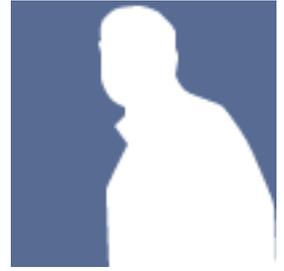


# The Importance of Being Ernest Hemingway

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Rich girl wants him a wealthy writer. Best girl wants him a great writer. Which girl wins?

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## The Importance Of Being Ernest Hemingway

It happened at a Maryland yacht club after Labor Day, when summer lingers. Philip Wright was adjusting lines aboard his forty-something-foot sailing ketch. Suddenly dark-haired Adrienne Racine called from the dock, “You’re publishing a novel?”

That Saturday was stormy, and this bold belle’s voice battled the wailing wind: “Alex Gooding told my uncle. He’s your agent, right? He goes sailing with you? We’re new here.”

Before Philip could answer, she’d climbed, uninvited, aboard his boat. She’d recently arrived like a disoriented explorer. Charmingly she’d wander the docks as if searching for her lost home, her paradise. Philip fantasized her as from another galaxy. Maybe Alpha Centauri? Her space ship let her out on the wrong planet?

But now Philip’s Android phone was signaling a caller: Claudia Fletcher, Philip’s blonde society friend, reminding him: “Tomorrow at eleven, Philip. Remember?”

“Right. I’ll be there, Claudia.”

“And, by the way, congratulations. Alex told us about the book deal. Why didn’t you call and tell me yourself?”

“It’s not firm, Claudia. They’re proposing some weird conditions.”

“Well, Alex seems excited about it. And he knows publishing.”

#

Ringling off, Philip said to Adrienne, “Your uncle’s boat’s the Martha Ann , right?”

“Yeah, named after my aunt. Hemingway had a power boat too. But I like sailing. But I’ve never been sailing.”

“That’s sad.”

“Would you take me?”

“Well, yeah—sometimes, maybe.”

“Not now?”

Philip glanced at her shoes. Boating shoes, but he laughed and shook his head. “See how those trees are blowing? There’s a gale out there. It’ll even be dangerous.”

“Okay. Next Saturday? Or Sunday?”

“Sorry. On Monday this boat’s being hauled for a refitting, possibly for a month.”

“Let’s go today then. Are you scared?”

“No.”

“If you do this, I’ll read every story you write.”

“Do that, and I’ll take you to Paris, or the moon.”

“Let’s go sailing first.”

#

Philip wondered if he or she or both were crazy—their first date, going to a storm? Out there, at sea, the flashing and splashing tempest began thrashing and crashing and smashing their bouncing sailboat. But Adrienne seemed thrilled. Clinging to a starboard shroud, she shouted happily as the howling northeaster flagged her raven hair: “What’s your book about, Philip?”

“Uh . . . well, political conspiracy, skimming enormous profits. But with yachting and love scenes. So, the publishers want a romance novel.”

“And you won’t write that?”

“I don’t know. I may have to.”

“Don’t do it. Don’t give in,” Adrienne cried. “Please! Don’t cater to popular sensationalism. I love early Hemingway, but he got commercialized.”

They could see, far out in the Atlantic, a large tanker heaving and flailing—a violent spectacle: mucho sea-drama, as Adrienne exclaimed, “I feel sick. Please, Philip, don’t get commercialized like Hemingway.”

Philip laughed. “I’ll match Hemingway’s career? What a terrible fate!”

#

And what a day! As the ketch rolled with the vicious waves, Adrienne, beside Philip in the cockpit, was thrown into his arms. Hurriedly he put the helm on autopilot as he steadied Adrienne and asked, “How do you know about Hemingway? Do you teach literature?”

“I don’t think so, seeing I never went to college.”

“Your parents didn’t send you?”

“What parents?”

“You don’t have parents?”

“I have parents. They just don’t have me.”

“What happened?”

“It’s sad and decadent. I shouldn’t tell you or you’ll put it into a story.”

“Anyway, you sound highly educated.”

“I am. But I’m sick. I’m going to throw up.”

He was holding her waist while she leaned over the lifelines, but he had to pull her back from the savagely breaking sea.

Delicately she vomited on his foul-weather jacket, until the retching stopped and she heaved herself

dry. Both were soiled with vomitus now, but still Adrienne shouted on: "I'm self-educated. By the way, I read the best books all the time. In my view, I'm smart. But nobody knows, because I don't have any degrees."

Then it seemed for some reason that something magical was happening. They were just together—just a part of each other on a rolling deck, feeling the wind as it hassled the sea on that psycho night.

#

Claudia Fletcher's luncheon party the next day was at her mother's house on Capernaum Beach, next to the Channing mansion. Parking in back, Philip joined the other guests on a large tiled veranda. They welcomed him courteously, inquiring about his work, as Claudia embraced him affectionally.

"Who are your important influences?" one lady asked.

Philip replied that he wasn't sure. "But my favorite novelists are probably Stendhal and Dostoevsky."

"Dostoevsky?" someone asked. "You prefer him to Tolstoy? May I ask why?"

"As I see it, Tolstoy had the art. But Dostoevsky had the heart."

Now the little group seemed impressed. One man even clapped as Philip's phone rang. It was Alex Gooding, sounding puzzled: "Look, a friend of yours is upset with me—Adrienne Racine."

"I'm at a party, Alex."

"What about the three of us for dinner? Say the club restaurant, seven o'clock?"

After lunch, as the party was breaking up, Claudia led Philip out across the rear lawn to the ocean seawall.

"My mother likes you a lot," she said, raising her hands elegantly to Philip's cheeks—as the noon sunlight, bouncing from her diamond bracelet, flashed in sync with the glittering sea.

