CHAPTER-III

STILL WATERS
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Henry James, whose sympathies for the French were keen, contributed *Still waters* and it appeared in the second of the six numbers of the *Balloon Post*, on April 12, 1871. This play was staged in Boston in aid of the destitute people of France, victims of the Franco-Prussian war.

*Still Waters* is James’ second one-act play among his three one-act plays. The title of the play suggests that of Tom Taylor’s play *Still Waters Run Deep* which James saw as a boy. The play has three characters; Emma, Felix and Horace. This is a triangular love story.

The play opens as Felix is painting a beautiful scenery by the side of the sea, in the piazza of a cottage. It is James’ interest in painting which made him portray a painter in the play. Felix, in the opening lines gives a clear picture about other characters in the play. Just as in his first play, *Pyramus and Thisbe*, the opening of *Still Waters* is also soliloquy giving a clear description of Horace, a surveyor and Emma, the heroine of the play. Felix likes Emma for her decency and is in love with her.
Horace, the passive hero of the play, also loves Emma but in silence. He feels inferior to express his love to her. Horace meets Felix in the piazza which is owned by Emma. By seeing Felix, Horace compares himself with him:

I'm little and modest and ugly! but he! He's six feet high, with enormous whiskers and a still enormous-impudence- and so, with all his enormities, people swallow him.1

Horace finds a little book of Adelaide Proctor's poems on Felix's table. After seeing the book of Emma, Horace thinks that Emma is in love with Felix. He speaks to her:

she'll think it's Felix, and that will make her happy,- half- happy, half miserable, as people are when they're in love-even when the loved object is absolutely indifferent, or, what is worse, partial to another.2

Emma has a special inclination towards Horace as the latter assists her in various aspects. But she never exposes her inclination. On an occasion,

2. Ibid., p. 90.
Emma asks Horace to bring some essence from the nearby village. James' wit can be observed at this juncture:

Emma. Don't hurry; you know it's hot. Essence, remember.

Horace. Quintessence, I promise you.  

As Horace was proceeding to the village, Felix requests him to get a state-room booked on a boat. Emma expresses her view on Horace, after his departure, to Felix:

He's going because he's bored. What can I do? I wish I were only a little brighter! He thinks me a common creature! This last hour! I may never see him again. I could do something wild!  

Emma's concern was that Horace was not showing any inclination towards her. Meanwhile Emma gets engaged to Felix. By seeing his portrait she openly denounces his artistry and says she hates his painting:

Felix . (Emma takes the sketch and looks at it in silence)

I hope you like it.

Emma . (After an interval) To tell the truth, -I don't.

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3. Ibid., p.90.
Felix. (staring but smiling) Brava! There’s nothing
I like as a little criticism.

Emma. I am no critic; but I don’t like it. I hate it.

Felix. (laughing) Nay, that’s not criticism; its passion.4

Emma’s reaction is rude but her comment doesn’t perturb Felix as he takes
a lighter note on the comment. He can be regarded as a perfect professionalist. Emma snubs each and every query that was asked by Felix but
his love for her makes forget all his insults. When Felix says that her presence makes him forget all sorrows, she repents for her mistake:

Emma. (After a silence) I’ve been unjust. I beg a thousand
pardons.

Felix. I forgive you, but the next time I come don’t
treat me as a monster, to be fed at the end of
a long pole.5

Emma comes to him and asks him to visit again:

Emma. Will you come again?

Felix. Do you invite me?

Emma. Do you accept me?

4. Ibid, p.91.
5. Ibid, p.91.
Felix. Not till I'm invited-what a jolly sunset!

Emma. You had better sketch.6

After a along conversation with Felix, Emma develops a strong desire to come closer to him. packs ups his bundle for the journey. On seeing the paleness in Emma’s face, Horace feels that it might be Felix’s departure that is causing the paleness and immediately he commits himself to bring them together ands worries about his crippled love:

...my love was born a cripple, to sit on a stool in a
dark corner- hers with the wings of Ariel to flutter
and frolic in the light....7

Horace’s passiveness and pessimism had made him to deprive his heart to Emma. Horace now decides to stop Felix and tells him that Emma is in love with him. Astonished Felix thus speaks to Horace:

ah, The ewig webliche! You are a passive feminine

6. Ibid. P.91.
7. Ibid. p.92.
creature, Horace; you have a fellow-feeling for
lovelorn maidens. Seriously I'm extremely obliged to
you. This is real friendship. 8

But Felix doubts this fact and tells Horace that Emma was proud and he
was modest and wonders how she suddenly changed her heart as she is
used to his very company. Felix proposes to unfold his love to Emma.

Emma steps upon the piazza, where Felix was staying, and offers
him her hand. Felix praises her:

For these days I have done nothing else; your complexion,
your movements, the sound of your voice, everything that
makes the charming girl you are. 9

At this juncture suddenly Felix expresses his inner feelings to Emma:

Felix. Let me be plain. I love you!

Emma. Felix! -Weigh your words. I have a heart.

Have a conscience.

Felix. I love you, I love you; on my conscience,

I love you! (falls on his knees) 10

8. Ibid., p.95.
9. Ibid., p.95.
10. Ibid., p.95
Emma never expected such a proposal from Felix and aptly tells him that he is a stranger and further tells him that he hardly exchanged words with her. Felix becomes desperate and tries to motivate her to love him. She turns down the proposal and says that she has a 'passion for dignity'.

Felix then reveals that Horace had instigated him to love Emma. Emma didn't expect this type of deed by Horace. By this time Horace decides to flee from that place. He comes to Emma to bid farewell. Emma didn't expect his departure. Horace tells Emma that he is pushing off to Europe. Before his departure he asks Emma to take away her book, Adelaïde Proctor's Poems, in which she has described her and thereon her views on love and life. He tells her that the book is every thing to him as it had made him realize the feelings of love and life through her scribbling. He moves ahead with his sorrowful journey.

Emma wonders why Horace had taken her book. She asks Felix about that man's intention and attitude. Felix, with a cool head, tells her that Horace too was in love with her and further says that he had sacrificed his love to him. Astonished Emma bursts out on knowing the sacrifice made by the poor creature:
In love with me himself? And yet he told you?

- Horace- little Horace! How strange! 11.

At this moment Felix goes towards he to console and to further reiterate his love but Emma doesn’t allow him even to touch her. Realizing the true and sincere love of Horace, Emma pays a rich tribute to Horace’s love and verily snubs Felix:

Don’t touch me, Felix. I’d rather not go to the rocks.

I prefer to stay here (still pensive) His love- his sacrifice!

Dear, dear! 12.

Felix after seeing the reaction of Emma says these words for the sake of his lost love; for a consolation;

Don’t, don’t! I won’t, I won’t! Must I already resort to a cigar for consolation? 13.

The plot of this play- that of a passive hero, worshipping the heroine in silence, ready to abdicate in another’s favour- resembles that of such early tales as The Story of a Year and A Most Extraordinary Case and foreshadows many later situations including that of Guy Domville.

11. Ibid., p.97.
12. Ibid., P.97.
13. Ibid., P. 97.
The triangle indeed is not unlike that of the later play and the renunciatory hero has much in common with Guy. His last words, "farewell. Be happy", have the same ring as the speech James was to write for Guy thirty years later. "Be kind to him. Be good to her. Be good to her."