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A detailed oil painting of Henry James, showing him from the chest up. He has a serious expression, looking slightly to the right. He is wearing a dark, high-collared coat over a white shirt and a dark bow tie. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights on his forehead and nose, and deep shadows on the sides of his face and in his clothing. The background is dark and indistinct.

**SHORT STORIES
VOLUME 2**

HENRY JAMES

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Short Stories, Volume 2 by Henry James.

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Mrs. Temperly

I

‘Why, Cousin Raymond, how can you suppose? Why, she’s only sixteen!’

‘She told me she was seventeen,’ said the young man, as if it made a great difference.

‘Well, only *just!*’ Mrs. Temperly replied, in the tone of graceful, reasonable concession.

‘Well, that’s a very good age for me. I’m very young.’

‘You are old enough to know better,’ the lady remarked, in her soft, pleasant voice, which always drew the sting from a reproach, and enabled you to swallow it as you would a cooked plum, without the stone. ‘Why, she hasn’t finished her education!’

‘That’s just what I mean,’ said her interlocutor. ‘It would finish it beautifully for her to marry me.’

‘Have you finished yours, my dear?’ Mrs. Temperly inquired. ‘The way you young people talk about marrying!’ she exclaimed, looking at the itinerant functionary with the long wand who touched into a flame the tall gas-lamp on the other side of the Fifth Avenue. The pair were standing, in the recess of a window, in one of the big public rooms of an immense hotel, and the October day was turning to dusk.

‘Well, would you have us leave it to the old?’ Raymond asked. ‘That’s just what I think—she would be such a help to me,’ he continued. ‘I want to go back to Paris to study more. I have come home too soon. I don’t know half enough; they know more here than I thought. So it would be perfectly easy, and we should all be together.’

‘Well, my dear, when you do come back to Paris we will talk about it,’ said Mrs. Temperly, turning away from the window.

‘I should like it better, Cousin Maria, if you trusted me a little more,’ Raymond sighed, observing that she was not really giving her thoughts to what he said. She irritated him somehow; she was so full of her impending departure, of her arrangements, her last duties and memoranda. She was not exactly important, any more than she was humble; she was too conciliatory for the one and too positive for the other. But she bustled quietly and gave one the sense of being ‘up to’ everything; the successive steps of her enterprise were in advance perfectly clear to her, and he could see that her imagination (conventional as she was she had plenty of that faculty) had already taken up its abode on one of those fine *premiers* which she had never seen, but which by instinct she seemed to know all about, in the very best part of the quarter of the Champs Elysées. If she ruffled him envy had perhaps something to do with it: she was to set sail on the morrow for the city of his affection and he was to stop in New York, where the fact that he was but half pleased did not alter the fact that he had his studio on his hands and that it was a bad one (though perhaps as good as any use he should put it to), which no one would be in a hurry to relieve him of.

It was easy for him to talk to Mrs. Temperly in that airy way about going back, but he couldn’t go back unless the old gentleman gave him the means. He had already given him a great many things in the past, and with the others coming on (Marian’s marriage-outfit, within three months, had cost literally thousands), Raymond had not at present the face to ask for more. He must sell some pictures first, and to sell them he must first paint them. It was his misfortune that he saw what he wanted to do so much better than he could do it. But he must

really try and please himself—an effort that appeared more possible now that the idea of following Dora across the ocean had become an incentive. In spite of secret aspirations and even intentions, however, it was not encouraging to feel that he made really no impression at all on Cousin Maria. This certitude was so far from agreeable to him that he almost found it in him to drop the endearing title by which he had hitherto addressed her. It was only that, after all, her husband had been distantly related to his mother. It was not as a cousin that he was interested in Dora, but as something very much more intimate. I know not whether it occurred to him that Mrs. Temperly herself would never give his displeasure the benefit of dropping the affectionate form. She might shut her door to him altogether, but he would always be her kinsman and her dear. She was much addicted to these little embellishments of human intercourse—the friendly apostrophe and even the caressing hand—and there was something homely and cosy, a rustic, motherly *bonhomie*, in her use of them. She was as lavish of them as she was really careful in the selection of her friends.

She stood there with her hand in her pocket, as if she were feeling for something; her little plain, pleasant face was presented to him with a musing smile, and he vaguely wondered whether she were fumbling for a piece of money to buy him off from wishing to marry her daughter. Such an idea would be quite in keeping with the disguised levity with which she treated his state of mind. If her levity was wrapped up in the air of tender solicitude for everything that related to the feelings of her child, that only made her failure to appreciate his suit more deliberate. She struck him almost as impertinent (at the same time that he knew this was never her intention) as she looked up at him—her tiny proportions always made her throw back her head and set something dancing in her cap—and inquired whether he had noticed if she gave two keys, tied together by a blue ribbon, to Susan Winkle, when that faithful but flurried domestic met them in the lobby. She was thinking only of questions of luggage, and the fact that he wished to marry Dora was the smallest incident in their getting off.

‘I think you ask me that only to change the subject,’ he said. ‘I don’t believe that ever in your life you have been unconscious of what you have done with your keys.’

‘Not often, but you make me nervous,’ she answered, with her patient, honest smile.

‘Oh, Cousin Maria!’ the young man exclaimed, ambiguously, while Mrs. Temperly looked humanely at some totally uninteresting people who came straggling into the great hot, frescoed, velvety drawing-room, where it was as easy to see you were in an hotel as it was to see that, if you were, you were in one of the very best. Mrs. Temperly, since her husband’s death, had passed much of her life at hotels, where she flattered herself that she preserved the tone of domestic life free from every taint and promoted the refined development of her children; but she selected them as well as she selected her friends. Somehow they became better from the very fact of her being there, and her children were smuggled in and out in the most extraordinary way; one never met them racing and whooping, as one did hundreds of others, in the lobbies. Her frequentation of hotels, where she paid enormous bills, was part of her expensive but practical way of living, and also of her theory that, from one week to another, she was going to Europe for a series of years as soon as she had wound up certain complicated affairs which had devolved upon her at her husband’s death. If these affairs had dragged on it was owing to their inherent troublesomeness and implied no doubt of her capacity to bring them to a solution and to administer the very considerable fortune that Mr. Temperly had left. She used, in a superior, unprejudiced way, every convenience that the civilisation of her time offered her, and would have lived without hesitation in a lighthouse if this had contributed to her general scheme. She was now, in the interest of this scheme,

preparing to use Europe, which she had not yet visited and with none of whose foreign tongues she was acquainted. This time she was certainly embarking.

She took no notice of the discredit which her young friend appeared to throw on the idea that she had nerves, and betrayed no suspicion that he believed her to have them in about the same degree as a sound, productive Alderney cow. She only moved toward one of the numerous doors of the room, as if to remind him of all she had still to do before night. They passed together into the long, wide corridor of the hotel—a vista of soft carpet, numbered doors, wandering women and perpetual gaslight—and approached the staircase by which she must ascend again to her domestic duties. She counted over, serenely, for his enlightenment, those that were still to be performed; but he could see that everything would be finished by nine o'clock—the time she had fixed in advance. The heavy luggage was then to go to the steamer; she herself was to be on board, with the children and the smaller things, at eleven o'clock the next morning. They had thirty pieces, but this was less than they had when they came from California five years before. She wouldn't have done that again. It was true that at that time she had had Mr. Temperly to help: he had died, Raymond remembered, six months after the settlement in New York. But, on the other hand, she knew more now. It was one of Mrs. Temperly's amiable qualities that she admitted herself so candidly to be still susceptible of development. She never professed to be in possession of all the knowledge requisite for her career; not only did she let her friends know that she was always learning, but she appealed to them to instruct her, in a manner which was in itself an example.

When Raymond said to her that he took for granted she would let him come down to the steamer for a last good-bye, she not only consented graciously but added that he was free to call again at the hotel in the evening, if he had nothing better to do. He must come between nine and ten; she expected several other friends—those who wished to see the last of them, yet didn't care to come to the ship. Then he would see all of them—she meant all of themselves, Dora and Effie and Tishy, and even Mademoiselle Bourde. She spoke exactly as if he had never approached her on the subject of Dora and as if Tishy, who was ten years of age, and Mademoiselle Bourde, who was the French governess and forty, were objects of no less an interest to him. He felt what a long pull he should have ever to get round her, and the sting of this knowledge was in his consciousness that Dora was really in her mother's hands. In Mrs. Temperly's composition there was not a hint of the bully; but none the less she held her children—she would hold them for ever. It was not simply by tenderness; but what it was by she knew best herself. Raymond appreciated the privilege of seeing Dora again that evening as well as on the morrow; yet he was so vexed with her mother that his vexation betrayed him into something that almost savoured of violence—a fact which I am ashamed to have to chronicle, as Mrs. Temperly's own urbanity deprived such breaches of every excuse. It may perhaps serve partly as an excuse for Raymond Bestwick that he was in love, or at least that he thought he was. Before she parted from him at the foot of the staircase he said to her, 'And of course, if things go as you like over there, Dora will marry some foreign prince.'

She gave no sign of resenting this speech, but she looked at him for the first time as if she were hesitating, as if it were not instantly clear to her what to say. It appeared to him, on his side, for a moment, that there was something strange in her hesitation, that abruptly, by an inspiration, she was almost making up her mind to reply that Dora's marriage to a prince was, considering Dora's peculiarities (he knew that her mother deemed her peculiar, and so did he, but that was precisely why he wished to marry her), so little probable that, after all, once such a union was out of the question, *he* might be no worse than another plain man. These, however, were not the words that fell from Mrs. Temperly's lips. Her embarrassment vanished in her clear smile. 'Do you know what Mr. Temperly used to say? He used to say that Dora was the pattern of an old maid—she would never make a choice.'

‘I hope—because that would have been too foolish—that he didn’t say she wouldn’t have a chance.’

‘Oh, a chance! what do you call by that fine name?’ Cousin Maria exclaimed, laughing, as she ascended the stair.

II

When he came back, after dinner, she was again in one of the public rooms; she explained that a lot of the things for the ship were spread out in her own parlours: there was no space to sit down. Raymond was highly gratified by this fact; it offered an opportunity for strolling away a little with Dora, especially as, after he had been there ten minutes, other people began to come in. They were entertained by the rest, by Effie and Tishy, who was allowed to sit up a little, and by Mademoiselle Bourde, who besought every visitor to indicate her a remedy that was *really* effective against the sea—some charm, some philter, some potion or spell. ‘Never mind, ma’m’selle, I’ve got a remedy,’ said Cousin Maria, with her cheerful decision, each time; but the French instructress always began afresh.

As the young man was about to be parted for an indefinite period from the girl whom he was ready to swear that he adored, it is clear that he ought to have been equally ready to swear that she was the fairest of her species. In point of fact, however, it was no less vivid to him than it had been before that he loved Dora Temperly for qualities which had nothing to do with straightness of nose or pinkness of complexion. Her figure was straight, and so was her character, but her nose was not, and Philistines and other vulgar people would have committed themselves, without a blush on their own flat faces, to the assertion that she was decidedly plain. In his artistic imagination he had analogies for her, drawn from legend and literature; he was perfectly aware that she struck many persons as silent, shy and angular, while his own version of her peculiarities was that she was like a figure on the *predella* of an early Italian painting or a mediæval maiden wandering about a lonely castle, with her lover gone to the Crusades. To his sense, Dora had but one defect—her admiration for her mother was too indiscriminating. An ardent young man may well be slightly vexed when he finds that a young lady will probably never care for him so much as she cares for her parent; and Raymond Bestwick had this added ground for chagrin, that Dora had—if she chose to take it—so good a pretext for discriminating. For she had nothing whatever in common with the others; she was not of the same stuff as Mrs. Temperly and Effie and Tishy.

She was original and generous and uncalculating, besides being full of perception and taste in regard to the things *he* cared about. She knew nothing of conventional signs or estimates, but understood everything that might be said to her from an artistic point of view. She was formed to live in a studio, and not in a stiff drawing-room, amid upholstery horribly new; and moreover her eyes and her voice were both charming. It was only a pity she was so gentle; that is, he liked it for himself, but he deplored it for her mother. He considered that he had virtually given that lady his word that he would not make love to her; but his spirits had risen since his visit of three or four hours before. It seemed to him, after thinking things over more intently, that a way would be opened for him to return to Paris. It was not probable that in the interval Dora would be married off to a prince; for in the first place the foolish race of princes would be sure not to appreciate her, and in the second she would not, in this matter, simply do her mother’s bidding—her gentleness would not go so far as that. She might remain single by the maternal decree, but she would not take a husband who was disagreeable to her. In this reasoning Raymond was obliged to shut his eyes very tight to the danger that some particular prince might not be disagreeable to her, as well as to the attraction proceeding from what her mother might announce that she would ‘do.’ He was perfectly aware that it was in Cousin Maria’s power, and would probably be in her pleasure, to settle a handsome marriage-fee

upon each of her daughters. He was equally certain that this had nothing to do with the nature of his own interest in the eldest, both because it was clear that Mrs. Temperly would do very little for *him*, and because he didn't care how little she did.

Effie and Tishy sat in the circle, on the edge of rather high chairs, while Mademoiselle Bourde surveyed in them with complacency the results of her own superiority. Tishy was a child, but Effie was fifteen, and they were both very nice little girls, arrayed in fresh travelling dresses and deriving a quaintness from the fact that Tishy was already armed, for foreign adventures, with a smart new reticule, from which she could not be induced to part, and that Effie had her finger in her 'place' in a fat red volume of *Murray*. Raymond knew that in a general way their mother would not have allowed them to appear in the drawing-room with these adjuncts, but something was to be allowed to the fever of anticipation. They were both pretty, with delicate features and blue eyes, and would grow up into worldly, conventional young ladies, just as Dora had not done. They looked at Mademoiselle Bourde for approval whenever they spoke, and, in addressing their mother alternately with that accomplished woman, kept their two languages neatly distinct.

Raymond had but a vague idea of who the people were who had come to bid Cousin Maria farewell, and he had no wish for a sharper one, though she introduced him, very definitely, to the whole group. She might make light of him in her secret soul, but she would never put herself in the wrong by omitting the smallest form. Fortunately, however, he was not obliged to like all her forms, and he foresaw the day when she would abandon this particular one. She was not so well made up in advance about Paris but that it would be in reserve for her to detest the period when she had thought it proper to 'introduce all round.' Raymond detested it already, and tried to make Dora understand that he wished her to take a walk with him in the corridors. There was a gentleman with a curl on his forehead who especially displeased him; he made childish jokes, at which the others laughed all at once, as if they had rehearsed for it—jokes *à la portée* of Effie and Tishy and mainly about them. These two joined in the merriment, as if they followed perfectly, as indeed they might, and gave a small sigh afterward, with a little factitious air. Dora remained grave, almost sad; it was when she was different, in this way, that he felt how much he liked her. He hated, in general, a large ring of people who had drawn up chairs in the public room of an hotel: some one was sure to undertake to be funny.

He succeeded at last in drawing Dora away; he endeavoured to give the movement a casual air. There was nothing peculiar, after all, in their walking a little in the passage; a dozen other persons were doing the same. The girl had the air of not suspecting in the least that he could have anything particular to say to her—of responding to his appeal simply out of her general gentleness. It was not in her companion's interest that her mind should be such a blank; nevertheless his conviction that in spite of the ministrations of Mademoiselle Bourde she was not falsely ingenuous made him repeat to himself that he would still make her his own. They took several turns in the hall, during which it might still have appeared to Dora Temperly that her cousin Raymond had nothing particular to say to her. He remarked several times that he should certainly turn up in Paris in the spring; but when once she had replied that she was very glad that subject seemed exhausted. The young man cared little, however; it was not a question now of making any declaration: he only wanted to be with her. Suddenly, when they were at the end of the corridor furthest removed from the room they had left, he said to her: 'Your mother is very strange. Why has she got such an idea about Paris?'

'How do you mean, such an idea?' He had stopped, making the girl stand there before him.

‘Well, she thinks so much of it without having ever seen it, or really knowing anything. She appears to have planned out such a great life there.’

‘She thinks it’s the best place,’ Dora rejoined, with the dim smile that always charmed our young man.

‘The best place for what?’

‘Well, to learn French.’ The girl continued to smile.

‘Do you mean for her? She’ll never learn it; she can’t.’

‘No; for us. And other things.’

‘You know it already. And *you* know other things,’ said Raymond.

‘She wants us to know them better—better than any girls know them.’

‘I don’t know what things you mean,’ exclaimed the young man, rather impatiently.

‘Well, we shall see,’ Dora returned, laughing.

He said nothing for a minute, at the end of which he resumed: ‘I hope you won’t be offended if I say that it seems curious your mother should have such aspirations—such Napoleonic plans. I mean being just a quiet little lady from California, who has never seen any of the kind of thing that she has in her head.’

‘That’s just why she wants to see it, I suppose; and I don’t know why her being from California should prevent. At any rate she wants us to have the best. Isn’t the best taste in Paris?’

‘Yes; and the worst.’ It made him gloomy when she defended the old lady, and to change the subject he asked: ‘Aren’t you sorry, this last night, to leave your own country for such an indefinite time?’

It didn’t cheer him up that the girl should answer: ‘Oh, I would go anywhere with mother!’

‘And with *her*?’ Raymond demanded, sarcastically, as Mademoiselle Bourde came in sight, emerging from the drawing-room. She approached them; they met her in a moment, and she informed Dora that Mrs. Temperly wished her to come back and play a part of that composition of Saint-Saens—the last one she had been learning—for Mr. and Mrs. Parminter: they wanted to judge whether their daughter could manage it.

‘I don’t believe she can,’ said Dora, smiling; but she was moving away to comply when her companion detained her a moment.

Are you going to bid me good-bye?’

‘Won’t you come back to the drawing-room?’

‘I think not; I don’t like it.’

‘And to mamma—you’ll say nothing?’ the girl went on.

‘Oh, we have made our farewell; we had a special interview this afternoon.’

‘And you won’t come to the ship in the morning?’

Raymond hesitated a moment. ‘Will Mr. and Mrs. Parminter be there?’

‘Oh, surely they will!’ Mademoiselle Bourde declared, surveying the young couple with a certain tactful serenity, but standing very close to them, as if it might be her duty to interpose.

‘Well then, I won’t come.’

‘Well, good-bye then,’ said the girl gently, holding out her hand.

‘Good-bye, Dora.’ He took it, while she smiled at him, but he said nothing more—he was so annoyed at the way Mademoiselle Bourde watched them. He only looked at Dora; she seemed to him beautiful.

‘My dear child—that poor Madame Parminter,’ the governess murmured.

‘I shall come over very soon,’ said Raymond, as his companion turned away.

