



THE ADVANCED LADY (1911)

By Katherine Mansfield

"Do you think we might ask her to come with us," said Fräulein Elsa, retying her pink sash ribbon before my mirror. "You know, although she is so intellectual, I cannot help feeling convinced that she has some secret sorrow. And Lisa told me this morning, as she was turning out my room, that she remains hours and hours by herself, writing; in fact Lisa says she is writing a book! I suppose that is why she never cares to mingle with us, and has so little time for her husband and the child."

"Well, *you* ask her," said I. "I have never spoken to the lady."

Elsa blushed faintly. "I have only spoken to her once," she confessed. "I took her a bunch of wild flowers, to her room, and she came to the door in a white gown, with her hair loose. Never shall I forget that moment. She just took the flowers, and I heard her – because the door was not quite properly shut – I heard her, as I walked down the passage, saying 'Purity, fragrance, the fragrance of purity and the purity of fragrance!' It was wonderful!"

At that moment Frau Kellermann knocked at the door.

"Are you ready?" she said, coming into the room and nodding to us very genially. "The gentlemen are waiting on the steps, and I have asked the Advanced Lady to come with us."

"Na, how extraordinary!" cried Elsa. "But this moment the *gnadige* Frau and I were debating whether – "

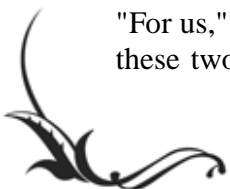
"Yes, I met her coming out of her room and she said she was charmed with the idea. Like all of us, she has never been to Schlingen. She is downstairs now, talking to Herr Erhardt. I think we shall have a delightful afternoon."

"Is Fritz waiting too?" asked Elsa.

"Of course he is, dear child – as impatient as a hungry man listening for the dinner bell. Run along!"

Elsa ran, and Frau Kellermann smiled at me significantly. In the past she and I had seldom spoken to each other, owing to the fact that her "one remaining joy" – her charming little Karl – had never succeeded in kindling into flame those sparks of maternity which are supposed to glow in great numbers upon the altar of every respectable female heart; but, in view of a premeditated journey together, we became delightfully cordial.

"For us," she said, "there will be a double joy. We shall be able to watch the happiness of these two dear children, Elsa and Fritz. They only received the letters of blessing from



their parents yesterday morning. It is a very strange thing, but whenever I am in the company of newly-engaged couples I blossom. Newly-engaged couples, mothers with first babies, and normal deathbeds have precisely the same effect on me. Shall we join the others?"

I was longing to ask her why normal deathbeds should cause anyone to burst into flower, and said, "Yes, do let us."

We were greeted by the little party of "cure guests" on the pension steps, with those cries of joy and excitement which herald so pleasantly the mildest German excursion. Herr Erhardt and I had not met before that day, so, in accordance with strict pension custom, we asked each other how long we had slept during the night, had we dreamed agreeably, what time we had got up, was the coffee fresh when we had appeared at breakfast, and how had we passed the morning. Having toiled up these stairs of almost national politeness we landed, triumphant and smiling, and paused to recover breath.

"And now," said Herr Erhardt, "I have a pleasure in store for you. The Frau Professor is going to be one of us for the afternoon. Yes," nodding graciously to the Advanced Lady. "Allow me to introduce you to each other."

We bowed very formally, and looked each other over with that eye which is known as "eagle" but is far more the property of the female than that most unoffending of birds. "I think you are English?" she said. I acknowledged the fact. "I am reading a great many English books just now – rather, I am studying them."

"Nu," cried Herr Erhardt. "Fancy that! What a bond already! I have made up my mind to know Shakespeare in his mother tongue before I die, but that you, Frau Professor, should be already immersed in those wells of English thought!"

"From what I have read," she said, "I do not think they are very deep wells."

He nodded sympathetically.

"No," he answered, "so I have heard. . . But do not let us embitter our excursion for our little English friend. We will speak of this another time."

"Nu, are we ready?" cried Fritz, who stood, supporting Elsa's elbow in his hand, at the foot of the steps. It was immediately discovered that Karl was lost.

