

**RODERICK  
HUDSON; IN TWO  
VOLUMES, VOL. II**

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Roderick Hudson; in two volumes, Vol. II by Henry James

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**HENRY JAMES**

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RODERICK HUDSON



# RODERICK HUDSON

BY

HENRY JAMES

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.

London

MACMILLAN AND CO

1883

965  
+  
1873  
2

## RODERICK HUDSON.

### XIV.

SOME days afterwards it happened that Rowland, on a long afternoon ramble, took his way through one of the quiet corners of the Trastevere. He was particularly fond of this part of Rome, though he could hardly have expressed the charm he found in it. As you pass away from the dusky swarming purlieus of the Ghetto, you emerge into a region of empty, soundless, grass-grown lanes and alleys, where the shabby houses seem mouldering away in disuse, and yet your footstep brings figures of startling Roman type to the doorways. There are few monuments here, but no part of Rome seemed more historic, in the sense of being weighted with a ponderous past, blighted with the melancholy of things that had had their day. When the yellow afternoon sunshine slept on the sallow battered walls and lengthened the shadows in the grassy courtyards of small closed churches, the place acquired a strange fascination. The church of St. Cecilia has one of these sunny waste-looking courts; the edifice seems abandoned to silence and the charity of chance devotion. Rowland never passed it without going in, and he was generally the only visitor. He entered it now, but he found that two persons had



preceded him. Both were women. One was at her prayers at one of the side-altars; the other was seated against a column at the upper end of the nave. Rowland walked to the altar and paid in a momentary glance at the clever statue of the saint in death in the niche beneath it the usual tribute to the charm of polished ingenuity. As he turned away he looked at the person seated, and recognised Christina Light. Seeing that she perceived him he advanced to speak to her.

She was sitting in a listless attitude, with her hands in her lap; she seemed to be tired. She was dressed very simply, as if for walking and escaping observation. When he had greeted her he glanced back at her companion and recognised the faithful Assunta.

Christina smiled. "Are you looking for Mr. Hudson? He is not here, I am happy to say."

"If he were here one might understand," said Rowland. "This is a strange place to find you alone."

"Not at all! People call me a strange girl, and I might as well have the comfort of it. I came to take a walk; that, by the way, is part of my strangeness. I can't loll all the morning on a sofa and sit perched all the afternoon in a carriage. I get horribly restless; I must move; I must do something and see something. Mamma suggests a cup of tea. Meanwhile I put on an old dress and half a dozen veils, I take Assunta under my arm, and we start on a pedestrian tour. It's a bore that I can't take the poodle, but he attracts attention. We trudge about everywhere; there is nothing I like so much. I hope you will congratulate me on the simplicity of my tastes."

"I congratulate you on your wisdom. To live in Rome and not to walk about would, I think, be poor pleasure. But you are terribly far from home, and I am afraid you are tired."

"A little—enough to sit here a while."

"Might I offer you my company while you rest?"

"If you will promise to amuse me. I am in dismal spirits."

Saying he would do what he could, Rowland brought a chair and placed it near her. He was not in love with her; he disapproved of her; he distrusted her; and yet he felt it a kind of privilege to watch her, and he found a peculiar excitement in talking to her. The background of her nature, as he would have called it, was large and mysterious, and it emitted strange fantastic gleams and flashes. Watching for these rather quickened one's pulses. Moreover it was not a disadvantage to talk to a girl who made one keep guard on one's composure; it diminished one's usual liability to utter something less than revised wisdom.

Assunta had risen from her prayers, and as he took his place was coming back to her mistress. But Christina motioned her away. "No, no; while you are about it say a few dozen more!" she said. "Pray for *me*," she added in English. "Pray that I say nothing silly. She has been at it half an hour; I envy her volubility!"

"One often envies good Catholics," said Rowland.

"Oh, speak to me of that; I have been through that too! There was a time when I wanted immensely to be a nun; it was not a laughing matter. It was when I was about sixteen years old. I read the *Imitation* and the *Life of St. Catherine*. I fully believed in the miracles of the saints, and I was dying to have one of my own—little of a saint as I was! The least little accident that could have been twisted into a miracle would have carried me straight into the cloister. I had the real religious passion. It passed away, and as I sat here just now I was wondering what has become of it!"

Rowland had already been sensible of something in this young lady's tone which he would have called a want of veracity, and this epitome of her religious experience failed to strike him as absolutely historical.

But the trait was not disagreeable, for she herself was evidently the foremost dupe of her inventions. She had a fictitious history in which she believed much more fondly than in her real one, and an infinite capacity for extemporised reminiscence adapted to the mood of the hour. She liked to idealise herself, to take interesting and picturesque attitudes to her own imagination; and the vivacity and spontaneity of her character gave her really a starting-point in experience, so that the many-coloured flowers of fiction which blossomed in her talk were not so much perversions as sympathetic exaggerations of fact. And Rowland felt that whatever she said of herself might have been, under the imagined circumstances; energy was there, audacity, the restless questioning temperament. "I am afraid I am sadly prosaic," he said, "for in these many months now that I have been in Rome I have never ceased for a moment to look at Catholicism simply from the outside. I don't see an opening as big as your finger-nail where I could creep into it!"

"What do you believe?" asked Christina, looking at him. "Are you religious?"

"I am very old-fashioned. I believe in God."

Christina let her beautiful eyes wander a while, and then gave a little sigh. "You are much to be envied!"

"You, I imagine, in that line have nothing to envy me."

"Yes, I have. Rest!"

"You are too young to say that."

"I am not young; I have never been young! My mother took care of that. I was a little wrinkled old woman at ten."

"I am afraid," said Rowland, in a moment, "that you are fond of painting yourself in dark colours."

She looked at him a while in silence. "Do you wish to win my eternal gratitude? Prove to me that I am better than I suppose."