‘That will be charming.’ And she left him quickly, without looking back.

Mademoiselle Bourde lingered—he didn’t know why, unless it was to make him feel, with her smooth, finished French assurance, which had the manner of extreme benignity, that she was following him up. He sometimes wondered whether she copied Mrs. Temperly or whether Mrs. Temperly tried to copy her. Presently she said, slowly rubbing her hands and smiling at him:

‘You will have plenty of time. We shall be long in Paris.’

‘Perhaps you will be disappointed,’ Raymond suggested.

‘How can we be—unless *you* disappoint us?’ asked the governess, sweetly.

He left her without ceremony: the imitation was probably on the part of Cousin Maria.

III

‘Only just ourselves,’ her note had said; and he arrived, in his natural impatience, a few moments before the hour. He remembered his Cousin Maria’s habitual punctuality, but when he entered the splendid *salon* in the quarter of the Parc Monceau—it was there that he had found her established—he saw that he should have it, for a little, to himself. This was pleasing, for he should be able to look round—there were admirable things to look at. Even to-day Raymond Bestwick was not sure that he had learned to paint, but he had no doubt of his judgment of the work of others, and a single glance showed him that Mrs. Temperly had ‘known enough’ to select, for the adornment of her walls, half a dozen immensely valuable specimens of contemporary French art. Her choice of other objects had been equally enlightened, and he remembered what Dora had said to him five years before—that her mother wished them to have the best. Evidently, now they had got it; if five years was a long time for him to have delayed (with his original plan of getting off so soon) to come to Paris, it was a very short one for Cousin Maria to have taken to arrive at the highest good.

Rather to his surprise the first person to come in was Effie, now so complete a young lady, and such a very pretty girl, that he scarcely would have known her. She was fair, she was graceful, she was lovely, and as she entered the room, blushing and smiling, with a little floating motion which suggested that she was in a liquid element, she brushed down the ribbons of a delicate Parisian *toilette de jeune fille*. She appeared to expect that he would be surprised, and as if to justify herself for being the first she said, ‘Mamma told me to come; she knows you are here; she said I was not to wait.’ More than once, while they conversed, during the next few moments, before any one else arrived, she repeated that she was acting by her mamma’s directions. Raymond perceived that she had not only the costume but several other of the attributes of a *jeune fille*. They talked, I say, but with a certain difficulty, for Effie asked him no questions, and this made him feel a little stiff about thrusting information upon her. Then she was so pretty, so exquisite, that this by itself disconcerted him. It seemed to him almost that she had falsified a prophecy, instead of bringing one to pass. He had foretold

that she would be like this; the only difference was that she was so much more like it. She made no inquiries about his arrival, his people in America, his plans; and they exchanged vague remarks about the pictures, quite as if they had met for the first time.

When Cousin Maria came in Effie was standing in front of the fire fastening a bracelet, and he was at a distance gazing in silence at a portrait of his hostess by Bastien-Lepage. One of his apprehensions had been that Cousin Maria would allude ironically to the difference there had been between his threat (because it had been really almost a threat) of following them speedily to Paris and what had in fact occurred; but he saw in a moment how superficial this calculation had been. Besides, when had Cousin Maria ever been ironical? She treated him as if she had seen him last week (which did not preclude kindness), and only expressed her regret at having missed his visit the day before, in consequence of which she had immediately written to him to come and dine. He might have come from round the corner, instead of from New York and across the wintry ocean. This was a part of her 'cosiness,' her friendly, motherly optimism, of which, even of old, the habit had been never to recognise nor allude to disagreeable things; so that to-day, in the midst of so much that was not disagreeable, the custom would of course be immensely confirmed.

Raymond was perfectly aware that it was not a pleasure, even for her, that, for several years past, things should have gone so ill in New York with his family and himself. His father's embarrassments, of which Marian's silly husband had been the cause and which had terminated in general ruin and humiliation, to say nothing of the old man's 'stroke' and the necessity, arising from it, for a renunciation on his own part of all present thoughts of leaving home again and even for a partial relinquishment of present work, the old man requiring so much of his personal attention—all this constituted an episode which could not fail to look sordid and dreary in the light of Mrs. Temperly's high success. The odour of success was in the warm, slightly heavy air, which seemed distilled from rare old fabrics, from brocades and tapestries, from the deep, mingled tones of the pictures, the subdued radiance of cabinets and old porcelain and the jars of winter roses standing in soft circles of lamp-light. Raymond felt himself in the presence of an effect in regard to which he remained in ignorance of the cause—a mystery that required a key. Cousin Maria's success was unexplained so long as she simply stood there with her little familiar, comforting, upward gaze, talking in coaxing cadences, with exactly the same manner she had brought ten years ago from California, to a tall, bald, bending, smiling young man, evidently a foreigner, who had just come in and whose name Raymond had not caught from the lips of the *maître d'hôtel*. Was he just one of themselves—was he there for Effie, or perhaps even for Dora? The unexplained must preponderate till Dora came in; he found he counted upon her, even though in her letters (it was true that for the last couple of years they had come but at long intervals) she had told him so little about their life. She never spoke of people; she talked of the books she read, of the music she had heard or was studying (a whole page sometimes about the last concert at the Conservatoire), the new pictures and the manner of the different artists.

When she entered the room three or four minutes after the arrival of the young foreigner, with whom her mother conversed in just the accents Raymond had last heard at the hotel in the Fifth Avenue (he was obliged to admit that she gave herself no airs; it was clear that her success had not gone in the least to her head); when Dora at last appeared she was accompanied by Mademoiselle Bourde. The presence of this lady—he didn't know she was still in the house—Raymond took as a sign that they were really dining *en famille*, so that the young man was either an actual or a prospective intimate. Dora shook hands first with her cousin, but he watched the manner of her greeting with the other visitor and saw that it indicated extreme friendliness—on the part of the latter. If there was a charming flush in her cheek as he took her hand, that was the remainder of the colour that had risen there as she

came toward Raymond. It will be seen that our young man still had an eye for the element of fascination, as he used to regard it, in this quiet, dimly-shining maiden.

He saw that Effie was the only one who had changed (Tishy remained yet to be judged), except that Dora really looked older, quite as much older as the number of years had given her a right to: there was as little difference in her as there was in her mother. Not that she was like her mother, but she was perfectly like herself. Her meeting with Raymond was bright, but very still; their phrases were awkward and commonplace, and the thing was mainly a contact of looks—conscious, embarrassed, indirect, but brightening every moment with old familiarities. Her mother appeared to pay no attention, and neither, to do her justice, did Mademoiselle Bourde, who, after an exchange of expressive salutations with Raymond began to scrutinise Effie with little admiring gestures and smiles. She surveyed her from head to foot; she pulled a ribbon straight; she was evidently a flattering governess. Cousin Maria explained to Cousin Raymond that they were waiting for one more friend—a very dear lady. ‘But she lives near, and when people live near they are always late—haven’t you noticed that?’

‘Your hotel is far away, I know, and yet you were the first,’ Dora said, smiling to Raymond.

‘Oh, even if it were round the corner I should be the first—to come to *you!*’ the young man answered, speaking loud and clear, so that his words might serve as a notification to Cousin Maria that his sentiments were unchanged.

‘You are more French than the French,’ Dora returned.

‘You say that as if you didn’t like them: I hope you don’t,’ said Raymond, still with intentions in regard to his hostess.

‘We like them more and more, the more we see of them,’ this lady interposed; but gently, impersonally, and with an air of not wishing to put Raymond in the wrong.

‘*Mais j’espère bien!*’ cried Mademoiselle Bourde, holding up her head and opening her eyes very wide. ‘Such friendships as we form, and, I may say, as we inspire! *Je m’en rapporte à Effie*’, the governess continued.

‘We have received immense kindness; we have established relations that are so pleasant for us, Cousin Raymond. We have the *entrée* of so many charming homes,’ Mrs. Temperly remarked.

‘But ours is the most charming of all; that I will say,’ exclaimed Mademoiselle Bourde. ‘Isn’t it so, Effie?’

‘Oh yes, I think it is; especially when we are expecting the Marquise,’ Effie responded. Then she added, ‘But here she comes now; I hear her carriage in the court.’

The Marquise too was just one of themselves; she was a part of their charming home.

‘She *is* such a love!’ said Mrs. Temperly to the foreign gentleman, with an irrepressible movement of benevolence.

To which Raymond heard the gentleman reply that, Ah, she was the most distinguished woman in France.

‘Do you know Madame de Brives?’ Effie asked of Raymond, while they were waiting for her to come in.

She came in at that moment, and the girl turned away quickly without an answer.

‘How in the world should I know her?’ That was the answer he would have been tempted to give. He felt very much out of Cousin Maria’s circle. The foreign gentleman fingered his moustache and looked at him sidewise. The Marquise was a very pretty woman, fair and slender, of middle age, with a smile, a complexion, a diamond necklace, of great splendour, and a charming manner. Her greeting to her friends was sweet and familiar, and was accompanied with much kissing, of a sisterly, motherly, daughterly kind; and yet with this expression of simple, almost homely sentiment there was something in her that astonished and dazzled. She might very well have been, as the foreign young man said, the most distinguished woman in France. Dora had not rushed forward to meet her with nearly so much *empressement* as Effie, and this gave him a chance to ask the former who she was. The girl replied that she was her mother’s most intimate friend: to which he rejoined that that was not a description; what he wanted to know was her title to this exalted position.

‘Why, can’t you see it? She is beautiful and she is good.’

‘I see that she is beautiful; but how can I see that she is good?’

‘Good to mamma, I mean, and to Effie and Tishy.’

‘And isn’t she good to you?’

‘Oh, I don’t know her so well. But I delight to look at her.’

‘Certainly, that must be a great pleasure,’ said Raymond. He enjoyed it during dinner, which was now served, though his enjoyment was diminished by his not finding himself next to Dora. They sat at a small round table and he had at his right his Cousin Maria, whom he had taken in. On his left was Madame de Brives, who had the foreign gentleman for a neighbour. Then came Effie and Mademoiselle Bourde, and Dora was on the other side of her mother. Raymond regarded this as marked—a symbol of the fact that Cousin Maria would continue to separate them. He remained in ignorance of the other gentleman’s identity, and remembered how he had prophesied at the hotel in New York that his hostess would give up introducing people. It was a friendly, easy little family repast, as she had said it would be, with just a marquise and a secretary of embassy—Raymond ended by guessing that the stranger was a secretary of embassy—thrown in. So far from interfering with the family tone Madame de Brives directly contributed to it. She eminently justified the affection in which she was held in the house; she was in the highest degree sociable and sympathetic, and at the same time witty (there was no insipidity in Madame de Brives), and was the cause of Raymond’s making the reflection—as he had made it often in his earlier years—that an agreeable Frenchwoman is a triumph of civilisation. This did not prevent him from giving the Marquise no more than half of his attention; the rest was dedicated to Dora, who, on her side, though in common with Effie and Mademoiselle Bourde she bent a frequent, interested gaze on the splendid French lady, very often met our young man’s eyes with mute, vague but, to his sense, none the less valuable intimations. It was as if she knew what was going on in his mind (it is true that he scarcely knew it himself), and might be trusted to clear things up at some convenient hour.

Madame de Brives talked across Raymond, in excellent English, to Cousin Maria, but this did not prevent her from being gracious, even encouraging, to the young man, who was a little afraid of her and thought her a delightful creature. She asked him more questions about himself than any of them had done. Her conversation with Mrs. Temperly was of an intimate, domestic order, and full of social, personal allusions, which Raymond was unable to follow. It appeared to be concerned considerably with the private affairs of the old French *noblesse*, into whose councils—to judge by the tone of the Marquise—Cousin Maria had been admitted by acclamation. Every now and then Madame de Brives broke into French, and it was in this

tongue that she uttered an apostrophe to her hostess: ‘Oh, you, *ma toute-bonne*, you who have the genius of good sense!’ And she appealed to Raymond to know if his Cousin Maria had not the genius of good sense—the wisdom of the ages. The old lady did not defend herself from the compliment; she let it pass, with her motherly, tolerant smile; nor did Raymond attempt to defend her, for he felt the justice of his neighbour’s description: Cousin Maria’s good sense was incontestable, magnificent. She took an affectionate, indulgent view of most of the persons mentioned, and yet her tone was far from being vapid or vague. Madame de Brives usually remarked that they were coming very soon again to see her, she did them so much good. ‘The freshness of your judgment—the freshness of your judgment!’ she repeated, with a kind of glee, and she narrated that Eléonore (a personage unknown to Raymond) had said that she was a woman of Plutarch. Mrs. Temperly talked a great deal about the health of their friends; she seemed to keep the record of the influenzas and neuralgias of a numerous and susceptible circle. He did not find it in him quite to agree—the Marquise dropping the statement into his ear at a moment when their hostess was making some inquiry of Mademoiselle Bourde—that she was a nature absolutely marvellous; but he could easily see that to world-worn Parisians her quiet charities of speech and manner, with something quaint and rustic in their form, might be restorative and salutary. She allowed for everything, yet she was so good, and indeed Madame de Brives summed this up before they left the table in saying to her, ‘Oh, you, my dear, your success, more than any other that has ever taken place, has been a *succès de bonté*! Raymond was greatly amused at this idea of Cousin Maria’s *succès de bonté*: it seemed to him delightfully Parisian.

Before dinner was over she inquired of him how he had got on ‘in his profession’ since they last met, and he was too proud, or so he thought, to tell her anything but the simple truth, that he had not got on very well. If he was to ask her again for Dora it would be just as he was, an honourable but not particularly successful man, making no show of lures and bribes. ‘I am not a remarkably good painter,’ he said. ‘I judge myself perfectly. And then I have been handicapped at home. I have had a great many serious bothers and worries.’

‘Ah, we were so sorry to hear about your dear father.’

The tone of these words was kind and sincere; still Raymond thought that in this case her *bonté* might have gone a little further. At any rate this was the only allusion that she made to his bothers and worries. Indeed, she always passed over such things lightly; she was an optimist for others as well as for herself, which doubtless had a great deal to do (Raymond indulged in the reflection) with the headway she made in a society tired of its own pessimism.

After dinner, when they went into the drawing-room, the young man noted with complacency that this apartment, vast in itself, communicated with two or three others into which it would be easy to pass without attracting attention, the doors being replaced by old tapestries, looped up and offering no barrier. With pictures and curiosities all over the place, there were plenty of pretexts for wandering away. He lost no time in asking Dora whether her mother would send Mademoiselle Bourde after them if she were to go with him into one of the other rooms, the same way she had done—didn’t she remember?—that last night in New York, at the hotel. Dora didn’t admit that she remembered (she was too loyal to her mother for that, and Raymond foresaw that this loyalty would be a source of irritation to him again, as it had been in the past), but he perceived, all the same, that she had not forgotten. She raised no difficulty, and a few moments later, while they stood in an adjacent *salon* (he had stopped to admire a bust of Effie, wonderfully living, slim and juvenile, the work of one of the sculptors who are the pride of contemporary French art), he said to her, looking about him, ‘How has she done it so fast?’

‘Done what, Raymond?’

‘Why, done everything. Collected all these wonderful things; become intimate with Madame de Brives and every one else; organised her life—the life of all of you—so brilliantly.’

‘I have never seen mamma in a hurry,’ Dora replied.

‘Perhaps she will be, now that I have come,’ Raymond suggested, laughing.

The girl hesitated a moment ‘Yes, she was, to invite you—the moment she knew you were here.’

‘She has been most kind, and I talk like a brute. But I am liable to do worse—I give you notice. She won’t like it any more than she did before, if she thinks I want to make up to you.’

‘Don’t, Raymond—don’t!’ the girl exclaimed, gently, but with a look of sudden pain.

‘Don’t what, Dora?—don’t make up to you?’

‘Don’t begin to talk of those things. There is no need. We can go on being friends.’

‘I will do exactly as you prescribe, and heaven forbid I should annoy you. But would you mind answering me a question? It is very particular, very intimate.’ He stopped, and she only looked at him, saying nothing. So he went on: ‘Is it an idea of your mother’s that you should marry—some person here?’ He gave her a chance to reply, but still she was silent, and he continued: ‘Do you mind telling me this? Could it ever be an idea of your own?’

‘Do you mean some Frenchman?’

Raymond smiled. ‘Some protégé of Madame de Brives.’

Then the girl simply gave a slow, sad head-shake which struck him as the sweetest, proudest, most suggestive thing in the world. ‘Well, well, that’s all right,’ he remarked, cheerfully, and looked again a while at the bust, which he thought extraordinarily clever. ‘And haven’t *you* been done by one of these great fellows?’

‘Oh dear no; only mamma and Effie. But Tishy is going to be, in a month or two. The next time you come you must see her. She remembers you vividly.’

‘And I remember her that last night, with her reticule. Is she always pretty?’

Dora hesitated a moment. ‘She is a very sweet little creature, but she is not so pretty as Effie.’

‘And have none of them wished to do you—none of the painters?’

‘Oh, it’s not a question of me. I only wish them to let me alone.’

‘For me it would be a question of you, if you would sit for me. But I daresay your mother wouldn’t allow that.’

‘No, I think not,’ said Dora, smiling.

She smiled, but her companion looked grave. However, not to pursue the subject, he asked, abruptly, ‘Who is this Madame de Brives?’

‘If you lived in Paris you would know. She is very celebrated.’

‘Celebrated for what?’

‘For everything.’

‘And is she good—is she genuine?’ Raymond asked. Then, seeing something in the girl’s face, he added: ‘I told you I should be brutal again. Has she undertaken to make a great marriage for Effie?’

‘I don’t know what she has undertaken,’ said Dora, impatiently.

‘And then for Tishy, when Effie has been disposed of?’

‘Poor little Tishy!’ the girl continued, rather inscrutably.

‘And can she do nothing for you?’ the young man inquired.

Her answer surprised him—after a moment. ‘She has kindly offered to exert herself, but it’s no use.’

‘Well, that’s good. And who is it the young man comes for—the secretary of embassy?’

‘Oh, he comes for all of us,’ said Dora, laughing.

‘I suppose your mother would prefer a preference,’ Raymond suggested.

To this she replied, irrelevantly, that she thought they had better go back; but as Raymond took no notice of the recommendation she mentioned that the secretary was no one in particular. At this moment Effie, looking very rosy and happy, pushed through the *portière* with the news that her sister must come and bid good-bye to the Marquise. She was taking her to the Duchess’s—didn’t Dora remember? To the *bal blanc*—the *sauterie de jeunes filles*.

‘I thought we should be called,’ said Raymond, as he followed Effie; and he remarked that perhaps Madame de Brives would find something suitable at the Duchess’s.