"Ka-rl, Karl-chen!" we cried. No response.

"But he was here one moment ago," said Herr Langen, a tired, pale youth, who was recovering from a nervous breakdown due to much philosophy and little nourishment. "He was sitting here, picking out the works of his watch with a hairpin!"

Frau Kellermann rounded on him. "Do you mean to say, my dear Herr Langen, you did not stop the child!"

"No," said Herr Langen; "I've tried stopping him before now."

"Da, that child has such energy; never is his brain at peace. If he is not doing one thing, he is doing another!"



"Perhaps he has started on the dining-room clock now," suggested Herr Langen, abominably hopeful.

The Advanced Lady suggested that we should go without him. "I never take my little daughter for walks," she said. "I have accustomed her to sitting quietly in my bedroom from the time I go out until I return!"

"There he is – there he is," piped Elsa, and Karl was observed slithering down a chestnut-tree, very much the worse for twigs.

"I've been listening to what you said about me, mumma," he confessed while Frau Kellermann brushed him down. "It was not true about the watch. I was only looking at it, and the little girl never stays in the bedroom. She told me herself she always goes down to the kitchen, and –"

"Da, that's enough!" said Frau Kellermann.

We marched *en masse* along the station road. It was a very warm afternoon, and continuous parties of "cure guests", who were giving their digestions a quiet airing in pension gardens, called after us, asked if we were going for a walk, and cried "Herr Gott – happy journey" with immense ill-concealed relish when we mentioned Schlingen.

"But that is eight kilometres," shouted one old man with a white beard, who leaned against a fence, fanning himself with a yellow handkerchief.

"Seven and a half," answered Herr Erhardt shortly.

"Eight," bellowed the sage.

"Seven and a half!"

"Eight!"

"The man is mad," said Herr Erhardt.

"Well, please let him be mad in peace," said I, putting my hands over my ears.

"Such ignorance must not be allowed to go uncontradicted," said he, and turning his back on us, too exhausted to cry out any longer, he held up seven and a half fingers.

"Eight!" thundered the greybeard, with pristine freshness.

We felt very sobered, and did not recover until we reached a white signpost which entreated us to leave the road and walk through the field path – without trampling down more of the grass than was necessary. Being interpreted, it meant "single file", which was distressing for Elsa and Fritz. Karl, like a happy child, gambolled ahead, and cut down as many flowers as possible with the stick of his mother's parasol followed the three others – then myself – and the lovers in the rear. And above the conversation of the advance party I had the privilege of hearing these delicious whispers.

Fritz: "Do you love me?" Elsa: "Nu – yes." Fritz passionately: "But how much?" To which Elsa never replied – except with "How much do *you* love *me*?"

Fritz escaped that truly Christian trap by saying, "I asked you first."



It grew so confusing that I slipped in front of Frau Kellermann – and walked in the peaceful knowledge that she was blossoming and I was under no obligation to inform even my nearest and dearest as to the precise capacity of my affections. "What right have they to ask each other such questions the day after letters of blessing have been received?" I reflected. "What right have they even to question each other? Love which becomes engaged and married is a purely affirmative affair – they are usurping the privileges of their betters and wisers!"

The edges of the field frilled over into an immense pine forest – very pleasant and cool it looked. Another signpost begged us to keep to the broad path for Schlingen and deposit waste paper and fruit peelings in wire receptacles attached to the benches for the purpose. We sat down on the first bench, and Karl with great curiosity explored the wire receptacle.

"I love woods," said the Advanced Lady, smiling pitifully into the air. "In a wood my hair already seems to stir and remember something of its savage origin."

"But speaking literally," said Frau Kellermann, after an appreciative pause, "there is really nothing better than the air of pine-trees for the scalp."

"Oh, Frau Kellermann, please don't break the spell," said Elsa.

The Advanced Lady looked at her very sympathetically. "Have you, too, found the magic heart of Nature?" she said.

