a mile homeward she had succumbed to it, or had at least given it the pledge of that quickening of the heart which accompanies a bold resolution. This little sacrifice allowed her no breath for idle words, and she accordingly advanced with a bent and listening head. Ludlow marched along, with no apparent diminution of his habitual buoyancy of mien, talking as fast and as loud as at the outset. He risked a prophecy that Mr Moore would not have returned, and charged Adela with a comical message of regrets. Adela had begun by wondering whether the approach of their separation had wrought within him any sentimental depression at all commensurate with her own, with that which sealed her lips and weighed upon her heart; and now she was debating as to whether his express declaration that he felt 'awfully blue' ought necessarily to remove her doubts. Ludlow followed up this declaration with a very pretty review of the morning, and a leave-taking speech which, whether intensely sincere or not, struck Adela as at least in very good taste. He might be a common creature – but he was certainly a very uncommon one. When they reached the garden-gate it was with a fluttering heart that Adela scanned the premises for some accidental sign of her brother's presence. She felt that there would be an especial fitness in his not having returned. She led the way in. The hall table was bare of his usual hat and overcoat, his silver-headed stick was not in

the corner. The only object that struck her was Mr Pynsent's card, which she had deposited there on her exit. All that was represented by that little white ticket seemed a thousand miles away. She looked for Mr Moore in his study, but it was empty.

As Adela went back from her quest into the drawing-room she simply shook her head at Ludlow, who was standing before the fire-place; and as she did so she caught her reflection in the mantel-glass. 'Verily,' she said to herself, 'I have travelled far.' She had pretty well unlearned her old dignities and forms, but she was to break with them still more completely. It was with a singular hardihood that she prepared to redeem the little pledge which had been extorted from her on her way home. She felt that there was no trial to which her generosity might now be called which she would not hail with enthusiasm. Unfortunately, her generosity was not likely to be challenged; although she nevertheless had the satisfaction of assuring herself at this moment that, like the mercy of the Lord, it was infinite. Should she satisfy herself of her friend's? or should she leave it delightfully uncertain? These had been the terms of what has been called her temptation, at the foot of the hill.

"Well, I have very little time," said Ludlow; "I must get my dinner and pay my bill and drive to the train." And he put out his hand.

Adela gave him her own, without meeting his eyes. "You are in a great hurry,"

said she, rather casually.

“It’s not I who am in a hurry. It’s my confounded destiny. It’s the train and the steamer.”

“If you really wished to stay you wouldn’t be bullied by the train and the steamer.”

“Very true – very true. But do I really wish to stay?”

“That’s the question. That’s exactly what I want to know.”

“You ask difficult questions, Miss Moore.”

“Difficult for me – yes.”

“Then, of course, you are prepared to answer easy ones.”

“Let me hear what you call easy.”

“Well, then, do you wish me to stay? All I have to do is to throw down my hat, sit down, and fold my arms for twenty minutes. I lose my train and my ship. I remain in America, instead of going to Europe.”

“I have thought of all that.”

“I don’t mean to say it’s a great deal. There are attractions on both sides.”

“Yes, and especially on one. It is a great deal.”

“And you request me to give it up – to renounce Berlin?”

“No; I ought not to do that. What I ask of you is whether, if I should so request you,

you would say 'yes'."

"That does make the matter easy for you, Miss Moore. What attractions do you hold out?"

"I hold out nothing whatever, sir."

"I suppose that means a great deal."

"A great deal of absurdity."

"Well, you are certainly a most interesting woman, Miss Moore – a charming woman."

"Why don't you call me irresistible at once, and bid me good morning?"

"I don't know but that I shall have to come to that. But I will give you no answer that leaves you at an advantage. Ask me to stay – order me to stay, if that suits you better – and I will see how it sounds. Come, you must not trifle with a man." He still held Adela's hand, and now they were looking watchfully into each other's eyes. He paused, waiting for an answer.

"Good-bye, Mr Ludlow," said Adela. "God bless you!" And she was about to withdraw her hand; but he held it.

"Are we friends?" said he.

Adela gave a little shrug of her shoulders. "Friends of three hours!"

Ludlow looked at her with some sternness. "Our parting could at best hardly have been sweet," said he; "but why should you make it bitter, Miss Moore?"

"If it's bitter, why should you try to change it?"

"Because I don't like bitter things."

Ludlow had caught a glimpse of the truth – that truth of which the reader has had a glimpse – and he stood there at once thrilled and annoyed. He had both a heart and a conscience. 'It's not my fault,' he murmured to the latter; but he was unable to add, in all consistency, that it was his misfortune. It would be very heroic, very poetic, very chivalric, to lose his steamer, and he felt that he could do so for sufficient cause – at the suggestion of a fact. But the motive here was less than a fact – an idea; less than an idea – a mere guess. 'It's a very pretty little romance as it is,' he said to himself. 'Why spoil it? She's a different sort from any I have met, and just to have seen her like this – that is enough for me!' He raised her hand to his lips, pressed them to it, dropped it, reached the door, and bounded out of the garden-gate.

THE END.