‘I don’t know. Mamma would be very particular,’ the girl rejoined; and this was said simply, sympathetically, without the least appearance of deflection from that loyalty which Raymond deplored.

IV

‘You must come to us on the 17th; we expect to have a few people and some good music,’ Cousin Maria said to him before he quitted the house; and he wondered whether, the 17th being still ten days off, this might not be an intimation that they could abstain from his society until then. He chose, at any rate, not to take it as such, and called several times in the interval, late in the afternoon, when the ladies would be sure to have come in.

They were always there, and Cousin Maria’s welcome was, for each occasion, maternal, though when he took leave she made no allusion to future meetings—to his coming again; but there were always other visitors as well, collected at tea round the great fire of logs, in the friendly, brilliant drawing-room where the luxurious was no enemy to the casual and Mrs. Temperly’s manner of dispensing hospitality recalled to our young man somehow certain memories of his youthful time: visits in New England, at old homesteads flanked with elms, where a talkative, democratic, delightful farmer’s wife pressed upon her company rustic viands in which she herself had had a hand. Cousin Maria enjoyed the services of a distinguished *chef*, and delicious *petits fours* were served with her tea; but Raymond had a sense that to complete the impression hot home-made gingerbread should have been produced.

The atmosphere was suffused with the presence of Madame de Brives. She was either there or she was just coming or she was just gone; her name, her voice, her example and encouragement were in the air. Other ladies came and went—sometimes accompanied by gentlemen who looked worn out, had waxed moustaches and knew how to talk—and they were sometimes designated in the same manner as Madame de Brives; but she remained the Marquise *par excellence*, the incarnation of brilliancy and renown. The conversation moved among simple but civilised topics, was not dull and, considering that it consisted largely of

personalities, was not ill-natured. Least of all was it scandalous, for the girls were always there, Cousin Maria not having thought it in the least necessary, in order to put herself in accord with French traditions, to relegate her daughters to the middle distance. They occupied a considerable part of the foreground, in the prettiest, most modest, most becoming attitudes.

It was Cousin Maria's theory of her own behaviour that she did in Paris simply as she had always done; and though this would not have been a complete account of the matter Raymond could not fail to notice the good sense and good taste with which she laid down her lines and the quiet *bonhomie* of the authority with which she caused the tone of the American home to be respected. Scandal stayed outside, not simply because Effie and Tishy were there, but because, even if Cousin Maria had received alone, she never would have received evil-speakers. Indeed, for Raymond, who had been accustomed to think that in a general way he knew pretty well what the French capital was, this was a strange, fresh Paris altogether, destitute of the salt that seasoned it for most palates, and yet not insipid nor innutritive. He marvelled at Cousin Maria's air, in such a city, of knowing, of recognising nothing bad: all the more that it represented an actual state of mind. He used to wonder sometimes what she would do and how she would feel if some day, in consequence of researches made by the Marquise in the *grand monde*, she should find herself in possession of a son-in-law formed according to one of the types of which *he* had impressions. However, it was not credible that Madame de Brives would play her a trick. There were moments when Raymond almost wished she might—to see how Cousin Maria would handle the gentleman.

Dora was almost always taken up by visitors, and he had scarcely any direct conversation with her. She was there, and he was glad she was there, and she knew he was glad (he knew that), but this was almost all the communion he had with her. She was mild, exquisitely mild—this was the term he mentally applied to her now—and it amply sufficed him, with the conviction he had that she was not stupid. She attended to the tea (for Mademoiselle Bourde was not always free), she handed the *petits fours*, she rang the bell when people went out; and it was in connection with these offices that the idea came to him once—he was rather ashamed of it afterward—that she was the Cinderella of the house, the domestic drudge, the one for whom there was no career, as it was useless for the Marquise to take up her case. He was ashamed of this fancy, I say, and yet it came back to him; he was even surprised that it had not occurred to him before. Her sisters were neither ugly nor proud (Tishy, indeed, was almost touchingly delicate and timid, with exceedingly pretty points, yet with a little appealing, old-womanish look, as if, small—very small—as she was, she was afraid she shouldn't grow any more); but her mother, like the mother in the fairy-tale, was a *femme forte*. Madame de Brives could do nothing for Dora, not absolutely because she was too plain, but because she would never lend herself, and that came to the same thing. Her mother accepted her as recalcitrant, but Cousin Maria's attitude, at the best, could only be resignation. She would respect her child's preferences, she would never put on the screw; but this would not make her love the child any more. So Raymond interpreted certain signs, which at the same time he felt to be very slight, while the conversation in Mrs. Temperly's *salon* (this was its preponderant tendency) rambled among questions of bric-à-brac, of where Tishy's portrait should be placed when it was finished, and the current prices of old Gobelins. *Ces dames* were not in the least above the discussion of prices.

On the 17th it was easy to see that more lamps than usual had been lighted. They streamed through all the windows of the charming hotel and mingled with the radiance of the carriage-lanterns, which followed each other slowly, in couples, in a close, long rank, into the fine sonorous court, where the high stepping of valuable horses was sharp on the stones, and up to the ruddy portico. The night was wet, not with a downpour, but with showers interspaced by starry patches, which only added to the glitter of the handsome, clean Parisian surfaces.

The *sergents de ville* were about the place, and seemed to make the occasion important and official. These night aspects of Paris in the *beaux quartiers* had always for Raymond a particularly festive association, and as he passed from his cab under the wide permanent tin canopy, painted in stripes like an awning, which protected the low steps, it seemed to him odder than ever that all this established prosperity should be Cousin Maria's.

If the thought of how well she did it bore him company from the threshold, it deepened to admiration by the time he had been half an hour in the place. She stood near the entrance with her two elder daughters, distributing the most familiar, most encouraging smiles, together with hand-shakes which were in themselves a whole system of hospitality. If her party was grand Cousin Maria was not; she indulged in no assumption of stateliness and no attempt at graduated welcomes. It seemed to Raymond that it was only because it would have taken too much time that she didn't kiss every one. Effie looked lovely and just a little frightened, which was exactly what she ought to have done; and he noticed that among the arriving guests those who were not intimate (which he could not tell from Mrs. Temperly's manner, but could from their own) recognised her as a daughter much more quickly than they recognised Dora, who hung back disinterestedly, as if not to challenge their discernment, while the current passed her, keeping her little sister in position on its brink meanwhile by the tenderest small gesture.

'May I talk with you a little, later?' he asked of Dora, with only a few seconds for the question, as people were pressing behind him. She answered evasively that there would be very little talk—they would all have to listen—it was very serious; and the next moment he had received a programme from the hand of a monumental yet gracious personage who stood beyond and who had a silver chain round his neck.

The place was arranged for music, and how well arranged he saw later, when every one was seated, spaciouly, luxuriously, without pushing or over-peeping, and the finest talents in Paris performed selections at which the best taste had presided. The singers and players were all stars of the first magnitude. Raymond was fond of music and he wondered whose taste it had been. He made up his mind it was Dora's—it was only she who could have conceived a combination so exquisite; and he said to himself: 'How they all pull together! She is not in it, she is not of it, and yet she too works for the common end.' And by 'all' he meant also Mademoiselle Bourde and the Marquise. This impression made him feel rather hopeless, as if, *en fin de compte*, Cousin Maria were too large an adversary. Great as was the pleasure of being present on an occasion so admirably organised, of sitting there in a beautiful room, in a still, attentive, brilliant company, with all the questions of temperature, space, light and decoration solved to the gratification of every sense, and listening to the best artists doing their best—happily constituted as our young man was to enjoy such a privilege as this, the total effect was depressing: it made him feel as if the gods were not on his side.

'And does she do it so well without a man? There must be so many details a woman can't tackle,' he said to himself; for even counting in the Marquise and Mademoiselle Bourde this only made a multiplication of petticoats. Then it came over him that she *was* a man as well as a woman—the masculine element was included in her nature. He was sure that she bought her horses without being cheated, and very few men could do that. She had the American national quality—she had 'faculty' in a supreme degree. 'Faculty—faculty,' the voices of the quartette of singers seemed to repeat, in the quick movement of a composition they rendered beautifully, while they swelled and went faster, till the thing became a joyous chant of praise, a glorification of Cousin Maria's practical genius.

During the intermission, in the middle of the concert, people changed places more or less and circulated, so that, walking about at this time, he came upon the Marquise, who, in her

sympathetic, demonstrative way, appeared to be on the point of clasping her hostess in her arms. ‘*Décidément, ma bonne, il n’y a que vous! C’est une perfection—*’ he heard her say. To which, gratified but unelated, Cousin Maria replied, according to her simple, sociable wont: ‘Well, it *does* seem quite a successful occasion. If it will only keep on to the end!’

Raymond, wandering far, found himself in a world that was mainly quite new to him, and explained his ignorance of it by reflecting that the people were probably celebrated: so many of them had decorations and stars and a quiet of manner that could only be accounted for by renown. There were plenty of Americans with no badge but a certain fine negativeness, and *they* were quiet for a reason which by this time had become very familiar to Raymond: he had heard it so often mentioned that his country-people were supremely ‘adaptable.’ He tried to get hold of Dora, but he saw that her mother had arranged things beautifully to keep her occupied with other people; so at least he interpreted the fact—after all very natural—that she had half a dozen fluttered young girls on her mind, whom she was providing with programmes, seats, ices, occasional murmured remarks and general support and protection. When the concert was over she supplied them with further entertainment in the form of several young men who had pliable backs and flashing breastpins and whom she inarticulately introduced to them, which gave her still more to do, as after this serious step she had to stay and watch all parties. It was strange to Raymond to see her transformed by her mother into a precocious duenna. Him she introduced to no young girl, and he knew not whether to regard this as cold neglect or as high consideration. If he had liked he might have taken it as a sweet intimation that she knew he couldn’t care for any girl but her.

On the whole he was glad, because it left him free—free to get hold of her mother, which by this time he had boldly determined to do. The conception was high, inasmuch as Cousin Maria’s attention was obviously required by the ambassadors and other grandees who had flocked to do her homage. Nevertheless, while supper was going on (he wanted none, and neither apparently did she), he collared her, as he phrased it to himself, in just the right place—on the threshold of the conservatory. She was flanked on either side with a foreigner of distinction, but he didn’t care for her foreigners now. Besides, a conservatory was meant only for couples; it was a sign of her comprehensive sociability that she should have been rambling among the palms and orchids with a double escort. Her friends would wish to quit her but would not wish to appear to give way to each other; and Raymond felt that he was relieving them both (though he didn’t care) when he asked her to be so good as to give him a few minutes’ conversation. He made her go back with him into the conservatory: it was the only thing he had ever made her do, or probably ever would. She began to talk about the great Gregorini—how it had been too sweet of her to repeat one of her songs, when it had really been understood in advance that repetitions were not expected. Raymond had no interest at present in the great Gregorini. He asked Cousin Maria vehemently if she remembered telling him in New York—that night at the hotel, five years before—that when he should have followed them to Paris he would be free to address her on the subject of Dora. She had given him a promise that she would listen to him in this case, and now he must keep her up to the mark. It was impossible to see her alone, but, at whatever inconvenience to herself, he must insist on her giving him his opportunity.

‘About Dora, Cousin Raymond?’ she asked, blandly and kindly—almost as if she didn’t exactly know who Dora was.

‘Surely you haven’t forgotten what passed between us the evening before you left America. I was in love with her then and I have been in love with her ever since. I told you so then, and you stopped me off, but you gave me leave to make another appeal to you in the future. I make it now—this is the only way I have—and I think you ought to listen to it. Five years

have passed, and I love her more than ever. I have behaved like a saint in the interval: I haven't attempted to practise upon her without your knowledge.'

'I am so glad; but she would have let me know,' said Cousin Maria, looking round the conservatory as if to see if the plants were all there.

'No doubt. I don't know what you do to her. But I trust that to-day your opposition falls—in face of the proof that we have given you of mutual fidelity.'

'Fidelity?' Cousin Maria repeated, smiling.

'Surely—unless you mean to imply that Dora has given me up. I have reason to believe that she hasn't.'

'I think she will like better to remain just as she is.'

'Just as she is?'

'I mean, not to make a choice,' Cousin Maria went on, smiling.

Raymond hesitated a moment. 'Do you mean that you have tried to make her make one?'

At this the good lady broke into a laugh. 'My dear Raymond, how little you must think I know my child!'

'Perhaps, if you haven't tried to make her, you have tried to prevent her. Haven't you told her I am unsuccessful, I am poor?'

She stopped him, laying her hand with unaffected solicitude on his arm. '*Are* you poor, my dear? I should be so sorry!'

'Never mind; I can support a wife,' said the young man.

'It wouldn't matter, because I am happy to say that Dora has something of her own,' Cousin Maria went on, with her imperturbable candour. 'Her father thought that was the best way to arrange it. I had quite forgotten my opposition, as you call it; that was so long ago. Why, she was only a little girl. Wasn't that the ground I took? Well, dear, she's older now, and you can say anything to her you like. But I do think she wants to stay——' And she looked up at him, cheerily.

'Wants to stay?'

'With Effie and Tishy.'

'Ah, Cousin Maria,' the young man exclaimed, 'you are modest about yourself!'

'Well, we are all together. Now is that all? I *must* see if there is enough champagne. Certainly—you can say to her what you like. But twenty years hence she will be just as she is to-day; that's how I see her.'

'Lord, what is it you do to her?' Raymond groaned, as he accompanied his hostess back to the crowded rooms.

He knew exactly what she would have replied if she had been a Frenchwoman; she would have said to him, triumphantly, overwhelmingly: '*Que voulez-vous? Elle adore sa mère!*' She was, however, only a Californian, unacquainted with the language of epigram, and her answer consisted simply of the words: 'I am sorry you have ideas that make you unhappy. I guess you are the only person here who hasn't enjoyed himself to-night.'

Raymond repeated to himself, gloomily, for the rest of the evening, '*Elle adore sa mère—elle adore sa mère!*' He remained very late, and when but twenty people were left and he had

observed that the Marquise, passing her hand into Mrs. Temperly's arm, led her aside as if for some important confabulation (some new light doubtless on what might be hoped for Effie), he persuaded Dora to let the rest of the guests depart in peace (apparently her mother had told her to look out for them to the very last), and come with him into some quiet corner. They found an empty sofa in the outlasting lamp-light, and there the girl sat down with him. Evidently she knew what he was going to say, or rather she thought she did; for in fact, after a little, after he had told her that he had spoken to her mother and she had told him he might speak to *her*, he said things that she could not very well have expected.

'Is it true that you wish to remain with Effie and Tishy? That's what your mother calls it when she means that you will give me up.'

'How can I give you up?' the girl demanded. 'Why can't we go on being friends, as I asked you the evening you dined here?'

'What do you mean by friends?'

'Well, not making everything impossible.'

'You didn't think anything impossible of old,' Raymond rejoined, bitterly. 'I thought you liked me then, and I have even thought so since.'

'I like you more than I like any one. I like you so much that it's my principal happiness.'

'Then why are there impossibilities?'

'Oh, some day I'll tell you!' said Dora, with a quick sigh. 'Perhaps after Tishy is married. And meanwhile, are you not going to remain in Paris, at any rate? Isn't your work here? You are not here for me only. You can come to the house often. That's what I mean by our being friends.'

Her companion sat looking at her with a gloomy stare, as if he were trying to make up the deficiencies in her logic.

'After Tishy is married? I don't see what that has to do with it. Tishy is little more than a baby; she may not be married for ten years.'

'That is very true.'

'And you dispose of the interval by a simple "meanwhile"? My dear Dora, your talk is strange,' Raymond continued, with his voice passionately lowered. 'And I may come to the house—often? How often do you mean—in ten years? Five times—or even twenty?' He saw that her eyes were filling with tears, but he went on: 'It has been coming over me little by little (I notice things very much if I have a reason), and now I think I understand your mother's system.'

'Don't say anything against my mother,' the girl broke in, beseechingly.

'I shall not say anything unjust. That is if I am unjust you must tell me. This is my idea, and your speaking of Tishy's marriage confirms it. To begin with she has had immense plans for you all; she wanted each of you to be a princess or a duchess—I mean a good one. But she has had to give *you* up.'

'No one has asked for me,' said Dora, with unexpected honesty.

'I don't believe it. Dozens of fellows have asked for you, and you have shaken your head in that divine way (divine for me, I mean) in which you shook it the other night.'

'My mother has never said an unkind word to me in her life,' the girl declared, in answer to this.

‘I never said she had, and I don’t know why you take the precaution of telling me so. But whatever you tell me or don’t tell me,’ Raymond pursued, ‘there is one thing I see very well—that so long as you won’t marry a duke Cousin Maria has found means to prevent you from marrying till your sisters have made rare alliances.’

‘Has found means?’ Dora repeated, as if she really wondered what was in his thought.

‘Of course I mean only through your affection for her. How she works that, you know best yourself.’

‘It’s delightful to have a mother of whom every one is so fond,’ said Dora, smiling.

‘She is a most remarkable woman. Don’t think for a moment that I don’t appreciate her. You don’t want to quarrel with her, and I daresay you are right.’

‘Why, Raymond, of course I’m right!’

‘It proves you are not madly in love with me. It seems to me that for you *I* would have quarrelled——’

‘Raymond, Raymond!’ she interrupted, with the tears again rising.

He sat looking at her, and then he said, ‘Well, when they *are* married?’

‘I don’t know the future—I don’t know what may happen.’

‘You mean that Tishy is so small—she doesn’t grow—and will therefore be difficult? Yes, she *is* small.’ There was bitterness in his heart, but he laughed at his own words. ‘However, Effie ought to go off easily,’ he went on, as Dora said nothing. ‘I really wonder that, with the Marquise and all, she hasn’t gone off yet. This thing, to-night, ought to do a great deal for her.’

Dora listened to him with a fascinated gaze; it was as if he expressed things for her and relieved her spirit by making them clear and coherent. Her eyes managed, each time, to be dry again, and now a somewhat wan, ironical smile moved her lips. ‘Mamma knows what she wants—she knows what she will take. And she will take only that.’

‘Precisely—something tremendous. And she is willing to wait, eh? Well, Effie is very young, and she’s charming. But she won’t be charming if she has an ugly appendage in the shape of a poor unsuccessful American artist (not even a good one), whose father went bankrupt, for a brother-in-law. That won’t smooth the way, of course; and if a prince is to come into the family, the family must be kept tidy to receive him.’ Dora got up quickly, as if she could bear his lucidity no longer, but he kept close to her as she walked away. ‘And she can sacrifice you like that, without a scruple, without a pang?’

‘I might have escaped—if I would marry,’ the girl replied.

