

**RODERICK
HUDSON, IN TWO
VOLUMES, VOL. I.**

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Roderick Hudson, in two volumes, Vol. I. by Henry James

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BY

HENRY JAMES

IN TWO VOLUMES

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RODERICK HUDSON.

I.

ROWLAND MALLET had made his arrangements to sail for Europe on the 1st of September, and having in the interval a fortnight to spare, he determined to spend it with his cousin Cecilia, the widow of a nephew of his father. He was urged by the reflection that an affectionate farewell might help to exonerate him from the charge of neglect frequently preferred by this lady. It was not that the young man disliked her; on the contrary, he regarded her with a tender admiration, and he had not forgotten how when his cousin brought her home on her marriage he seemed to feel the upward sweep of the empty bough from which the golden fruit had been plucked, and then and there accepted the prospect of bachelorhood. The truth was that, as it will be part of the entertainment of this narrative to exhibit, Rowland Mallet had an uncomfortably sensitive conscience, and that, in spite of the seeming paradox, his visits to Cecilia were rare because she and her misfortunes were often uppermost in it. Her misfortunes were three in number: first, she had lost her husband; second, she had lost her money (or the greater part of it); and third, she lived at Northampton, Massachusetts. Mallet's compassion was

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really wasted, because Cecilia was a very clever woman, and a skilful counter-plotter to adversity. She had made herself a charming home, her economies were not obtrusive, and there was always a cheerful flutter in the folds of her crape. It was the consciousness of all this that puzzled Mallet whenever he felt tempted to put in his oar. He had money and he had time, but he never could decide just how to place these gifts gracefully at Cecilia's service. He no longer felt like marrying her; in these eight years that fancy had died a natural death. And yet her extreme cleverness seemed somehow to make charity difficult and patronage impossible. He would rather chop off his hand than offer her a cheque, a piece of useful furniture, or a black silk dress; and yet there was much sadness in seeing such a bright proud woman living in such a small dull way. Cecilia had, moreover, a turn for sarcasm, and her smile, which was her pretty feature, was never so pretty as when her sprightly phrase had a lurking scratch in it. Rowland remembered that for him she was all smiles, and suspected awkwardly that he ministered not a little to her sense of the irony of things. And in truth, with his means, his leisure, and his opportunities, what had he done? He had a lively suspicion of his uselessness. Cecilia meanwhile cut out her own dresses, and was personally giving her little girl the education of a princess.

This time, however, he presented himself bravely enough; for in the way of activity it was something definite at least to be going to Europe and to be meaning to spend the winter in Rome. Cecilia met him in the early dusk at the gate of her little garden, amid a studied combination of horticultural odours. A rosy widow of twenty-eight, half-cousin, half-hostess, doing the honours of a fragrant cottage on a midsummer evening, was a phenomenon to which the young man's imagination was able to do ample justice. Cecilia was always gracious, but this evening she was almost joyous. She was in a happy

mood, and Mallet imagined there was a private reason for it—a reason quite distinct from her pleasure in receiving her honoured kinsman. The next day he flattered himself he was on the way to discover it.

For the present, after tea, as they sat on the rose-framed porch, while Rowland held his younger cousin between his knees, and she, enjoying her situation, listened timorously for the stroke of bedtime, Cecilia insisted on talking more about her visitor than about herself.

“What is it you mean to do in Europe?” she asked, lightly, giving a turn to the frill of her sleeve—just such a turn as seemed to Mallet to bring out all the latent difficulties of the question.

“Why, very much what I do here,” he answered. “No great harm!”

“Is it true,” Cecilia asked, “that here you do no great harm? Is not a man like you doing harm when he is not doing positive good?”

“Your compliment is ambiguous,” said Rowland.

“No,” answered the widow, “you know what I think of you. You have a turn for doing nice things and behaving yourself properly. You have it, in the first place, in your character. You are an amiable creature. Ask Bessie if you don't hold her more gently and comfortably than any of her other admirers.”

“He holds me more comfortably than Mr. Hudson,” Bessie declared roundly.

Rowland, not knowing Mr. Hudson, could but half appreciate the eulogy, and Cecilia went on to develop her idea. “Your circumstances, in the second place, suggest the idea of some sort of social usefulness. You are intelligent, you are well informed, and your benevolence, if one may call it benevolence, would be discriminating. You are rich and unoccupied, so that it might be abundant. Therefore I say you are a man to do something on a large scale. Bestir yourself, dear Rowland,