

Eighth Decade 2000-2009

The Heiress Scene with cuts (Act I, Scene 3) 2009-10

(Scene: morning, Dr. Sloper's parlor; Dr. Sloper stands as Mrs. Montgomery enters.)

DR. SLOPER: ...Good morning Mrs. Montgomery. Will you sit down here where we may talk? *(leads her to a chair)* You gathered from my note that I wish to ask you a few questions...about your brother?

MRS. MONTGOMERY: ... Yes, I understood that.

DR. SLOPER: Did you tell him that you were coming here this morning?

MRS. MONTGOMERY: No, Doctor. I thought I would prefer to tell him *after* I had seen you.

DR. SLOPER: Thank you. You must understand my situation—my state of mind. Your brother wishes to marry my daughter, so I must find out what sort of young man he is. A good way to do so seemed to be to meet you...

MRS. MONTGOMERY: *(politely)* I'm very happy to meet you.

DR. SLOPER: ...If my girl should marry your brother, her whole happiness will depend on his being a good fellow. I want you to tell me something about his character. What sort of gentleman is he? *(He sits on a chair facing her.)*

MRS. MONTGOMERY: Well, Doctor, he is intelligent and he is charming. He is a wonderful companion.

DR. SLOPER: Yes, I know that! But is he reliable? Is he trustworthy? Is he—responsible?

MRS. MONTGOMERY: Well, if you mean, is he financially secure, he is not, Doctor. But I'm sure you must know what.

DR. SLOPER: Yes, he told me himself.

MRS. MONTGOMERY: That is another thing about Morris. He is honest.

DR. SLOPER: Is he? Is he then honest about his feeling for my daughter?

MRS. MONTGOMERY: *(Gravely)* Oh, I don't know that, Doctor. I never could say what goes on in people's hearts. Could you? ... It is natural to want some assurance...I want that, too. I am very anxious that Morris shall make a happy marriage...he has lived with me since he was sixteen.

DR. SLOPER: I have nothing but my impression to go by, Mrs. Montgomery...your brother strikes me as selfish...he told me that he had used up a small inheritance. Did he use it well?

MRS. MONTGOMERY: (*Smiling*) Probably you would not think so, Doctor, but from his point of view he did a great deal with it. He saw Europe, he met many interesting people, he enlarged his capacities.

DR. SLOPER: Did he help you, ma'am?... You are widowed and you have children...

MRS. MONTGOMERY: You want me to complain about him, sir. But I have no complaint. I have brought him up as if he were my child, and I have accepted the good and the bad in him... I think you expect too much of people.

DR. SLOPER: (*worriedly*) But you see, ma'am, these two young people have only know each other two weeks! ...

MRS. MONTGOMERY: (*smiles*) Yes, I know. To me, that's a good sign... They are listening to the promptings of their own hearts... they have just fallen in love... it's a matter of temperament. Morris has always made immediate responses to beauty, in any form.

DR. SLOPER: In women? ... Catherine! Catherine, will you come downstairs, please?

MRS. MONTGOMERY: I am glad to meet your daughter. I hoped you would bring us together. (*she picks up a miniature*) Is this she? ... She is very beautiful.

DR. SLOPER: No. That is a picture of my wife... yes, she *was*—very beautiful. (*As Catherine enters, Mrs. Montgomery puts down the miniature and looks up at Catherine and registers some surprise as Catherine is plain, shy, and unworldly in contrast to her mother and accomplished father.*)

MRS. MONTGOMERY: Oh... (*Recovers*) Ah, Miss Sloper—I am very happy to meet you (*extends her hand*)

CATHERINE: (*Very shy*) Thank you.... (*To Dr. Sloper*) Didn't Morris come? (*Anxiously*) Isn't he coming?

DR. SLOPER: No... (*Patiently*) His appointment is for eleven, Catherine.

MRS. MONTGOMERY: ...Er... your aunt tells me that you are interested in hospital charities... and my brother tells me you have an aunt visiting you, Miss Sloper... Does she like our city?...

CATHERINE: ...Yes... Father, may I ask Mrs. Montgomery to try my coriander cookies....?

DR. SLOPER: Very well...

CATHERINE: (*As she leaves for the kitchen, to Mrs. Montgomery*) I think you will find them quite—delicate.

MRS. MONTGOMERY: She is very shy.

DR. SLOPER: Yes, she is.

MRS. MONTGOMERY: Perhaps she is less shy with Morris?

DR. SLOPER: Has your brother listened *only* to the promptings of his heart? You said, love at first sight. Well, you were right about Catherine. Were you right about him?

MRS. MONTGOMERY: Well, I—I can only suppose that Morris is more mature in his feelings than I had thought. This time he has not sought out superficial charms, but has considered the gentle character underneath.

DR. SLOPER: Well, I believe that her money is her prime attraction.

MRS. MONTGOMERY: What money?

DR. SLOPER: She is an heiress! Didn't your brother tell you that...she has ten thousand a year from her mother, and on my death she will have twice as much more.

MRS. MONTGOMERY: She will be immensely rich!

DR. SLOPER: Yes, she will. Of course, if she marries a man I don't approve, I shall leave my part to the Clinic....And consider how he has behaved with money...He gratified his every wish! Look at his gloves...the finest chamois...Will he help you with this fortune he hopes to marry? I would stake my life he would not...tell me I'm wrong.

MRS. MONTGOMERY: (*Rising*) I must go now.

DR. SLOPER: Mrs. Montgomery, she will believe you. Will you tell my daughter the truth about your brother's motives?

MRS. MONTGOMERY:I don't know the truth, Doctor. I don't know the truth of anyone's motives.

DR. SLOPER: I think his are clear...pitifully clear. His is in love with her money.

MRS. MONTGOMERY: You want me to tell her *that*?

DR. SLOPER: Yes.

MRS. MONTGOMERY: I won't!

DR. SLOPER: You see, you still protect him!

MRS. MONTGOMERY: No, it is the girl I protect! Am I to tell her that she is undesirable—that she is unloved! Why, it would break her heart! I would not say that to any girl! (*She begins to leave*)

DR. SLOPER: (*He follows and stops her.*) What am I to do?

MRS. MONTGOMERY: I don't know. But if you are so opposed to this marriage, then as a father you must find a kinder way of stopping it. Good day, Doctor.

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