‘Do you call that escaping? She has succeeded with you, but is it a part of what the Marquise calls her *succès de bonté*?’

‘Nothing that you can say (and it’s far worse than the reality) can prevent her being delightful.’

‘Yes, that’s your loyalty, and I could shoot you for it!’ he exclaimed, making her pause on the threshold of the adjoining room. ‘So you think it will take about ten years, considering Tishy’s size—or want of size?’ He himself again was the only one to laugh at this. ‘Your mother is closeted, as much as she can be closeted now, with Madame de Brives, and perhaps this time they are really settling something.’

‘I have thought that before and nothing has come. Mamma wants something so good; not only every advantage and every grandeur, but every virtue under heaven, and every guarantee. Oh, she wouldn’t expose them!’

‘I see; that’s where her goodness comes in and where the Marquise is impressed’ He took Dora’s hand; he felt that he must go, for she exasperated him with her irony that stopped short and her patience that wouldn’t stop. ‘You simply propose that I should wait?’ he said, as he held her hand.

‘It seems to me that you might, if *I* can.’ Then the girl remarked, ‘Now that you are here, it’s far better.’

There was a sweetness in this which made him, after glancing about a moment, raise her hand to his lips. He went away without taking leave of Cousin Maria, who was still out of sight, her conference with the Marquise apparently not having terminated. This looked (he reflected as he passed out) as if something might come of it. However, before he went home he fell again into a gloomy forecast. The weather had changed, the stars were all out, and he walked the empty streets for an hour. Tishy’s perverse refusal to grow and Cousin Maria’s conscientious exactions promised him a terrible probation. And in those intolerable years what further interference, what meddlesome, effective pressure, might not make itself felt? It may be added that Tishy is decidedly a dwarf and his probation is not yet over.

Louisa Pallant

I

Never say you know the last words about any human heart! I was once treated to a revelation which startled and touched me in the nature of a person with whom I had been acquainted—well, as I supposed—for years, whose character I had had good reasons, heaven knows, to appreciate and in regard to whom I flattered myself I had nothing more to learn.

It was on the terrace of the Kursaal at Homburg, nearly ten years ago, one beautiful night toward the end of July. I had come to the place that day from Frankfort, with vague intentions, and was mainly occupied in waiting for my young nephew, the only son of my sister, who had been entrusted to my care by a very fond mother for the summer—I was expected to show him Europe, only the very best of it—and was on his way from Paris to join me. The excellent band discoursed music not too abstruse, while the air was filled besides with the murmur of different languages, the smoke of many cigars, the creak on the gravel of the gardens of strolling shoes and the thick tinkle of beer-glasses. There were a hundred people walking about, there were some in clusters at little tables and many on benches and rows of chairs, watching the others as if they had paid for the privilege and were rather disappointed. I was among these last; I sat by myself, smoking my cigar and thinking of nothing very particular while families and couples passed and repassed me.

I scarce know how long I had sat when I became aware of a recognition which made my meditations definite. It was on my own part, and the object of it was a lady who moved to and fro, unconscious of my observation, with a young girl at her side. I hadn't seen her for ten years, and what first struck me was the fact not that she was Mrs. Henry Pallant, but that the girl who was with her was remarkably pretty—or rather first of all that every one who passed appeared extremely to admire. This led me also to notice the young lady myself, and her charming face diverted my attention for some time from that of her companion. The latter, moreover, though it was night, wore a thin light veil which made her features vague. The couple slowly walked and walked, but though they were very quiet and decorous, and also very well dressed, they seemed to have no friends. Every one observed but no one addressed them; they appeared even themselves to exchange very few words. Moreover they bore with marked composure and as if they were thoroughly used to it the attention they excited. I am afraid it occurred to me to take for granted that they were of an artful intention and that if they hadn't been the elder lady would have handed the younger over a little less to public valuation and not have sought so to conceal her own face. Perhaps this question came into my mind too easily just then—in view of my prospective mentorship to my nephew. If I was to show him only the best of Europe I should have to be very careful about the people he should meet—especially the ladies—and the relations he should form. I suspected him of great innocence and was uneasy about my office. Was I completely relieved and reassured when I became aware that I simply had Louisa Pallant before me and that the girl was her daughter Linda, whom I had known as a child—Linda grown up to charming beauty?

The question was delicate and the proof that I was not very sure is perhaps that I forbore to speak to my pair at once. I watched them a while—I wondered what they would do. No great harm assuredly; but I was anxious to see if they were really isolated. Homburg was then a great resort of the English—the London season took up its tale there toward the first of August—and I had an idea that in such a company as that Louisa would naturally know people. It was my impression that she “cultivated” the English, that she had been much in

London and would be likely to have views in regard to a permanent settlement there. This supposition was quickened by the sight of Linda's beauty, for I knew there is no country in which such attractions are more appreciated. You will see what time I took, and I confess that as I finished my cigar I thought it all over. There was no good reason in fact why I should have rushed into Mrs. Pallant's arms. She had not treated me well and we had never really made it up. Somehow even the circumstance that—after the first soreness—I was glad to have lost her had never put us quite right with each other; nor, for herself, had it made her less ashamed of her heartless behaviour that poor Pallant proved finally no great catch. I had forgiven her; I hadn't felt it anything but an escape not to have married a girl who had in her to take back her given word and break a fellow's heart for mere flesh-pots—or the shallow promise, as it pitifully turned out, of flesh-pots. Moreover we had met since then—on the occasion of my former visit to Europe; had looked each other in the eyes, had pretended to be easy friends and had talked of the wickedness of the world as composedly as if we were the only just, the only pure. I knew by that time what she had given out—that I had driven her off by my insane jealousy before she ever thought of Henry Pallant, before she had ever seen him. This hadn't been before and couldn't be to-day a ground of real reunion, especially if you add to it that she knew perfectly what I thought of her. It seldom ministers to friendship, I believe, that your friend shall know your real opinion, for he knows it mainly when it's unfavourable, and this is especially the case if—let the solecism pass!—he be a woman. I hadn't followed Mrs. Pallant's fortunes; the years went by for me in my own country, whereas she led her life, which I vaguely believed to be difficult after her husband's death—virtually that of a bankrupt—in foreign lands. I heard of her from time to time; always as “established” somewhere, but on each occasion in a different place. She drifted from country to country, and if she had been of a hard composition at the beginning it could never occur to me that her struggle with society, as it might be called, would have softened the paste. Whenever I heard a woman spoken of as “horribly worldly” I thought immediately of the object of my early passion. I imagined she had debts, and when I now at last made up my mind to recall myself to her it was present to me that she might ask me to lend her money. More than anything else, however, at this time of day, I was sorry for her, so that such an idea didn't operate as a deterrent.

She pretended afterwards that she hadn't noticed me—expressing as we stood face to face great surprise and wishing to know where I had dropped from; but I think the corner of her eye had taken me in and she had been waiting to see what I would do. She had ended by sitting down with her girl on the same row of chairs with myself, and after a little, the seat next to her becoming vacant, I had gone and stood before her. She had then looked up at me a moment, staring as if she couldn't imagine who I was or what I wanted; after which, smiling and extending her hands, she had broken out: “Ah my dear old friend—what a delight!” If she had waited to see what I would do in order to choose her own line she thus at least carried out this line with the utmost grace. She was cordial, friendly, artless, interested, and indeed I'm sure she was very glad to see me. I may as well say immediately, none the less, that she gave me neither then nor later any sign of a desire to contract a loan. She had scant means—that I learned—yet seemed for the moment able to pay her way. I took the empty chair and we remained in talk for an hour. After a while she made me sit at her other side, next her daughter, whom she wished to know me—to love me—as one of their oldest friends. “It goes back, back, back, doesn't it?” said Mrs. Pallant; “and of course she remembers you as a child.” Linda smiled all sweetly and blankly, and I saw she remembered me not a whit. When her mother threw out that they had often talked about me she failed to take it up, though she looked extremely nice. Looking nice was her strong point; she was prettier even than her mother had been. She was such a little lady that she made me ashamed of having doubted, however vaguely and for a moment, of her position in the scale of propriety. Her appearance

seemed to say that if she had no acquaintances it was because she didn't want them—because nobody there struck her as attractive: there wasn't the slightest difficulty about her choosing her friends. Linda Pallant, young as she was, and fresh and fair and charming, gentle and sufficiently shy, looked somehow exclusive—as if the dust of the common world had never been meant to besprinkle her. She was of thinner consistency than her mother and clearly not a young woman of professions—except in so far as she was committed to an interest in you by her bright pure candid smile. No girl who had such a lovely way of parting her lips could pass for designing.

As I sat between the pair I felt I had been taken possession of and that for better or worse my stay at Homburg would be intimately associated with theirs. We gave each other a great deal of news and expressed unlimited interest in each other's history since our last meeting. I mightn't judge of what Mrs. Pallant kept back, but for myself I quite overflowed. She let me see at any rate that her life had been a good deal what I supposed, though the terms she employed to describe it were less crude than those of my thought. She confessed they had drifted, she and her daughter, and were drifting still. Her narrative rambled and took a wrong turn, a false flight, or two, as I thought Linda noted, while she sat watching the passers, in a manner that betrayed no consciousness of their attention, without coming to her mother's aid. Once or twice Mrs. Pallant made me rather feel a cross-questioner, which I had had no intention of being. I took it that if the girl never put in a word it was because she had perfect confidence in her parent's ability to come out straight. It was suggested to me, I scarcely knew how, that this confidence between the two ladies went to a great length; that their union of thought, their system of reciprocal divination, was remarkable, and that they probably seldom needed to resort to the clumsy and in some cases dangerous expedient of communicating by sound. I suppose I made this reflexion not all at once—it was not wholly the result of that first meeting. I was with them constantly for the next several days and my impressions had time to clarify.

I do remember, however, that it was on this first evening that Archie's name came up. She attributed her own stay at Homburg to no refined nor exalted motive—didn't put it that she was there from force of habit or because a high medical authority had ordered her to drink the waters; she frankly admitted the reason of her visit to have been simply that she didn't know where else to turn. But she appeared to assume that my behaviour rested on higher grounds and even that it required explanation, the place being frivolous and modern—devoid of that interest of antiquity which I had ever made so much of. "Don't you remember—ever so long ago—that you wouldn't look at anything in Europe that wasn't a thousand years old? Well, as we advance in life I suppose we don't think that quite such a charm." And when I mentioned that I had arrived because the place was as good as another for awaiting my nephew she exclaimed: "Your nephew—what nephew? He must have come up of late." I answered that his name was Archie Parker and that he was modern indeed; he was to attain legal manhood in a few months and was in Europe for the first time. My last news of him had been from Paris and I was expecting to hear further from one day to the other. His father was dead, and though a selfish bachelor, little versed in the care of children, I was considerably counted on by his mother to see that he didn't smoke nor flirt too much, nor yet tumble off an Alp.

Mrs. Pallant immediately guessed that his mother was my sister Charlotte, whom she spoke of familiarly, though I knew she had scarce seen her. Then in a moment it came to her which of the Parkers Charlotte had married; she remembered the family perfectly from the old New York days—"that disgustingly rich set." She said it was very nice having the boy come out that way to my care; to which I replied that it was very nice for the boy. She pronounced the advantage rather mine—I ought to have had children; there was something so parental about me and I would have brought them up so well. She could make an allusion like that—to all

that might have been and had not been—without a gleam of guilt in her eye; and I foresaw that before I left the place I should have confided to her that though I detested her and was very glad we had fallen out, yet our old relations had left me no heart for marrying another woman. If I had remained so single and so sterile the fault was nobody's but hers. She asked what I meant to do with my nephew—to which I replied that it was much more a question of what he would do with me. She wished to know if he were a nice young man and had brothers and sisters and any particular profession. I assured her I had really seen little of him; I believed him to be six feet high and of tolerable parts. He was an only son, but there was a little sister at home, a delicate, rather blighted child, demanding all the mother's care.

“So that makes your responsibility greater, as it were, about the boy, doesn't it?” said Mrs. Pallant.

“Greater? I'm sure I don't know.”

“Why if the girl's life's uncertain he may become, some moment, all the mother has. So that being in your hands—”

“Oh I shall keep him alive, I suppose, if you mean that,” I returned.

“Well, WE won't kill him, shall we, Linda?” my friend went on with a laugh.

“I don't know—perhaps we shall!” smiled the girl.

II

I called on them the next at their lodgings, the modesty of which was enhanced by a hundred pretty feminine devices—flowers and photographs and portable knick-knacks and a hired piano and morsels of old brocade flung over angular sofas. I took them to drive; I met them again at the Kursaal; I arranged that we should dine together, after the Homburg fashion, at the same table d'hote; and during several days this revived familiar intercourse continued, imitating intimacy if not quite achieving it. I was pleased, as my companions passed the time for me and the conditions of our life were soothing—the feeling of summer and shade and music and leisure in the German gardens and woods, where we strolled and sat and gossiped; to which may be added a vague sociable sense that among people whose challenge to the curiosity was mainly not irresistible we kept quite to ourselves. We were on the footing of old friends who still had in regard to each other discoveries to make. We knew each other's nature but didn't know each other's experience; so that when Mrs. Pallant related to me what she had been “up to,” as I called it, for so many years, the former knowledge attached a hundred interpretative footnotes—as if I had been editing an author who presented difficulties—to the interesting page. There was nothing new to me in the fact that I didn't esteem her, but there was relief in my finding that this wasn't necessary at Homburg and that I could like her in spite of it. She struck me, in the oddest way, as both improved and degenerate; the two processes, in her nature, might have gone on together. She was battered and world-worn and, spiritually speaking, vulgarised; something fresh had rubbed off her—it even included the vivacity of her early desire to do the best thing for herself—and something rather stale had rubbed on. At the same time she betrayed a scepticism, and that was rather becoming, for it had quenched the eagerness of her prime, the mercenary principle I had so suffered from. She had grown weary and detached, and since she affected me as more impressed with the evil of the world than with the good, this was a gain; in other words her accretion of indifference, if not of cynicism, showed a softer surface than that of her old ambitions. Furthermore I had to recognise that her devotion to her daughter was a kind of religion; she had done the very best possible for Linda.

Linda was curious, Linda was interesting; I've seen girls I liked better—charming as this one might be—but have never seen one who for the hour you were with her (the impression passed somehow when she was out of sight) occupied you so completely. I can best describe the attention she provoked by saying that she struck you above all things as a felicitous FINAL product—after the fashion of some plant or some fruit, some waxen orchid or some perfect peach. She was clearly the result of a process of calculation, a process patiently educative, a pressure exerted, and all artfully, so that she should reach a high point.

This high point had been the star of her mother's heaven—it hung before her so unquenchably—and had shed the only light (in default of a better) that was to shine on the poor lady's path. It stood her instead of every other ideal. The very most and the very best—that was what the girl had been led on to achieve; I mean of course, since no real miracle had been wrought, the most and the best she was capable of. She was as pretty, as graceful, as intelligent, as well-bred, as well-informed, as well-dressed, as could have been conceived for her; her music, her singing, her German, her French, her English, her step, her tone, her glance, her manner, everything in her person and movement, from the shade and twist of her hair to the way you saw her finger-nails were pink when she raised her hand, had been carried so far that one found one's self accepting them as the very measure of young grace. I regarded her thus as a model, yet it was a part of her perfection that she had none of the stiffness of a pattern. If she held the observation it was because you wondered where and when she would break down; but she never broke down, either in her French accent or in her role of educated angel.

After Archie had come the ladies were manifestly his greatest resource, and all the world knows why a party of four is more convenient than a party of three. My nephew had kept me waiting a week, with a serenity all his own; but this very coolness was a help to harmony—so long, that is, as I didn't lose my temper with it. I didn't, for the most part, because my young man's unperturbed acceptance of the most various forms of good fortune had more than anything else the effect of amusing me. I had seen little of him for the last three or four years; I wondered what his impending majority would have made of him—he didn't at all carry himself as if the wind of his fortune were rising—and I watched him with a solicitude that usually ended in a joke. He was a tall fresh-coloured youth, with a candid circular countenance and a love of cigarettes, horses and boats which had not been sacrificed to more strenuous studies. He was reassuringly natural, in a supercivilised age, and I soon made up my mind that the formula of his character was in the clearing of the inward scene by his so preordained lack of imagination. If he was serene this was still further simplifying. After that I had time to meditate on the line that divides the serene from the inane, the simple from the silly. He wasn't clever; the fonder theory quite defied our cultivation, though Mrs. Pallant tried it once or twice; but on the other hand it struck me his want of wit might be a good defensive weapon. It wasn't the sort of density that would let him in, but the sort that would keep him out. By which I don't mean that he had shortsighted suspicions, but that on the contrary imagination would never be needed to save him, since she would never put him in danger. He was in short a well-grown well-washed muscular young American, whose extreme salubrity might have made him pass for conceited. If he looked pleased with himself it was only because he was pleased with life—as well he might be, with the fortune that awaited the stroke of his twenty-first year—and his big healthy independent person was an inevitable part of that. I am bound to add that he was accommodating—for which I was grateful. His habits were active, but he didn't insist on my adopting them and he made numerous and generous sacrifices for my society. When I say he made them for mine I must duly remember that mine and that of Mrs. Pallant and Linda were now very much the same thing. He was willing to sit and smoke for hours under the trees or, adapting his long legs to

the pace of his three companions, stroll through the nearer woods of the charming little hill-range of the Taunus to those rustic Wirthschaften where coffee might be drunk under a trellis. Mrs. Pallant took a great interest in him; she made him, with his easy uncle, a subject of discourse; she pronounced him a delightful specimen, as a young gentleman of his period and country. She even asked me the sort of “figure” his fortune might really amount to, and professed a rage of envy when I told her what I supposed it to be. While we were so occupied Archie, on his side, couldn’t do less than converse with Linda, nor to tell the truth did he betray the least inclination for any different exercise. They strolled away together while their elders rested; two or three times, in the evening, when the ballroom of the Kursaal was lighted and dance-music played, they whirled over the smooth floor in a waltz that stirred my memory. Whether it had the same effect on Mrs. Pallant’s I know not: she held her peace. We had on certain occasions our moments, almost our half-hours, of unembarrassed silence while our young companions disported themselves. But if at other times her enquiries and comments were numerous on this article of my ingenuous charge, that might very well have passed for a courteous recognition of the frequent admiration I expressed for Linda—an admiration that drew from her, I noticed, but scant direct response. I was struck thus with her reserve when I spoke of her daughter—my remarks produced so little of a maternal flutter. Her detachment, her air of having no fatuous illusions and not being blinded by prejudice, seemed to me at times to savour of affectation. Either she answered me with a vague and impatient sigh and changed the subject, or else she said before doing so: “Oh yes, yes, she’s a very brilliant creature. She ought to be: God knows what I’ve done for her!” The reader will have noted my fondness, in all cases, for the explanations of things; as an example of which I had my theory here that she was disappointed in the girl. Where then had her special calculation failed? As she couldn’t possibly have wished her prettier or more pleasing, the pang must have been for her not having made a successful use of her gifts. Had she expected her to “land” a prince the day after leaving the schoolroom? There was after all plenty of time for this, with Linda but two-and-twenty. It didn’t occur to me to wonder if the source of her mother’s tepidity was that the young lady had not turned out so nice a nature as she had hoped, because in the first place Linda struck me as perfectly innocent, and because in the second I wasn’t paid, in the French phrase, for supposing Louisa Pallant much concerned on that score. The last hypothesis I should have invoked was that of private despair at bad moral symptoms. And in relation to Linda’s nature I had before me the daily spectacle of her manner with my nephew. It was as charming as it could be without betrayal of a desire to lead him on. She was as familiar as a cousin, but as a distant one—a cousin who had been brought up to observe degrees. She was so much cleverer than Archie that she couldn’t help laughing at him, but she didn’t laugh enough to exclude variety, being well aware, no doubt, that a woman’s cleverness most shines in contrast with a man’s stupidity when she pretends to take that stupidity for her law. Linda Pallant moreover was not a chatterbox; as she knew the value of many things she knew the value of intervals. There were a good many in the conversation of these young persons; my nephew’s own speech, to say nothing of his thought, abounding in comfortable lapses; so that I sometimes wondered how their association was kept at that pitch of continuity of which it gave the impression. It was friendly enough, evidently, when Archie sat near her—near enough for low murmurs, had such risen to his lips—and watched her with interested eyes and with freedom not to try too hard to make himself agreeable. She had always something in hand—a flower in her tapestry to finish, the leaves of a magazine to cut, a button to sew on her glove (she carried a little work-bag in her pocket and was a person of the daintiest habits), a pencil to ply ever so neatly in a sketchbook which she rested on her knee. When we were indoors—mainly then at her mother’s modest rooms—she had always the resource of her piano, of which she was of course a perfect mistress.