That was Herr Langen's cue. "Nature has no heart," said he, very bitterly and readily, as people do who are over-philosophised and underfed. "She creates that she may destroy. She eats that she may spew up and she spews up that she may eat. That is why we, who are forced to eke out an existence at her trampling feet, consider the world mad, and realise the deadly vulgarity of production."

"Young man," interrupted Herr Erhardt, "you have never lived and you have never suffered!"

"Oh, excuse me – how can you know?"

"I know because you have told me, and there's an end of it. Come back to this bench in ten years' time and repeat those words to me," said Frau Kellermann, with an eye upon Fritz, who was engaged in counting Elsa's fingers with passionate fervour – "and bring with you your young wife, Herr Langen, and watch, perhaps, your little child playing with – " She turned towards Karl, who had rooted an old illustrated paper out of the receptacle and was spelling over an advertisement for the enlargement of Beautiful Breasts.

The sentence remained unfinished. We decided to move on. As we plunged more deeply into the wood our spirits rose – reaching a point where they burst into song – on the part of the three men – "O Welt, wie bist du wunderbar!" – the lower part of which was piercingly sustained by Herr Langen, who attempted quite unsuccessfully to infuse satire into it in accordance with his "world outlook". They strode ahead and left us to trail after them – hot and happy.



"Now is the opportunity," said Frau Kellermann. "Dear Frau Professor, do tell us a little about your book."

"Ach, how did you know I was writing one?" she cried playfully.

"Elsa, here, had it from Lisa. And never before have I personally known a woman who was writing a book. How do you manage to find enough to write down?"

"That is never the trouble," said the Advanced Lady – she took Elsa's arm and leaned on it gently. "The trouble is to know where to stop. My brain has been a hive for years, and about three months ago the pent-up waters burst over my soul, and since then I am writing all day until late into the night, still ever finding fresh inspirations and thoughts which beat impatient wings about my heart."

"Is it a novel?" asked Elsa shyly.

"Of course it is a novel," said I.

"How can you be so positive?" said Frau Kellermann, eyeing me severely.

"Because nothing but a novel could produce an effect like that."

"Ach, don't quarrel," said the Advanced Lady sweetly. "Yes, it is a novel – upon the Modern Woman. For this seems to me the woman's hour. It is mysterious and almost prophetic, it is the symbol of the true advanced woman: not one of those violent creatures who deny their sex and smother their frail wings under... under –"

"The English tailor-made?" from Frau Kellermann.

"I was not going to put it like that. Rather, under the lying garb of false masculinity!"

"Such a subtle distinction!" I murmured.

"Whom then," asked Fräulein Elsa, looking adoringly at the Advanced Lady – "whom then do you consider the true woman?"

"She is the incarnation of comprehending Love!"

"But my dear Frau Professor," protested Frau Kellermann, "you must remember that one has so few opportunities for exhibiting Love within the family circle nowadays. One's husband is at business all day, and naturally desires to sleep when he returns home – one's children are out of the lap and in at the university before one can lavish anything at all upon them!"

"But Love is not a question of lavishing," said the Advanced Lady. "It is the lamp carried in the bosom touching with serene rays all the heights and depths of –"

"Darkest Africa," I murmured flippantly.

She did not hear.

"The mistake we have made in the past – as a sex," said she, "is in not realising that our gifts of giving are for the whole world – we are the glad sacrifice of ourselves!"



"Oh!" cried Elsa rapturously, and almost bursting into gifts as she breathed – "how I know that! You know ever since Fritz and I have been engaged, I share the desire to give to everybody, to share everything!"

"How extremely dangerous," said I.

"It is only the beauty of danger, or the danger of beauty" said the Advanced Lady – "and there you have the ideal of my book – that woman is nothing but a gift."

I smiled at her very sweetly. "Do you know," I said, "I, too, would like to write a book, on the advisability of caring for daughters, and taking them for airings and keeping them out of kitchens!"