"Mom said to me, 'Philip's fine in himself. There's just that question of . . .'"

Philip nodded: "Money."

Claudia smiled. "Always an ugly issue. But Alex thinks you're about to break through."

"I hope he's right."

“He said the publishers like your yacht-club scenes.”

“Well, good. But I want to write more than that.”

“Of course. But I suppose that in the beginning one must give them what they want.”

#

The sun was down when Philip joined Adrienne and Alex in the yacht club’s café. And as the darkening world outside relaxed from the day’s endeavors, the easy, fading hour seemed to whisper: Everything’s twilightful.

Many booths were filled, with four or five patrons at the bar. “Scenes in restaurants are static,” Alex said. “Yet they’re places to unwind and feel good by big windows with waterfront views.”

Then Alex got serious: “Philip, Adrienne’s worried about our negotiations.”

Philip laughed. “She’s afraid I’ll turn out like Hemingway.”

Alex laughed too. “What upsets you about Hemingway, Adrienne?”

“I’m upset about Hemingway because I like him so much. The same reason I’m upset about Philip. Hemingway led two lives, one after the other. What upsets me is his relentless self-promotion in his later life.”

Alex nodded. “He may have had no choice, given his extravagance and his many marriages.”

Adrienne smiled. “So, you’re familiar with Hemingway’s life?”

“I’ve heard of him.”

Ordering now, the threesome focused on seafood: seared tuna, smoked salmon, shrimp salad, sliced tomatoes, home-fried potatoes, sliced pineapple and melon.

“Wine, Philip?” the waitress asked.

“No, thanks, Elaine. We’re having a heavy conversation tonight.”

“Then iced tea?”

“Sure.”

Elaine was still scribbling the order when Adrienne continued: “Hemingway’s first great novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, was published about 1926. His first marriage broke up and he gave all proceeds

from that novel to his ex-wife, Hadley.

“Now this celebrity who’d gained immortal glory needed cash. After A Farewell to Arms in 1929, for almost a decade he published machoistic nonfiction: a bullfighting book, about 1932, and an African hunting book, around 1935. Alex, tell us about Martha Gellhorn.”

Alex nodded. “His third wife. He met her in 1936: a reporter as adventurous and ambitious as himself—and fiercely self-promoting. Both reported on the Spanish Civil War and World War Two.”

Adrienne smiled, “But did Hemingway report on those wars or on his presence at those wars? Did he describe the fighting or himself being near the fighting? Weren’t rumors spread that he’d liberated Paris, or at least the Ritz Hotel? Fact or fiction?”

Alex smiled. “Believe me, I understand you, Adrienne. You dislike commercial inauthenticity.”

“Inauthenticity !” Adrienne exclaimed. “That means travesty, parody, mockery, charade, sham ?”

Alex laughed. “You sound like a thesaurus. Well, okay: thesaurus means treasure .”

“Philip, hug me,” Adrienne said. “I’m a thesaurus .” And Philip, reaching across the table, complied while Alex went on:

“True, among friends, bragging about oneself is disgusting: ‘ Hey, pal, I could use some bucks! Check me out. Ain’t I terrific ?’ But success in our vast cosmopolitan nation means getting yourself praised to countless strangers. That’s publicity. Hemingway needed that just as Philip does now. it’s our modern fate.”

Adrienne shook her head. “I’m not faulting publicity, or Hemingway. He did what he must have felt he had to do. I’m just telling what happened.

“The same with Philip’s novel—his real novel, about the world of political deception. It doesn’t condemn deceit. It just dramatizes it.”

“That’s the part the publishers dislike,” Alex said. “They consider it too controversial for a budding author.”

“Alex! It’s just telling the truth. What’s wrong with the truth? The truth will set you free.”

Alex nodded. “It’ll set you free. But it may not always get you published. By the way, Philip, I phoned Sam about the new seasickness love scene, and I think he loves it. He wants it early in the book. And now hear this: he’s asking you to use your ketch to recreate that incident for a promotional video.”

For a moment Adrienne sat quietly. Then she just said in a small voice, “Philip?” But it was Alex who answered, “Nothing’s definite yet, Adrienne.”

"Nothing's definite? But it seems like something's becoming definite. Philip, all my life I'd dreamed of my first day sailing. And now you're going to film it as a nasty publicity farce?"

"Please, Adrienne. There'll be no mention of you," Alex said. "No name: all fiction."

"So, we'll go sailing on another stormy day. Then I'm supposed to puke all over Philip again?"

"I'm sure they'll get an actress to fake that part."

Adrienne was standing. "I'm going. I might vomit on this table."

She walked quickly away. Alex held Philip. "She's upset. Let her go now. Besides, you have to live your own life. I expect a breakthrough, possibly tomorrow."

#

Well, it was actually five days later—a Friday afternoon in a rainstorm—that Alex and Claudia Fletcher arrived together at Philip's apartment. And it all seemed miraculous, simple and quick: Alex waving a thick, stapled booklet of papers. "Here it is, your first contract, Philip. All you have to do is sign, man."

"Philip", Claudia said. "This is for us. Let me hug you."

While she held Philip, Alex grabbed his shoulder. "You're not going to like this, Philip. They're turning the novel into a melodrama with mostly dangerous sailing and sex. But don't worry. The future's yours now."

How break this to Adrienne? Philip phoned her: "Let's have dinner."

Then amazingly she accepted the news: "Philip, whatever you do, I'll support you."

"You won't leave me if I sign this contract?"

"I'll never leave you, unless you leave me."

"Then there's no choice: having you or being a successful writer? To hell with writing!"

"Philip, we'll be happy either way."

And already Philip knew that they would. Literature was great. It was the greatest. But the human heart was greater.