These pursuits supported her, they helped her to an assurance under such narrow inspection—I ended by rebuking Archie for it; I told him he stared the poor girl out of countenance—and she sought further relief in smiling all over the place. When my young man’s eyes shone at her those of Miss Pallant addressed themselves brightly to the trees and clouds and other surrounding objects, including her mother and me. Sometimes she broke into a sudden embarrassed happy pointless laugh. When she wandered off with him she looked back at us in a manner that promised it wasn’t for long and that she was with us still in spirit. If I liked her I had therefore my good reason: it was many a day since a pretty girl had had the air of taking me so much into account. Sometimes when they were so far away as not to disturb us she read aloud a little to Mr. Archie. I don’t know where she got her books—I never provided them, and certainly he didn’t. He was no reader and I fear he often dozed.

III

I remember the first time—it was at the end of about ten days of this—that Mrs. Pallant remarked to me: “My dear friend, you’re quite AMAZING! You behave for all the world as if you were perfectly ready to accept certain consequences.” She nodded in the direction of our young companions, but I nevertheless put her at the pains of saying what consequences she meant. “What consequences? Why the very same consequences that ensued when you and I first became acquainted.”

I hesitated, but then, looking her in the eyes, said: “Do you mean she’d throw him over?”

“You’re not kind, you’re not generous,” she replied with a quick colour. “I’m giving you a warning.”

“You mean that my boy may fall in love with your girl?”

“Certainly. It looks even as if the harm might be already done.”

“Then your warning comes too late,” I significantly smiled. “But why do you call it a harm?”

“Haven’t you any sense of the rigour of your office?” she asked. “Is that what his mother has sent him out to you for: that you shall find him the first wife you can pick up, that you shall let him put his head into the noose the day after his arrival?”

“Heaven forbid I should do anything of the kind! I know moreover that his mother doesn’t want him to marry young. She holds it the worst of mistakes, she feels that at that age a man never really chooses. He doesn’t choose till he has lived a while, till he has looked about and compared.”

“And what do you think then yourself?”

“I should like to say I regard the fact of falling in love, at whatever age, as in itself an act of selection. But my being as I am at this time of day would contradict me too much.”

“Well then, you’re too primitive. You ought to leave this place tomorrow.”

“So as not to see Archie fall—?”

“You ought to fish him out now—from where he HAS fallen—and take him straight away.”

I wondered a little. “Do you think he’s in very far?”

“If I were his mother I know what I should think. I can put myself in her place—I’m not narrow-minded. I know perfectly well how she must regard such a question.”

“And don’t you know,” I returned, “that in America that’s not thought important—the way the mother regards it?”

Mrs. Pallant had a pause—as if I mystified or vexed her. “Well, we’re not in America. We happen to be here.”

“No; my poor sister’s up to her neck in New York.”

“I’m almost capable of writing to her to come out,” said Mrs. Pallant.

“You ARE warning me,” I cried, “but I hardly know of what! It seems to me my responsibility would begin only at the moment your daughter herself should seem in danger.”

“Oh you needn’t mind that—I’ll take care of Linda.”

But I went on. “If you think she’s in danger already I’ll carry him off to-morrow.”

“It would be the best thing you could do.”

“I don’t know—I should be very sorry to act on a false alarm. I’m very well here; I like the place and the life and your society. Besides, it doesn’t strike me that—on her side—there’s any real symptom.”

She looked at me with an air I had never seen in her face, and if I had puzzled her she repaid me in kind. “You’re very annoying. You don’t deserve what I’d fain do for you.”

What she’d fain do for me she didn’t tell me that day, but we took up the subject again. I remarked that I failed to see why we should assume that a girl like Linda—brilliant enough to make one of the greatest—would fall so very easily into my nephew’s arms. Might I enquire if her mother had won a confession from her, if she had stammered out her secret? Mrs. Pallant made me, on this, the point that they had no need to tell each other such things—they hadn’t lived together twenty years in such intimacy for nothing. To which I returned that I had guessed as much, but that there might be an exception for a great occasion like the present. If Linda had shown nothing it was a sign that for HER the occasion wasn’t great; and I mentioned that Archie had spoken to me of the young lady only to remark casually and rather patronisingly, after his first encounter with her, that she was a regular little flower. (The little flower was nearly three years older than himself.) Apart from this he hadn’t alluded to her and had taken up no allusion of mine. Mrs. Pallant informed me again—for which I was prepared—that I was quite too primitive; after which she said: “We needn’t discuss the case if you don’t wish to, but I happen to know—how I obtained my knowledge isn’t important—that the moment Mr. Parker should propose to my daughter she’d gobble him down. Surely it’s a detail worth mentioning to you.”

I sought to defer then to her judgement. “Very good. I’ll sound him. I’ll look into the matter tonight.”

“Don’t, don’t; you’ll spoil everything!” She spoke as with some finer view. “Remove him quickly—that’s the only thing.”

I didn’t at all like the idea of removing him quickly; it seemed too summary, too extravagant, even if presented to him on specious grounds; and moreover, as I had told Mrs. Pallant, I really had no wish to change my scene. It was no part of my promise to my sister that, with my middle-aged habits, I should duck and dodge about Europe. So I temporised. “Should you really object to the boy so much as a son-in-law? After all he’s a good fellow and a gentleman.”

“My poor friend, you’re incredibly superficial!” she made answer with an assurance that struck me.

The contempt in it so nettled me in fact that I exclaimed: “Possibly! But it seems odd that a lesson in consistency should come from YOU.”

I had no retort from her on this, rather to my surprise, and when she spoke again it was all quietly. "I think Linda and I had best withdraw. We've been here a month—it will have served our purpose."

"Mercy on us, that will be a bore!" I protested; and for the rest of the evening, till we separated—our conversation had taken place after dinner at the Kursaal—she said little, preserving a subdued and almost injured air. This somehow didn't appeal to me, since it was absurd that Louisa Pallant, of all women, should propose to put me in the wrong. If ever a woman had been in the wrong herself—! I had even no need to go into that. Archie and I, at all events, usually attended the ladies back to their own door—they lived in a street of minor accommodation at a certain distance from the Rooms—where we parted for the night late, on the big cobblestones, in the little sleeping German town, under the closed windows of which, suggesting stuffy interiors, our cheerful English partings resounded. On this occasion indeed they rather languished; the question that had come up for me with Mrs. Pallant appeared—and by no intention of mine—to have brushed the young couple with its chill. Archie and Linda too struck me as conscious and dumb.

As I walked back to our hotel with my nephew I passed my hand into his arm and put to him, by no roundabout approach, the question of whether he were in serious peril of love.

"I don't know, I don't know—really, uncle, I don't know!" was, however, all the satisfaction I could extract from the youth, who hadn't the smallest vein of introspection. He mightn't know, but before we reached the inn—we had a few more words on the subject—it seemed to me that *I* did. His mind wasn't formed to accommodate at one time many subjects of thought, but Linda Pallant certainly constituted for the moment its principal furniture. She pervaded his consciousness, she solicited his curiosity, she associated herself, in a manner as yet informal and undefined, with his future. I could see that she held, that she beguiled him as no one had ever done. I didn't betray to him, however, that perception, and I spent my night a prey to the consciousness that, after all, it had been none of my business to provide him with the sense of being captivated. To put him in relation with a young enchantress was the last thing his mother had expected of me or that I had expected of myself. Moreover it was quite my opinion that he himself was too young to be a judge of enchantresses. Mrs. Pallant was right and I had given high proof of levity in regarding her, with her beautiful daughter, as a "resource." There were other resources—one of which WOULD be most decidedly to clear out. What did I know after all about the girl except that I rejoiced to have escaped from marrying her mother? That mother, it was true, was a singular person, and it was strange her conscience should have begun to fidget in advance of my own. It was strange she should so soon have felt Archie's peril, and even stranger that she should have then wished to "save" him. The ways of women were infinitely subtle, and it was no novelty to me that one never knew where they would turn up. As I haven't hesitated in this report to expose the irritable side of my own nature I shall confess that I even wondered if my old friend's solicitude hadn't been a deeper artifice. Wasn't it possibly a plan of her own for making sure of my young man—though I didn't quite see the logic of it? If she regarded him, which she might in view of his large fortune, as a great catch, mightn't she have arranged this little comedy, in their personal interest, with the girl?

That possibility at any rate only made it a happier thought that I should win my companion to some curiosity about other places. There were many of course much more worth his attention than Homburg. In the course of the morning—it was after our early luncheon—I walked round to Mrs. Pallant's to let her know I was ready to take action; but even while I went I again felt the unlikelihood of the part attributed by my fears and by the mother's own, so far as they had been roused, to Linda. Certainly if she was such a girl as these fears represented

her she would fly at higher game. It was with an eye to high game, Mrs. Pallant had frankly admitted to me, that she had been trained, and such an education, to say nothing of such a performer, justified a hope of greater returns. A young American, the fruit of scant “modelling,” who could give her nothing but pocket-money, was a very moderate prize, and if she had been prepared to marry for ambition—there was no such hardness in her face or tone, but then there never is—her mark would be inevitably a “personage” quelconque. I was received at my friend’s lodging with the announcement that she had left Homburg with her daughter half an hour before. The good woman who had entertained the pair professed to know nothing of their movements beyond the fact that they had gone to Frankfort, where, however, it was her belief that they didn’t intend to remain. They were evidently travelling beyond. Sudden, their decision to move? Oh yes, the matter of a moment. They must have spent the night in packing, they had so many things and such pretty ones; and their poor maid, all the morning, had scarce had time to swallow her coffee. But they clearly were ladies accustomed to come and go. It didn’t matter—with such rooms as hers she never wanted: there was a new family coming in at three.

IV

This piece of strategy left me staring and made me, I must confess, quite furious. My only consolation was that Archie, when I told him, looked as blank as myself, and that the trick touched him more nearly, for I was not now in love with Louisa. We agreed that we required an explanation and we pretended to expect one the next day in the shape of a letter satisfactory even to the point of being apologetic. When I say “we” pretended I mean that I did, for my suspicion that he knew what had been on foot—through an arrangement with Linda—lasted only a moment. If his resentment was less than my own his surprise was equally great. I had been willing to bolt, but I felt slighted by the ease with which Mrs. Pallant had shown she could part with us. Archie professed no sense of a grievance, because in the first place he was shy about it and because in the second it was evidently not definite to him that he had been encouraged—equipped as he was, I think, with no very particular idea of what constituted encouragement. He was fresh from the wonderful country in which there may be between the ingenuous young be so little question of “intentions.” He was but dimly conscious of his own and could by no means have told me whether he had been challenged or been jilted. I didn’t want to exasperate him, but when at the end of three days more we were still without news of our late companions I observed that it was very simple:—they must have been just hiding from us; they thought us dangerous; they wished to avoid entanglements. They had found us too attentive and wished not to raise false hopes. He appeared to accept this explanation and even had the air—so at least I inferred from his asking me no questions—of judging the matter might be delicate for myself. The poor youth was altogether much mystified, and I smiled at the image in his mind of Mrs. Pallant fleeing from his uncle’s importunities. We decided to leave Homburg, but if we didn’t pursue our fugitives it wasn’t simply that we were ignorant of where they were. I could have found that out with a little trouble, but I was deterred by the reflexion that this would be Louisa’s reasoning. She was a dreadful humbug and her departure had been a provocation—I fear it was in that stupid conviction that I made out a little independent itinerary with Archie. I even believed we should learn where they were quite soon enough, and that our patience—even my young man’s—would be longer than theirs. Therefore I uttered a small private cry of triumph when three weeks later—we happened to be at Interlaken—he reported to me that he had received a note from Miss Pallant. The form of this confidence was his enquiring if there were particular reasons why we should longer delay our projected visit to the Italian lakes. Mightn’t the fear of the hot weather, which was moreover at that season our native temperature, cease to operate, the middle of September having arrived? I answered that we

would start on the morrow if he liked, and then, pleased apparently that I was so easy to deal with, he revealed his little secret. He showed me his letter, which was a graceful natural document—it covered with a few flowing strokes but a single page of note-paper—not at all compromising to the young lady. If, however, it was almost the apology I had looked for—save that this should have come from the mother—it was not ostensibly in the least an invitation. It mentioned casually—the mention was mainly in the words at the head of her paper—that they were on the Lago Maggiore, at Baveno; but it consisted mainly of the expression of a regret that they had had so abruptly to leave Homburg. Linda failed to say under what necessity they had found themselves; she only hoped we hadn't judged them too harshly and would accept "this hasty line" as a substitute for the omitted good-bye. She also hoped our days were passing pleasantly and with the same lovely weather that prevailed south of the Alps; and she remained very sincerely and with the kindest remembrances—!

The note contained no message from her mother, and it was open to me to suppose, as I should prefer, either that Mrs. Pallant hadn't known she was writing or that they wished to make us think she hadn't known. The letter might pass as a common civility of the girl's to a person with whom she had been on easy terms. It was, however, for something more than this that my nephew took it; so at least I gathered from the touching candour of his determination to go to Baveno. I judged it idle to drag him another way; he had money in his own pocket and was quite capable of giving me the slip. Yet—such are the sweet incongruities of youth—when I asked him to what tune he had been thinking of Linda since they left us in the lurch he replied: "Oh I haven't been thinking at all! Why should I?" This fib was accompanied by an exorbitant blush. Since he was to obey his young woman's signal I must equally make out where it would take him, and one splendid morning we started over the Simplon in a post-chaise.

I represented to him successfully that it would be in much better taste for us to alight at Stresa, which as every one knows is a resort of tourists, also on the shore of the major lake, at about a mile's distance from Baveno. If we stayed at the latter place we should have to inhabit the same hotel as our friends, and this might be awkward in view of a strained relation with them. Nothing would be easier than to go and come between the two points, especially by the water, which would give Archie a chance for unlimited paddling. His face lighted up at the vision of a pair of oars; he pretended to take my plea for discretion very seriously, and I could see that he had at once begun to calculate opportunities for navigation with Linda. Our post-chaise—I had insisted on easy stages and we were three days on the way—deposited us at Stresa toward the middle of the afternoon, and it was within an amazingly short time that I found myself in a small boat with my nephew, who pulled us over to Baveno with vigorous strokes. I remember the sweetness of the whole impression. I had had it before, but to my companion it was new, and he thought it as pretty as the opera: the enchanting beauty of the place and, hour, the stillness of the air and water, with the romantic fantastic Borromean Islands set as great jewels in a crystal globe. We disembarked at the steps by the garden-foot of the hotel, and somehow it seemed a perfectly natural part of the lovely situation that I should immediately become conscious of Mrs. Pallant and her daughter seated on the terrace and quietly watching us. They had the air of expectation, which I think we had counted on. I hadn't even asked Archie if he had answered Linda's note; this was between themselves and in the way of supervision I had done enough in coming with him.

There is no doubt our present address, all round, lacked a little the easiest grace—or at least Louisa's and mine did. I felt too much the appeal of her exhibition to notice closely the style of encounter of the young people. I couldn't get it out of my head, as I have sufficiently indicated, that Mrs. Pallant was playing a game, and I'm afraid she saw in my face that this suspicion had been the motive of my journey. I had come there to find her out. The

knowledge of my purpose couldn't help her to make me very welcome, and that's why I speak of our meeting constrainedly. We observed none the less all the forms, and the admirable scene left us plenty to talk about. I made no reference before Linda to the retreat from Homburg. This young woman looked even prettier than she had done on the eve of that manoeuvre and gave no sign of an awkward consciousness. She again so struck me as a charming clever girl that I was freshly puzzled to know why we should get—or should have got—into a tangle about her. People had to want to complicate a situation to do it on so simple a pretext as that Linda was in every way beautiful. This was the clear fact: so why shouldn't the presumptions be in favour of every result of it? One of the effects of that cause, on the spot, was that at the end of a very short time Archie proposed to her to take a turn with him in his boat, which awaited us at the foot of the steps. She looked at her mother with a smiling "May I, mamma?" and Mrs. Pallant answered "Certainly, darling, if you're not afraid." At this—I scarcely knew why—I sought the relief of laughter: it must have affected me as comic that the girl's general competence should suffer the imputation of that particular flaw. She gave me a quick slightly sharp look as she turned away with my nephew; it appeared to challenge me a little—"Pray what's the matter with YOU?" It was the first expression of the kind I had ever seen in her face. Mrs. Pallant's attention, on the other hand, rather strayed from me; after we had been left there together she sat silent, not heeding me, looking at the lake and mountains—at the snowy crests crowned with the flush of evening. She seemed not even to follow our young companions as they got into their boat and pushed off. For some minutes I respected her mood; I walked slowly up and down the terrace and lighted a cigar, as she had always permitted me to do at Homburg. I found in her, it was true, rather a new air of weariness; her fine cold well-bred face was pale; I noted in it new lines of fatigue, almost of age. At last I stopped in front of her and—since she looked so sad—asked if she had been having bad news.