I think the masculine element must have felt these angry vibrations: they ceased from singing, and together we climbed out of the wood, to see Schlingen below us, tucked in a circle of hills, the white houses shining in the sunlight, "for all the world like eggs in a bird's nest", as Herr Erhardt declared. We descended upon Schlingen and demanded sour milk with fresh cream and bread at the Inn of the Golden Stag, a most friendly place, with tables in a rose-garden where hens and chickens ran riot – even flopping upon the disused tables and pecking at the red checks on the cloths. We broke the bread into the bowls, added the cream, and stirred it round with flat wooden spoons, the landlord and his wife standing by.

"Splendid weather!" said Herr Erhardt, waving his spoon at the landlord, who shrugged his shoulders.

"What! you don't call it splendid!"

"As you please," said the landlord, obviously scorning us.

"Such a beautiful walk," said Fräulein Elsa, making a free gift of her most charming smile to the landlady.

"I never walk," said the landlady; "when I go to Mindelbau my man drives me – I've more important things to do with my legs than walk them through the dust!"

"I like these people," confessed Herr Langen to me. "I like them very, very much. I think I shall take a room here for the whole summer."

"Why?"

"Oh, because they live close to the earth, and therefore despise it."

He pushed away his bowl of sour milk and lit a cigarette. We ate, solidly and seriously, until those seven and a half kilometres to Mindelbau stretched before us like an eternity. Even Karl's activity became so full fed that he lay on the ground and removed his leather waistbelt. Elsa suddenly leaned over to Fritz and whispered, who on hearing her to the end and asking her if she loved him, got up and made a little speech.

"We – we wish to celebrate our betrothal by – by – asking you all to drive back with us in the landlord's cart – if – it will hold us!"



"Oh, what a beautiful, noble idea!" said Frau Kellermann, heaving a sigh of relief that audibly burst two hoops.

"It is my little gift," said Elsa to the Advanced Lady, who by virtue of three portions almost wept tears of gratitude.

Squeezed into the peasant cart and driven by the landlord, who showed his contempt for mother earth by spitting savagely every now and again, we jolted home again, and the nearer we came to Mindelbau the more we loved it and one another.

"We must have many excursions like this," said Herr Erhardt to me, "for one surely gets to know a person in the simple surroundings of the open air – one *shares* the same joys – one feels friendship. What is it your Shakespeare says? One moment, I have it. The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried – grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel!"

"But," said I, feeling very friendly towards him, "the bother about my soul is that it refuses to grapple anybody at all – and I am sure that the dead weight of a friend whose adoption it had tried would kill it immediately. Never yet has it shown the slightest sign of a hoop!"

He bumped against my knees and excused himself and the cart.

"My dear little lady, you must not take the quotation literally. Naturally, one is not physically conscious of the hoops; but hoops there are in the soul of him or her who loves his fellow-men... Take this afternoon, for instance. How did we start out? As strangers you might almost say, and yet – all of us – how have we come home?"

"In a cart," said the only remaining joy, who sat upon his mother's lap and felt sick.

We skirted the field that we had passed through, going round by the cemetery. Herr Langen leaned over the edge of the seat and greeted the graves. He was sitting next to the Advanced Lady – inside the shelter of her shoulder. I heard her murmur: "You look like a little boy with your hair blowing about in the wind." Herr Langen, slightly less bitter – watched the last graves disappear. And I heard her murmur: "Why are you so sad? I too am very sad sometimes – but – you look young enough for me to dare to say this – I – too – know of much joy!"

"What do you know?" said he.

I leaned over and touched the Advanced Lady's hand. "Hasn't it been a nice afternoon?" I said questioningly. "But you know, that theory of yours about women and Love – it's as old as the hill – oh, older!"

From the road a sudden shout of triumph. Yes, there he was again – white beard, silk handkerchief and undaunted enthusiasm.

"What did I say? Eight kilometres it – is!"

"Seven and a half!" shrieked Herr Erhardt.

"Why, then, do you return in carts? Eight kilometres it must be."



Herr Erhardt made a cup of his hands and stood up in the jolting cart while Frau Kellermann clung to his knees. "Seven and a half!"

"Ignorance must not go uncontradicted!" I said to the Advanced Lady.