"The only bad news was when I learned—through your nephew's note to Linda—that you were coming to us."

"Ah then he wrote?"

"Certainly he wrote."

"You take it all harder than I do," I returned as I sat down beside her. And then I added, smiling: "Have you written to his mother?"

Slowly at last, and more directly, she faced me. "Take care, take care, or you'll have been more brutal than you'll afterwards like," she said with an air of patience before the inevitable.

"Never, never! Unless you think me brutal if I ask whether you knew when Linda wrote."

She had an hesitation. "Yes, she showed me her letter. She wouldn't have done anything else. I let it go because I didn't know what course was best. I'm afraid to oppose her to her face."

"Afraid, my dear friend, with that girl?"

"That girl? Much you know about her! It didn't follow you'd come. I didn't take that for granted."

"I'm like you," I said—"I too am afraid of my nephew. I don't venture to oppose him to his face. The only thing I could do—once he wished it—was to come with him."

"I see. Well, there are grounds, after all, on which I'm glad," she rather inscrutably added.

"Oh I was conscientious about that! But I've no authority; I can neither drive him nor stay him—I can use no force," I explained. "Look at the way he's pulling that boat and see if you can fancy me."

“You could tell him she’s a bad hard girl—one who’d poison any good man’s life!” my companion broke out with a passion that startled me.

At first I could only gape. “Dear lady, what do you mean?”

She bent her face into her hands, covering it over with them, and so remained a minute; then she continued a little differently, though as if she hadn’t heard my question: “I hoped you were too disgusted with us—after the way we left you planted.”

“It was disconcerting assuredly, and it might have served if Linda hadn’t written. That patched it up,” I gaily professed. But my gaiety was thin, for I was still amazed at her violence of a moment before. “Do you really mean that she won’t do?” I added.

She made no direct answer; she only said after a little that it didn’t matter whether the crisis should come a few weeks sooner or a few weeks later, since it was destined to come at the first chance, the favouring moment. Linda had marked my young man—and when Linda had marked a thing!

“Bless my soul—how very grim—” But I didn’t understand. “Do you mean she’s in love with him?”

“It’s enough if she makes him think so—though even that isn’t essential.”

Still I was at sea. “If she makes him think so? Dear old friend, what’s your idea? I’ve observed her, I’ve watched her, and when all’s said what has she done? She has been civil and pleasant to him, but it would have been much more marked if she hadn’t. She has really shown him, with her youth and her natural charm, nothing more than common friendliness. Her note was nothing; he let me see it.”

“I don’t think you’ve heard every word she has said to him,” Mrs. Pallant returned with an emphasis that still struck me as perverse.

“No more have you, I take it!” I promptly cried. She evidently meant more than she said; but if this excited my curiosity it also moved, in a different connexion, my indulgence.

“No, but I know my own daughter. She’s a most remarkable young woman.”

“You’ve an extraordinary tone about her,” I declared “such a tone as I think I’ve never before heard on a mother’s lips. I’ve had the same impression from you—that of a disposition to ‘give her away,’ but never yet so strong.”

At this Mrs. Pallant got up; she stood there looking down at me. “You make my reparation—my expiation—difficult!” And leaving me still more astonished she moved along the terrace.

I overtook her presently and repeated her words. “Your reparation—your expiation? What on earth are you talking about?”

“You know perfectly what I mean—it’s too magnanimous of you to pretend you don’t.”

“Well, at any rate,” I said, “I don’t see what good it does me, or what it makes up to me for, that you should abuse your daughter.”

“Oh I don’t care; I shall save him!” she cried as we went, and with an extravagance, as I felt, of sincerity. At the same moment two ladies, apparently English, came toward us—scattered groups had been sitting there and the inmates of the hotel were moving to and fro—and I observed the immediate charming transition, the fruit of such years of social practice, by which, as they greeted us, her tension and her impatience dropped to recognition and pleasure. They stopped to speak to her and she enquired with sweet propriety as to the “continued improvement” of their sister. I strolled on and she presently rejoined me; after

which she had a peremptory note. "Come away from this—come down into the garden." We descended to that blander scene, strolled through it and paused on the border of the lake.

V

The charm of the evening had deepened, the stillness was like a solemn expression on a beautiful face and the whole air of the place divine. In the fading light my nephew's boat was too far out to be perceived. I looked for it a little and then, as I gave it up, remarked that from such an excursion as that, on such a lake and at such an hour, a young man and a young woman of common sensibility could only come back doubly pledged to each other.

To this observation Mrs. Pallant's answer was, superficially at least, irrelevant; she said after a pause: "With you, my dear man, one has certainly to dot one's 'i's.' Haven't you discovered, and didn't I tell you at Homburg, that we're miserably poor?"

"Isn't 'miserably' rather too much—living as you are at an expensive hotel?"

Well, she promptly met this. "They take us en pension, for ever so little a day. I've been knocking about Europe long enough to learn all sorts of horrid arts. Besides, don't speak of hotels; we've spent half our life in them and Linda told me only last night that she hoped never to put her foot into one again. She feels that when she comes to such a place as this she ought, if things were decently right, to find a villa of her own."

"Then her companion there's perfectly competent to give her one. Don't think I've the least desire to push them into each other's arms—I only ask to wash my hands of them. But I should like to know why you want, as you said just now, to save him. When you speak as if your daughter were a monster I take it you're not serious."

She was facing me in the rich short twilight, and to describe herself as immeasurably more serious perhaps than she had ever been in her life she had only to look at me without protestation. "It's Linda's standard. God knows I myself could get on! She's ambitious, luxurious, determined to have what she wants—more 'on the make' than any one I've ever seen. Of course it's open to you to tell me it's my own fault, that I was so before her and have made her so. But does that make me like it any better?"

"Dear Mrs. Pallant, you're wonderful, you're terrible," I could only stammer, lost in the desert of my thoughts.

"Oh yes, you've made up your mind about me; you see me in a certain way and don't like the trouble of changing. *Votre siege est fait.* But you'll HAVE to change—if you've any generosity!" Her eyes shone in the summer dusk and the beauty of her youth came back to her.

"Is this a part of the reparation, of the expiation?" I demanded. "I don't see what you ever did to Archie."

"It's enough that he belongs to you. But it isn't for you I do it—it's for myself," she strangely went on.

"Doubtless you've your own reasons—which I can't penetrate. But can't you sacrifice something else? Must you sacrifice your only child?"

"My only child's my punishment, my only child's my stigma!" she cried in her exaltation.

"It seems to me rather that you're hers."

"Hers? What does SHE know of such things?—what can she ever feel? She's cased in steel; she has a heart of marble. It's true—it's true," said Louisa Pallant. "She appals me!"

I laid my hand on my poor friend's; I uttered, with the intention of checking and soothing her, the first incoherent words that came into my head and I drew her toward a bench a few steps away. She dropped upon it; I placed myself near her and besought her to consider well what she said. She owed me nothing and I wished no one injured, no one denounced or exposed for my sake.

"For your sake? Oh I'm not thinking of you!" she answered; and indeed the next moment I thought my words rather fatuous. "It's a satisfaction to my own conscience—for I HAVE one, little as you may think I've a right to speak of it. I've been punished by my sin itself. I've been hideously worldly, I've thought only of that, and I've taught her to be so—to do the same. That's the only instruction I've ever given her, and she has learned the lesson so well that now I see it stamped there in all her nature, on all her spirit and on all her form, I'm horrified at my work. For years we've lived that way; we've thought of nothing else. She has profited so well by my beautiful influence that she has gone far beyond the great original. I say I'm horrified," Mrs. Pallant dreadfully wound up, "because she's horrible."

"My poor extravagant friend," I pleaded, "isn't it still more so to hear a mother say such things?"

"Why so, if they're abominably true? Besides, I don't care what I say if I save him."

I could only gape again at this least expected of all my adventures. "Do you expect me then to repeat to him—?"

"Not in the least," she broke in; "I'll do it myself." At this I uttered some strong inarticulate protest, but she went on with the grimmest simplicity: "I was very glad at first, but it would have been better if we hadn't met."

"I don't agree to that, for you interest me," I rather ruefully professed, "immensely."

"I don't care if I do—so I interest HIM."

"You must reflect then that your denunciation can only strike me as, for all its violence, vague and unconvincing. Never had a girl less the appearance of bearing such charges out. You know how I've admired her."

"You know nothing about her! *I* do, you see, for she's the work of my hand!" And Mrs. Pallant laughed for bitterness. "I've watched her for years, and little by little, for the last two or three, it has come over me. There's not a tender spot in her whole composition. To arrive at a brilliant social position, if it were necessary, she would see me drown in this lake without lifting a finger, she would stand there and see it—she would push me in—and never feel a pang. That's my young lady!" Her lucidity chilled me to the soul—it seemed to shine so flawless. "To climb up to the top and be splendid and envied there," she went on—"to do that at any cost or by any meanness and cruelty is the only thing she has a heart for. She'd lie for it, she'd steal for it, she'd kill for it!" My companion brought out these words with a cold confidence that had evidently behind it some occult past process of growth. I watched her pale face and glowing eyes; she held me breathless and frowning, but her strange vindictive, or at least retributive, passion irresistibly imposed itself. I found myself at last believing her, pitying her more than I pitied the subject of her dreadful analysis. It was as if she had held her tongue for longer than she could bear, suffering more and more the importunity of the truth. It relieved her thus to drag that to the light, and still she kept up the high and most unholy sacrifice. "God in his mercy has let me see it in time, but his ways are strange that he has let me see it in my daughter. It's myself he has let me see—myself as I was for years. But she's worse—she IS, I assure you; she's worse than I intended or dreamed." Her hands were

clasped tightly together in her lap; her low voice quavered and her breath came short; she looked up at the southern stars as if THEY would understand.

“Have you ever spoken to her as you speak to me?” I finally asked. “Have you ever put before her this terrible arraignment?”

“Put it before her? How can I put it before her when all she would have to say would be: ‘You, YOU, you base one, who made me—?’”

“Then why do you want to play her a trick?”

“I’m not bound to tell you, and you wouldn’t see my point if I did. I should play that boy a far worse one if I were to stay my hand.”

Oh I had my view of this. “If he loves her he won’t believe a word you say.”

“Very possibly, but I shall have done my duty.”

“And shall you say to him,” I asked, “simply what you’ve said to me?”

“Never mind what I shall say to him. It will be something that will perhaps helpfully affect him. Only,” she added with her proud decision, “I must lose no time.”

“If you’re so bent on gaining time,” I said, “why did you let her go out in the boat with him?”

“Let her? how could I prevent it?”

“But she asked your permission.”

“Ah that,” she cried, “is all a part of all the comedy!”

It fairly hushed me to silence, and for a moment more she said nothing. “Then she doesn’t know you hate her?” I resumed.

“I don’t know what she knows. She has depths and depths, and all of them bad. Besides, I don’t hate her in the least; I just pity her for what I’ve made of her. But I pity still more the man who may find himself married to her.”

“There’s not much danger of there being any such person,” I wailed, “at the rate you go on.”

“I beg your pardon—there’s a perfect possibility,” said my companion. “She’ll marry—she’ll marry ‘well.’ She’ll marry a title as well as a fortune.

“It’s a pity my nephew hasn’t a title,” I attempted the grimace of suggesting.

She seemed to wonder. “I see you think I want that, and that I’m acting a part. God forgive you! Your suspicion’s perfectly natural. How can any one TELL,” asked Louisa Pallant—
”with people like us?”

Her utterance of these words brought tears to my eyes. I laid my hand on her arm, holding her a while, and we looked at each other through the dusk. “You couldn’t do more if he were my son.”

“Oh if he had been your son he’d have kept out of it! I like him for himself. He’s simple and sane and honest—he needs affection.”

“He would have quite the most remarkable of mothers-in-law!” I commented.

Mrs. Pallant gave a small dry laugh—she wasn’t joking. We lingered by the lake while I thought over what she had said to me and while she herself apparently thought. I confess that even close at her side and under the strong impression of her sincerity, her indifference to the conventional graces, my imagination, my constitutional scepticism began to range. Queer ideas came into my head. Was the comedy on HER side and not on the girl’s, and was she

posturing as a magnanimous woman at poor Linda's expense? Was she determined, in spite of the young lady's preference, to keep her daughter for a grander personage than a young American whose dollars were not numerous enough—numerous as they were—to make up for his want of high relationships, and had she invented at once the boldest and the subtlest of games in order to keep the case in her hands? If she was prepared really to address herself to Archie she would have to go very far to overcome the mistrust he would be sure to feel at a proceeding superficially so sinister? Was she prepared to go far enough? The answer to these doubts was simply the way I had been touched—it came back to me the next moment—when she used the words “people like us.” Their effect was to wring my heart. She seemed to kneel in the dust, and I felt in a manner ashamed that I had let her sink to it. She said to me at last that I must wait no longer, I must go away before the young people came back. They were staying long, too long; all the more reason then she should deal with my nephew that night. I must drive back to Stresa, or if I liked I could go on foot: it wasn't far—for an active man. She disposed of me freely, she was so full of her purpose; and after we had quitted the garden and returned to the terrace above she seemed almost to push me to leave her—I felt her fine consecrated hands fairly quiver on my shoulders. I was ready to do as she prescribed; she affected me painfully, she had given me a “turn,” and I wanted to get away from her. But before I went I asked her why Linda should regard my young man as such a parti; it didn't square after all with her account of the girl's fierce ambitions. By that account these favours to one so graceless were a woeful waste of time.

“Oh she has worked it all out; she has regarded the question in every light,” said Mrs. Pallant. “If she has made up her mind it's because she sees what she can do.”

“Do you mean that she has talked it over with you?”

My friend's wonderful face pitied my simplicity. “Lord! for what do you take us? We don't talk things over to-day. We know each other's point of view and only have to act. We observe the highest proprieties of speech. We never for a moment name anything ugly—we only just go at it. We can take definitions, which are awkward things, for granted.”

“But in this case,” I nevertheless urged, “the poor thing can't possibly be aware of your point of view.”

“No,” she conceded—“that's because I haven't played fair. Of course she couldn't expect I'd cheat. There ought to be honour among thieves. But it was open to her to do the same.”

“What do you mean by the same?”

“She might have fallen in love with a poor man. Then I should have been ‘done.’”

“A rich one's better; he can do more,” I replied with conviction.

At this she appeared to have, in the oddest way, a momentary revulsion. “So you'd have reason to know if you had led the life that we have! Never to have had really enough—I mean to do just the few simple things we've wanted; never to have had the sinews of war, I suppose you'd call them, the funds for a campaign; to have felt every day and every hour the hard eternal pinch and found the question of dollars and cents—and so horridly few of them—mixed up with every experience, with every impulse: that DOES make one mercenary, does make money seem a good beyond all others; which it's quite natural it should! And it's why Linda's of the opinion that a fortune's always a fortune. She knows all about that of your nephew, how it's invested, how it may be expected to increase, exactly on what sort of footing it would enable her to live. She has decided that it's enough, and enough is as good as a feast. She thinks she could lead him by the nose, and I dare say she could. She'll of course make him live in these countries; she hasn't the slightest intention of casting her pearls—but

basta!" said my friend. "I think she has views upon London, because in England he can hunt and shoot, and that will make him leave her more or less to herself."

"I don't know about his leaving her to herself, but it strikes me that he would like the rest of that matter very much," I returned. "That's not at all a bad programme even from Archie's point of view."

"It's no use thinking of princes," she pursued as if she hadn't heard me. "They're most of them more in want of money even than we. Therefore 'greatness' is out of the question—we really recognised that at an early stage. Your nephew's exactly the sort of young man we've always built upon—if he wasn't, so impossibly, your nephew. From head to foot he was made on purpose. Dear Linda was her mother's own daughter when she recognised him on the spot! One's enough of a prince to-day when one's the right American: such a wonderful price is set on one's not being the wrong! It does as well as anything and it's a great simplification. If you don't believe me go to London and see." She had come with me out to the road. I had said I would walk back to Stresa and we stood there in the sweet dark warmth. As I took her hand, bidding her good-night, I couldn't but exhale a compassion. "Poor Linda, poor Linda!"

"Oh she'll live to do better," said Mrs. Pallant.

"How can she do better—since you've described all she finds Archie as perfection?"

She knew quite what she meant. "Ah better for HIM!"

I still had her hand—I still sought her eyes. "How came it you could throw me over—such a woman as you?"

"Well, my friend, if I hadn't thrown you over how could I do this for you?" On which, disengaging herself, she turned quickly away.

VI

I don't know how deeply she flushed as she made, in the form of her question, this avowal, which was a retraction of a former denial and the real truth, as I permitted myself to believe; but was aware of the colour of my own cheeks while I took my way to Stresa—a walk of half an hour—in the attenuating night. The new and singular character in which she had appeared to me produced in me an emotion that would have made sitting still in a carriage impossible. This same stress kept me up after I had reached my hotel; as I knew I shouldn't sleep it was useless to go to bed. Long, however, as I deferred this ceremony, Archie had not reappeared when the inn-lights began here and there to be dispensed with. I felt even slightly anxious for him, wondering at possible mischances. Then I reflected that in case of an accident on the lake, that is of his continued absence from Baveno—Mrs. Pallant would already have dispatched me a messenger. It was foolish moreover to suppose anything could have happened to him after putting off from Baveno by water to rejoin me, for the evening was absolutely windless and more than sufficiently clear and the lake as calm as glass. Besides I had unlimited confidence in his power to take care of himself in a much tighter place. I went to my room at last; his own was at some distance, the people of the hotel not having been able—it was the height of the autumn season—to make us contiguous. Before I went to bed I had occasion to ring for a servant, and I then learned by a chance enquiry that my nephew had returned an hour before and had gone straight to his own quarters. I hadn't supposed he could come in without my seeing him—I was wandering about the saloons and terraces—and it had not occurred to me to knock at his door. I had half a mind to do so now—I was so anxious as to how I should find him; but I checked myself, for evidently he had wanted to dodge me. This didn't diminish my curiosity, and I slept even less than I had expected. His so

markedly shirking our encounter—for if he hadn't perceived me downstairs he might have looked for me in my room—was a sign that Mrs. Pallant's interview with him would really have come off. What had she said to him? What strong measures had she taken? That almost morbid resolution I still seemed to hear the ring of pointed to conceivable extremities that I shrank from considering. She had spoken of these things while we parted there as something she would do for me; but I had made the mental comment in walking away from her that she hadn't done it yet. It wouldn't truly be done till Archie had truly backed out. Perhaps it was done by this time; his avoiding me seemed almost a proof. That was what I thought of most of the night. I spent a considerable part of it at my window, looking out to the couchant Alps. HAD he thought better of it?—was he making up his mind to think better of it? There was a strange contradiction in the matter; there were in fact more contradictions than ever. I had taken from Louisa what she told me of Linda, and yet that other idea made me ashamed of my nephew. I was sorry for the girl; I regretted her loss of a great chance, if loss it was to be; and yet I hoped her mother's grand treachery—I didn't know what to call it—had been at least, to her lover, thoroughgoing. It would need strong action in that lady to justify his retreat. For him too I was sorry—if she had made on him the impression she desired. Once or twice I was on the point of getting into my dressing-gown and going forth to condole with him. I was sure he too had jumped up from his bed and was looking out of his window at the everlasting hills.

But I am bound to say that when we met in the morning for breakfast he showed few traces of ravage. Youth is strange; it has resources that later experience seems only to undermine. One of these is the masterly resource of beautiful blankness. As we grow older and cleverer we think that too simple, too crude; we dissimulate more elaborately, but with an effect much less baffling. My young man looked not in the least as if he had lain awake or had something on his mind; and when I asked him what he had done after my premature departure—I explained this by saying I had been tired of waiting for him; fagged with my journey I had wanted to go to bed—he replied: “Oh nothing in particular. I hung about the place; I like it better than this one. We had an awfully jolly time on the water. *I* wasn't in the least fagged.” I didn't worry him with questions; it struck me as gross to try to probe his secret. The only indication he gave was on my saying after breakfast that I should go over again to see our friends and my appearing to take for granted he would be glad to come too. Then he let fall that he'd stop at Stresa—he had paid them such a tremendous visit; also that he had arrears of letters. There was a freshness in his scruples about the length of his visits, and I knew something about his correspondence, which consisted entirely of twenty pages every week from his mother. But he soothed my anxiety so little that it was really this yearning that carried me back to Baveno. This time I ordered a conveyance, and as I got into it he stood watching me from the porch of the hotel with his hands in his pockets. Then it was for the first time that I saw in the poor youth's face the expression of a person slightly dazed, slightly foolish even, to whom something disagreeable has happened. Our eyes met as I observed him, and I was on the point of saying “You had really better come with me” when he turned away. He went into the house as to escape my call. I said to myself that he had been indeed warned off, but that it wouldn't take much to bring him back.

The servant to whom I spoke at Baveno described my friends as in a summer-house in the garden, to which he led the way. The place at large had an empty air; most of the inmates of the hotel were dispersed on the lake, on the hills, in picnics, excursions, visits to the Borromean Islands. My guide was so far right as that Linda was in the summer-house, but she was there alone. On finding this the case I stopped short, rather awkwardly—I might have been, from the way I suddenly felt, an unmasked hypocrite, a proved conspirator against her security and honour. But there was no embarrassment in lovely Linda; she looked up with a

cry of pleasure from the book she was reading and held out her hand with engaging frankness. I felt again as if I had no right to that favour, which I pretended not to have noticed. This gave no chill, however, to her pretty manner; she moved a roll of tapestry off the bench so that I might sit down; she praised the place as a delightful shady corner. She had never been fresher, fairer, kinder; she made her mother's awful talk about her a hideous dream. She told me her mother was coming to join her; she had remained indoors to write a letter. One couldn't write out there, though it was so nice in other respects: the table refused to stand firm. They too then had pretexts of letters between them—I judged this a token that the situation was tense. It was the only one nevertheless that Linda gave: like Archie she was young enough to carry it off. She had been used to seeing us always together, yet she made no comment on my having come over without him. I waited in vain for her to speak of this—it would only be natural; her omission couldn't but have a sense. At last I remarked that my nephew was very unsociable that morning; I had expected him to join me, but he hadn't seemed to see the attraction.

"I'm very glad. You can tell him that if you like," said Linda Pallant.

I wondered at her. "If I tell him he'll come at once."

"Then don't tell him; I don't want him to come. He stayed too long last night," she went on, "and kept me out on the water till I don't know what o'clock. That sort of thing isn't done here, you know, and every one was shocked when we came back—or rather, you see, when we didn't! I begged him to bring me in, but he wouldn't. When we did return—I almost had to take the oars myself—I felt as if every one had been sitting up to time us, to stare at us. It was awfully awkward."

These words much impressed me; and as I have treated the reader to most of the reflexions—some of them perhaps rather morbid—in which I indulged on the subject of this young lady and her mother, I may as well complete the record and let him know that I now wondered whether Linda—candid and accomplished maiden—entertained the graceful thought of strengthening her hold of Archie by attempting to prove he had "compromised" her. "Ah no doubt that was the reason he had a bad conscience last evening!" I made answer. "When he came back to Stresa he sneaked off to his room; he wouldn't look me in the face."

But my young lady was not to be ruffled. "Mamma was so vexed that she took him apart and gave him a scolding. And to punish ME she sent me straight to bed. She has very old-fashioned ideas—haven't you, mamma?" she added, looking over my head at Mrs. Pallant, who had just come in behind me.

I forget how her mother met Linda's appeal; Louisa stood there with two letters, sealed and addressed, in her hand. She greeted me gaily and then asked her daughter if she were possessed of postage-stamps. Linda consulted a well-worn little pocket-book and confessed herself destitute; whereupon her mother gave her the letters with the request that she would go into the hotel, buy the proper stamps at the office, carefully affix them and put the letters into the box. She was to pay for the stamps, not have them put on the bill—a preference for which Mrs. Pallant gave reasons. I had bought some at Stresa that morning and was on the point of offering them when, apparently having guessed my intention, the elder lady silenced me with a look. Linda announced without reserve that she hadn't money and Louisa then fumbled for a franc. When she had found and bestowed it the girl kissed her before going off with the letters.

"Darling mother, you haven't any too many of them, have you?" she murmured; and she gave me, sidelong, as she left us, the prettiest half-comical, half-pitiful smile.

"She's amazing—she's amazing," said Mrs. Pallant as we looked at each other.

“Does she know what you’ve done?”

“She knows I’ve done something and she’s making up her mind what it is. She’ll satisfy herself in the course of the next twenty-four hours—if your nephew doesn’t come back. I think I can promise you he won’t.”

“And won’t she ask you?”

“Never!”

“Shan’t you tell her? Can you sit down together in this summer-house, this divine day, with such a dreadful thing as that between you?”

My question found my friend quite ready. “Don’t you remember what I told you about our relations—that everything was implied between us and nothing expressed? The ideas we have had in common—our perpetual worldliness, our always looking out for chances—are not the sort of thing that can be uttered conveniently between persons who like to keep up forms, as we both do: so that, always, if we’ve understood each other it has been enough. We shall understand each other now, as we’ve always done, and nothing will be changed. There has always been something between us that couldn’t be talked about.”

“Certainly, she’s amazing—she’s amazing,” I repeated; “but so are you.” And then I asked her what she had said to my boy.

She seemed surprised. “Hasn’t he told you?”

“No, and he never will.”

“I’m glad of that,” she answered simply.

“But I’m not sure he won’t come back. He didn’t this morning, but he had already half a mind to.”

“That’s your imagination,” my companion said with her fine authority. “If you knew what I told him you’d be sure.”

“And you won’t let me know?”

“Never, dear friend.”

“And did he believe you?”

“Time will show—but I think so.”

“And how did you make it plausible to him that you should take so unnatural a course?”

For a moment she said nothing, only looking at me. Then at last: “I told him the truth.”

“The truth?”

“Take him away—take him away!” she broke out. “That’s why I got rid of Linda, to tell you you mustn’t stay—you must leave Stresa to-morrow. This time it’s you who must do it. I can’t fly from you again—it costs too much!” And she smiled strangely.

“Don’t be afraid; don’t be afraid. We’ll break camp again to-morrow—ah me! But I want to go myself,” I added. I took her hand in farewell, but spoke again while I held it. “The way you put it, about Linda, was very bad?”

“It was horrible.”

I turned away—I felt indeed that I couldn’t stay. She kept me from going to the hotel, as I might meet Linda coming back, which I was far from wishing to do, and showed me another way into the road. Then she turned round to meet her daughter and spend the rest of the

morning there with her, spend it before the bright blue lake and the snowy crests of the Alps. When I reached Stresa again I found my young man had gone off to Milan—to see the cathedral, the servant said—leaving a message for me to the effect that, as he shouldn't be back for a day or two, though there were numerous trains, he had taken a few clothes. The next day I received telegram-notice that he had determined to go on to Venice and begged I would forward the rest of his luggage. "Please don't come after me," this missive added; "I want to be alone; I shall do no harm." That sounded pathetic to me, in the light of what I knew, and I was glad to leave him to his own devices. He proceeded to Venice and I recrossed the Alps. For several weeks after this I expected to discover that he had rejoined Mrs. Pallant; but when we met that November in Paris I saw he had nothing to hide from me save indeed the secret of what our extraordinary friend had said to him. This he concealed from me then and has concealed ever since. He returned to America before Christmas—when I felt the crisis over. I've never again seen the wronger of my youth. About a year after our more recent adventure her daughter Linda married, in London, a young Englishman the heir to a large fortune, a fortune acquired by his father in some prosaic but flourishing industry. Mrs. Gimmingham's admired photographs—such is Linda's present name—may be obtained from the principal stationers. I am convinced her mother was sincere. My nephew has not even yet changed his state, my sister at last thinks it high time. I put before her as soon as I next saw her the incidents here recorded, and—such is the inconsequence of women—nothing can exceed her reprobation of Louisa Pallant.

The Aspern Papers

I

I had taken Mrs. Prest into my confidence; in truth without her I should have made but little advance, for the fruitful idea in the whole business dropped from her friendly lips. It was she who invented the short cut, who severed the Gordian knot. It is not supposed to be the nature of women to rise as a general thing to the largest and most liberal view—I mean of a practical scheme; but it has struck me that they sometimes throw off a bold conception—such as a man would not have risen to—with singular serenity. “Simply ask them to take you in on the footing of a lodger”—I don’t think that unaided I should have risen to that. I was beating about the bush, trying to be ingenious, wondering by what combination of arts I might become an acquaintance, when she offered this happy suggestion that the way to become an acquaintance was first to become an inmate. Her actual knowledge of the Misses Bordereau was scarcely larger than mine, and indeed I had brought with me from England some definite facts which were new to her. Their name had been mixed up ages before with one of the greatest names of the century, and they lived now in Venice in obscurity, on very small means, unvisited, unapproachable, in a dilapidated old palace on an out-of-the-way canal: this was the substance of my friend’s impression of them. She herself had been established in Venice for fifteen years and had done a great deal of good there; but the circle of her benevolence did not include the two shy, mysterious and, as it was somehow supposed, scarcely respectable Americans (they were believed to have lost in their long exile all national quality, besides having had, as their name implied, some French strain in their origin), who asked no favors and desired no attention. In the early years of her residence she had made an attempt to see them, but this had been successful only as regards the little one, as Mrs. Prest called the niece; though in reality as I afterward learned she was considerably the bigger of the two. She had heard Miss Bordereau was ill and had a suspicion that she was in want; and she had gone to the house to offer assistance, so that if there were suffering (and American suffering), she should at least not have it on her conscience. The “little one” received her in the great cold, tarnished Venetian sala, the central hall of the house, paved with marble and roofed with dim crossbeams, and did not even ask her to sit down. This was not encouraging for me, who wished to sit so fast, and I remarked as much to Mrs. Prest. She however replied with profundity, “Ah, but there’s all the difference: I went to confer a favor and you will go to ask one. If they are proud you will be on the right side.” And she offered to show me their house to begin with—to row me thither in her gondola. I let her know that I had already been to look at it half a dozen times; but I accepted her invitation, for it charmed me to hover about the place. I had made my way to it the day after my arrival in Venice (it had been described to me in advance by the friend in England to whom I owed definite information as to their possession of the papers), and I had besieged it with my eyes while I considered my plan of campaign. Jeffrey Aspern had never been in it that I knew of; but some note of his voice seemed to abide there by a roundabout implication, a faint reverberation.

Mrs. Prest knew nothing about the papers, but she was interested in my curiosity, as she was always interested in the joys and sorrows of her friends. As we went, however, in her gondola, gliding there under the sociable hood with the bright Venetian picture framed on either side by the movable window, I could see that she was amused by my infatuation, the way my interest in the papers had become a fixed idea. “One would think you expected to find in them the answer to the riddle of the universe,” she said; and I denied the impeachment only by replying that if I had to choose between that precious solution and a bundle of Jeffrey

Aspern's letters I knew indeed which would appear to me the greater boon. She pretended to make light of his genius, and I took no pains to defend him. One doesn't defend one's god: one's god is in himself a defense. Besides, today, after his long comparative obscurity, he hangs high in the heaven of our literature, for all the world to see; he is a part of the light by which we walk. The most I said was that he was no doubt not a woman's poet: to which she rejoined aptly enough that he had been at least Miss Bordereau's. The strange thing had been for me to discover in England that she was still alive: it was as if I had been told Mrs. Siddons was, or Queen Caroline, or the famous Lady Hamilton, for it seemed to me that she belonged to a generation as extinct. "Why, she must be tremendously old—at least a hundred," I had said; but on coming to consider dates I saw that it was not strictly necessary that she should have exceeded by very much the common span. Nonetheless she was very far advanced in life, and her relations with Jeffrey Aspern had occurred in her early womanhood. "That is her excuse," said Mrs. Prest, half-sententiously and yet also somewhat as if she were ashamed of making a speech so little in the real tone of Venice. As if a woman needed an excuse for having loved the divine poet! He had been not only one of the most brilliant minds of his day (and in those years, when the century was young, there were, as everyone knows, many), but one of the most genial men and one of the handsomest.

The niece, according to Mrs. Prest, was not so old, and she risked the conjecture that she was only a grandniece. This was possible; I had nothing but my share in the very limited knowledge of my English fellow worshipper John Cumnor, who had never seen the couple. The world, as I say, had recognized Jeffrey Aspern, but Cumnor and I had recognized him most. The multitude, today, flocked to his temple, but of that temple he and I regarded ourselves as the ministers. We held, justly, as I think, that we had done more for his memory than anyone else, and we had done it by opening lights into his life. He had nothing to fear from us because he had nothing to fear from the truth, which alone at such a distance of time we could be interested in establishing. His early death had been the only dark spot in his life, unless the papers in Miss Bordereau's hands should perversely bring out others. There had been an impression about 1825 that he had "treated her badly," just as there had been an impression that he had "served," as the London populace says, several other ladies in the same way. Each of these cases Cumnor and I had been able to investigate, and we had never failed to acquit him conscientiously of shabby behavior. I judged him perhaps more indulgently than my friend; certainly, at any rate, it appeared to me that no man could have walked straighter in the given circumstances. These were almost always awkward. Half the women of his time, to speak liberally, had flung themselves at his head, and out of this pernicious fashion many complications, some of them grave, had not failed to arise. He was not a woman's poet, as I had said to Mrs. Prest, in the modern phase of his reputation; but the situation had been different when the man's own voice was mingled with his song. That voice, by every testimony, was one of the sweetest ever heard. "Orpheus and the Maenads!" was the exclamation that rose to my lips when I first turned over his correspondence. Almost all the Maenads were unreasonable, and many of them insupportable; it struck me in short that he was kinder, more considerate than, in his place (if I could imagine myself in such a place!) I should have been.

It was certainly strange beyond all strangeness, and I shall not take up space with attempting to explain it, that whereas in all these other lines of research we had to deal with phantoms and dust, the mere echoes of echoes, the one living source of information that had lingered on into our time had been unheeded by us. Every one of Aspern's contemporaries had, according to our belief, passed away; we had not been able to look into a single pair of eyes into which his had looked or to feel a transmitted contact in any aged hand that his had touched. Most dead of all did poor Miss Bordereau appear, and yet she alone had survived. We exhausted in

the course of months our wonder that we had not found her out sooner, and the substance of our explanation was that she had kept so quiet. The poor lady on the whole had had reason for doing so. But it was a revelation to us that it was possible to keep so quiet as that in the latter half of the nineteenth century—the age of newspapers and telegrams and photographs and interviewers. And she had taken no great trouble about it either: she had not hidden herself away in an undiscoverable hole; she had boldly settled down in a city of exhibition. The only secret of her safety that we could perceive was that Venice contained so many curiosities that were greater than she. And then accident had somehow favored her, as was shown for example in the fact that Mrs. Prest had never happened to mention her to me, though I had spent three weeks in Venice—under her nose, as it were—five years before. Mrs. Prest had not mentioned this much to anyone; she appeared almost to have forgotten she was there. Of course she had not the responsibilities of an editor. It was no explanation of the old woman's having eluded us to say that she lived abroad, for our researches had again and again taken us (not only by correspondence but by personal inquiry) to France, to Germany, to Italy, in which countries, not counting his important stay in England, so many of the too few years of Aspern's career were spent. We were glad to think at least that in all our publishings (some people consider I believe that we have overdone them), we had only touched in passing and in the most discreet manner on Miss Bordereau's connection. Oddly enough, even if we had had the material (and we often wondered what had become of it), it would have been the most difficult episode to handle.

The gondola stopped, the old palace was there; it was a house of the class which in Venice carries even in extreme dilapidation the dignified name. "How charming! It's gray and pink!" my companion exclaimed; and that is the most comprehensive description of it. It was not particularly old, only two or three centuries; and it had an air not so much of decay as of quiet discouragement, as if it had rather missed its career. But its wide front, with a stone balcony from end to end of the piano nobile or most important floor, was architectural enough, with the aid of various pilasters and arches; and the stucco with which in the intervals it had long ago been endued was rosy in the April afternoon. It overlooked a clean, melancholy, unfrequented canal, which had a narrow riva or convenient footway on either side. "I don't know why—there are no brick gables," said Mrs. Prest, "but this corner has seemed to me before more Dutch than Italian, more like Amsterdam than like Venice. It's perversely clean, for reasons of its own; and though you can pass on foot scarcely anyone ever thinks of doing so. It has the air of a Protestant Sunday. Perhaps the people are afraid of the Misses Bordereau. I daresay they have the reputation of witches."

I forget what answer I made to this—I was given up to two other reflections. The first of these was that if the old lady lived in such a big, imposing house she could not be in any sort of misery and therefore would not be tempted by a chance to let a couple of rooms. I expressed this idea to Mrs. Prest, who gave me a very logical reply. "If she didn't live in a big house how could it be a question of her having rooms to spare? If she were not amply lodged herself you would lack ground to approach her. Besides, a big house here, and especially in this quartier perdu, proves nothing at all: it is perfectly compatible with a state of penury. Dilapidated old palazzi, if you will go out of the way for them, are to be had for five shillings a year. And as for the people who live in them—no, until you have explored Venice socially as much as I have you can form no idea of their domestic desolation. They live on nothing, for they have nothing to live on." The other idea that had come into my head was connected with a high blank wall which appeared to confine an expanse of ground on one side of the house. Blank I call it, but it was figured over with the patches that please a painter, repaired breaches, crumbings of plaster, extrusions of brick that had turned pink with time; and a few thin trees, with the poles of certain rickety trellises, were visible over the top. The place was a

garden, and apparently it belonged to the house. It suddenly occurred to me that if it did belong to the house I had my pretext.

I sat looking out on all this with Mrs. Prest (it was covered with the golden glow of Venice) from the shade of our felze, and she asked me if I would go in then, while she waited for me, or come back another time. At first I could not decide—it was doubtless very weak of me. I wanted still to think I MIGHT get a footing, and I was afraid to meet failure, for it would leave me, as I remarked to my companion, without another arrow for my bow. “Why not another?” she inquired as I sat there hesitating and thinking it over; and she wished to know why even now and before taking the trouble of becoming an inmate (which might be wretchedly uncomfortable after all, even if it succeeded), I had not the resource of simply offering them a sum of money down. In that way I might obtain the documents without bad nights.

“Dearest lady,” I exclaimed, “excuse the impatience of my tone when I suggest that you must have forgotten the very fact (surely I communicated it to you) which pushed me to throw myself upon your ingenuity. The old woman won’t have the documents spoken of; they are personal, delicate, intimate, and she hasn’t modern notions, God bless her! If I should sound that note first I should certainly spoil the game. I can arrive at the papers only by putting her off her guard, and I can put her off her guard only by ingratiating diplomatic practices. Hypocrisy, duplicity are my only chance. I am sorry for it, but for Jeffrey Aspern’s sake I would do worse still. First I must take tea with her; then tackle the main job.” And I told over what had happened to John Cumnor when he wrote to her. No notice whatever had been taken of his first letter, and the second had been answered very sharply, in six lines, by the niece. “Miss Bordereau requested her to say that she could not imagine what he meant by troubling them. They had none of Mr. Aspern’s papers, and if they had should never think of showing them to anyone on any account whatever. She didn’t know what he was talking about and begged he would let her alone.” I certainly did not want to be met that way.

“Well,” said Mrs. Prest after a moment, provokingly, “perhaps after all they haven’t any of his things. If they deny it flat how are you sure?”

“John Cumnor is sure, and it would take me long to tell you how his conviction, or his very strong presumption—strong enough to stand against the old lady’s not unnatural fib—has built itself up. Besides, he makes much of the internal evidence of the niece’s letter.”

“The internal evidence?”

“Her calling him ‘Mr. Aspern.’”

“I don’t see what that proves.”

“It proves familiarity, and familiarity implies the possession of mementoes, or relics. I can’t tell you how that ‘Mr.’ touches me—how it bridges over the gulf of time and brings our hero near to me—nor what an edge it gives to my desire to see Juliana. You don’t say, ‘Mr.’ Shakespeare.”

“Would I, any more, if I had a box full of his letters?”

“Yes, if he had been your lover and someone wanted them!” And I added that John Cumnor was so convinced, and so all the more convinced by Miss Bordereau’s tone, that he would have come himself to Venice on the business were it not that for him there was the obstacle that it would be difficult to disprove his identity with the person who had written to them, which the old ladies would be sure to suspect in spite of dissimulation and a change of name. If they were to ask him point-blank if he were not their correspondent it would be too

awkward for him to lie; whereas I was fortunately not tied in that way. I was a fresh hand and could say no without lying.

“But you will have to change your name,” said Mrs. Prest. “Juliana lives out of the world as much as it is possible to live, but none the less she has probably heard of Mr. Aspern’s editors; she perhaps possesses what you have published.”

“I have thought of that,” I returned; and I drew out of my pocketbook a visiting card, neatly engraved with a name that was not my own.

“You are very extravagant; you might have written it,” said my companion.

“This looks more genuine.”

“Certainly, you are prepared to go far! But it will be awkward about your letters; they won’t come to you in that mask.”

“My banker will take them in, and I will go every day to fetch them. It will give me a little walk.”

“Shall you only depend upon that?” asked Mrs. Prest. “Aren’t you coming to see me?”

“Oh, you will have left Venice, for the hot months, long before there are any results. I am prepared to roast all summer—as well as hereafter, perhaps you’ll say! Meanwhile, John Cumnor will bombard me with letters addressed, in my feigned name, to the care of the padrona.”

“She will recognize his hand,” my companion suggested.

“On the envelope he can disguise it.”

“Well, you’re a precious pair! Doesn’t it occur to you that even if you are able to say you are not Mr. Cumnor in person they may still suspect you of being his emissary?”

“Certainly, and I see only one way to parry that.”

“And what may that be?”

I hesitated a moment. “To make love to the niece.”

“Ah,” cried Mrs. Prest, “wait till you see her!”

II

“I must work the garden—I must work the garden,” I said to myself, five minutes later, as I waited, upstairs, in the long, dusky sala, where the bare scagliola floor gleamed vaguely in a chink of the closed shutters. The place was impressive but it looked cold and cautious. Mrs. Prest had floated away, giving me a rendezvous at the end of half an hour by some neighboring water steps; and I had been let into the house, after pulling the rusty bell wire, by a little red-headed, white-faced maidservant, who was very young and not ugly and wore clicking pattens and a shawl in the fashion of a hood. She had not contented herself with opening the door from above by the usual arrangement of a creaking pulley, though she had looked down at me first from an upper window, dropping the inevitable challenge which in Italy precedes the hospitable act. As a general thing I was irritated by this survival of medieval manners, though as I liked the old I suppose I ought to have liked it; but I was so determined to be genial that I took my false card out of my pocket and held it up to her, smiling as if it were a magic token. It had the effect of one indeed, for it brought her, as I say, all the way down. I begged her to hand it to her mistress, having first written on it in Italian the words, “Could you very kindly see a gentleman, an American, for a moment?” The little maid was not hostile, and I reflected that even that was perhaps something gained. She

colored, she smiled and looked both frightened and pleased. I could see that my arrival was a great affair, that visits were rare in that house, and that she was a person who would have liked a sociable place. When she pushed forward the heavy door behind me I felt that I had a foot in the citadel. She pattered across the damp, stony lower hall and I followed her up the high staircase—stonier still, as it seemed—without an invitation. I think she had meant I should wait for her below, but such was not my idea, and I took up my station in the sala. She flitted, at the far end of it, into impenetrable regions, and I looked at the place with my heart beating as I had known it to do in the dentist's parlor. It was gloomy and stately, but it owed its character almost entirely to its noble shape and to the fine architectural doors—as high as the doors of houses—which, leading into the various rooms, repeated themselves on either side at intervals. They were surmounted with old faded painted escutcheons, and here and there, in the spaces between them, brown pictures, which I perceived to be bad, in battered frames, were suspended. With the exception of several straw-bottomed chairs with their backs to the wall, the grand obscure vista contained nothing else to minister to effect. It was evidently never used save as a passage, and little even as that. I may add that by the time the door opened again through which the maidservant had escaped, my eyes had grown used to the want of light.

I had not meant by my private ejaculation that I must myself cultivate the soil of the tangled enclosure which lay beneath the windows, but the lady who came toward me from the distance over the hard, shining floor might have supposed as much from the way in which, as I went rapidly to meet her, I exclaimed, taking care to speak Italian: “The garden, the garden—do me the pleasure to tell me if it's yours!”

She stopped short, looking at me with wonder; and then, “Nothing here is mine,” she answered in English, coldly and sadly.

“Oh, you are English; how delightful!” I remarked, ingenuously. “But surely the garden belongs to the house?”

“Yes, but the house doesn't belong to me.” She was a long, lean, pale person, habited apparently in a dull-colored dressing gown, and she spoke with a kind of mild literalness. She did not ask me to sit down, any more than years before (if she were the niece) she had asked Mrs. Prest, and we stood face to face in the empty pompous hall.

“Well then, would you kindly tell me to whom I must address myself? I'm afraid you'll think me odiously intrusive, but you know I MUST have a garden—upon my honor I must!”

Her face was not young, but it was simple; it was not fresh, but it was mild. She had large eyes which were not bright, and a great deal of hair which was not “dressed,” and long fine hands which were—possibly—not clean. She clasped these members almost convulsively as, with a confused, alarmed look, she broke out, “Oh, don't take it away from us; we like it ourselves!”

“You have the use of it then?”

“Oh, yes. If it wasn't for that!” And she gave a shy, melancholy smile.

“Isn't it a luxury, precisely? That's why, intending to be in Venice some weeks, possibly all summer, and having some literary work, some reading and writing to do, so that I must be quiet, and yet if possible a great deal in the open air—that's why I have felt that a garden is really indispensable. I appeal to your own experience,” I went on, smiling. “Now can't I look at yours?”

“I don't know, I don't understand,” the poor woman murmured, planted there and letting her embarrassed eyes wander all over my strangeness.

“I mean only from one of those windows—such grand ones as you have here—if you will let me open the shutters.” And I walked toward the back of the house. When I had advanced halfway I stopped and waited, as if I took it for granted she would accompany me. I had been of necessity very abrupt, but I strove at the same time to give her the impression of extreme courtesy. “I have been looking at furnished rooms all over the place, and it seems impossible to find any with a garden attached. Naturally in a place like Venice gardens are rare. It’s absurd if you like, for a man, but I can’t live without flowers.”

“There are none to speak of down there.” She came nearer to me, as if, though she mistrusted me, I had drawn her by an invisible thread. I went on again, and she continued as she followed me: “We have a few, but they are very common. It costs too much to cultivate them; one has to have a man.”

“Why shouldn’t I be the man?” I asked. “I’ll work without wages; or rather I’ll put in a gardener. You shall have the sweetest flowers in Venice.”

She protested at this, with a queer little sigh which might also have been a gush of rapture at the picture I presented. Then she observed, “We don’t know you—we don’t know you.”

“You know me as much as I know you: that is much more, because you know my name. And if you are English I am almost a countryman.”

“We are not English,” said my companion, watching me helplessly while I threw open the shutters of one of the divisions of the wide high window.

“You speak the language so beautifully: might I ask what you are?” Seen from above the garden was certainly shabby; but I perceived at a glance that it had great capabilities. She made no rejoinder, she was so lost in staring at me, and I exclaimed, “You don’t mean to say you are also by chance American?”

“I don’t know; we used to be.”

“Used to be? Surely you haven’t changed?”

“It’s so many years ago—we are nothing.”

“So many years that you have been living here? Well, I don’t wonder at that; it’s a grand old house. I suppose you all use the garden,” I went on, “but I assure you I shouldn’t be in your way. I would be very quiet and stay in one corner.”

“We all use it?” she repeated after me, vaguely, not coming close to the window but looking at my shoes. She appeared to think me capable of throwing her out.

“I mean all your family, as many as you are.”

“There is only one other; she is very old—she never goes down.”

“Only one other, in all this great house!” I feigned to be not only amazed but almost scandalized. “Dear lady, you must have space then to spare!”

“To spare?” she repeated, in the same dazed way.

“Why, you surely don’t live (two quiet women—I see YOU are quiet, at any rate) in fifty rooms!” Then with a burst of hope and cheer I demanded: “Couldn’t you let me two or three? That would set me up!”

I had not struck the note that translated my purpose, and I need not reproduce the whole of the tune I played. I ended by making my interlocutress believe that I was an honorable person, though of course I did not even attempt to persuade her that I was not an eccentric one. I repeated that I had studies to pursue; that I wanted quiet; that I delighted in a garden

and had vainly sought one up and down the city; that I would undertake that before another month was over the dear old house should be smothered in flowers. I think it was the flowers that won my suit, for I afterward found that Miss Tita (for such the name of this high tremulous spinster proved somewhat incongruously to be) had an insatiable appetite for them. When I speak of my suit as won I mean that before I left her she had promised that she would refer the question to her aunt. I inquired who her aunt might be and she answered, "Why, Miss Bordereau!" with an air of surprise, as if I might have been expected to know. There were contradictions like this in Tita Bordereau which, as I observed later, contributed to make her an odd and affecting person. It was the study of the two ladies to live so that the world should not touch them, and yet they had never altogether accepted the idea that it never heard of them. In Tita at any rate a grateful susceptibility to human contact had not died out, and contact of a limited order there would be if I should come to live in the house.

"We have never done anything of the sort; we have never had a lodger or any kind of inmate." So much as this she made a point of saying to me. "We are very poor, we live very badly. The rooms are very bare—that you might take; they have nothing in them. I don't know how you would sleep, how you would eat."

"With your permission, I could easily put in a bed and a few tables and chairs. C'est la moindre des choses and the affair of an hour or two. I know a little man from whom I can hire what I should want for a few months, for a trifle, and my gondolier can bring the things round in his boat. Of course in this great house you must have a second kitchen, and my servant, who is a wonderfully handy fellow" (this personage was an evocation of the moment), "can easily cook me a chop there. My tastes and habits are of the simplest; I live on flowers!" And then I ventured to add that if they were very poor it was all the more reason they should let their rooms. They were bad economists—I had never heard of such a waste of material.

I saw in a moment that the good lady had never before been spoken to in that way, with a kind of humorous firmness which did not exclude sympathy but was on the contrary founded on it. She might easily have told me that my sympathy was impertinent, but this by good fortune did not occur to her. I left her with the understanding that she would consider the matter with her aunt and that I might come back the next day for their decision.

"The aunt will refuse; she will think the whole proceeding very louche!" Mrs. Prest declared shortly after this, when I had resumed my place in her gondola. She had put the idea into my head and now (so little are women to be counted on) she appeared to take a despondent view of it. Her pessimism provoked me and I pretended to have the best hopes; I went so far as to say that I had a distinct presentiment that I should succeed. Upon this Mrs. Prest broke out, "Oh, I see what's in your head! You fancy you have made such an impression in a quarter of an hour that she is dying for you to come and can be depended upon to bring the old one round. If you do get in you'll count it as a triumph."

I did count it as a triumph, but only for the editor (in the last analysis), not for the man, who had not the tradition of personal conquest. When I went back on the morrow the little maidservant conducted me straight through the long sala (it opened there as before in perfect perspective and was lighter now, which I thought a good omen) into the apartment from which the recipient of my former visit had emerged on that occasion. It was a large shabby parlor, with a fine old painted ceiling and a strange figure sitting alone at one of the windows. They come back to me now almost with the palpitation they caused, the successive feelings that accompanied my consciousness that as the door of the room closed behind me I was really face to face with the Juliana of some of Aspern's most exquisite and most renowned lyrics. I grew used to her afterward, though never completely; but as she sat there before me

my heart beat as fast as if the miracle of resurrection had taken place for my benefit. Her presence seemed somehow to contain his, and I felt nearer to him at that first moment of seeing her than I ever had been before or ever have been since. Yes, I remember my emotions in their order, even including a curious little tremor that took me when I saw that the niece was not there. With her, the day before, I had become sufficiently familiar, but it almost exceeded my courage (much as I had longed for the event) to be left alone with such a terrible relic as the aunt. She was too strange, too literally resurgent. Then came a check, with the perception that we were not really face to face, inasmuch as she had over her eyes a horrible green shade which, for her, served almost as a mask. I believed for the instant that she had put it on expressly, so that from underneath it she might scrutinize me without being scrutinized herself. At the same time it increased the presumption that there was a ghastly death's-head lurking behind it. The divine Juliana as a grinning skull—the vision hung there until it passed. Then it came to me that she WAS tremendously old—so old that death might take her at any moment, before I had time to get what I wanted from her. The next thought was a correction to that; it lighted up the situation. She would die next week, she would die tomorrow—then I could seize her papers. Meanwhile she sat there neither moving nor speaking. She was very small and shrunken, bent forward, with her hands in her lap. She was dressed in black, and her head was wrapped in a piece of old black lace which showed no hair.

My emotion keeping me silent she spoke first, and the remark she made was exactly the most unexpected.

III

“Our house is very far from the center, but the little canal is very *comme il faut*.”

“It’s the sweetest corner of Venice and I can imagine nothing more charming,” I hastened to reply. The old lady’s voice was very thin and weak, but it had an agreeable, cultivated murmur, and there was wonder in the thought that that individual note had been in Jeffrey Aspern’s ear.

“Please to sit down there. I hear very well,” she said quietly, as if perhaps I had been shouting at her; and the chair she pointed to was at a certain distance. I took possession of it, telling her that I was perfectly aware that I had intruded, that I had not been properly introduced and could only throw myself upon her indulgence. Perhaps the other lady, the one I had had the honor of seeing the day before, would have explained to her about the garden. That was literally what had given me courage to take a step so unconventional. I had fallen in love at sight with the whole place (she herself probably was so used to it that she did not know the impression it was capable of making on a stranger), and I had felt it was really a case to risk something. Was her own kindness in receiving me a sign that I was not wholly out in my calculation? It would render me extremely happy to think so. I could give her my word of honor that I was a most respectable, inoffensive person and that as an inmate they would be barely conscious of my existence. I would conform to any regulations, any restrictions if they would only let me enjoy the garden. Moreover I should be delighted to give her references, guarantees; they would be of the very best, both in Venice and in England as well as in America.

She listened to me in perfect stillness and I felt that she was looking at me with great attention, though I could see only the lower part of her bleached and shriveled face. Independently of the refining process of old age it had a delicacy which once must have been great. She had been very fair, she had had a wonderful complexion. She was silent a little

after I had ceased speaking; then she inquired, "If you are so fond of a garden why don't you go to terra firma, where there are so many far better than this?"

"Oh, it's the combination!" I answered, smiling; and then, with rather a flight of fancy, "It's the idea of a garden in the middle of the sea."

"It's not in the middle of the sea; you can't see the water."

I stared a moment, wondering whether she wished to convict me of fraud. "Can't see the water? Why, dear madam, I can come up to the very gate in my boat."

She appeared inconsequent, for she said vaguely in reply to this, "Yes, if you have got a boat. I haven't any; it's many years since I have been in one of the gondolas." She uttered these words as if the gondolas were a curious faraway craft which she knew only by hearsay.

"Let me assure you of the pleasure with which I would put mine at your service!" I exclaimed. I had scarcely said this, however, before I became aware that the speech was in questionable taste and might also do me the injury of making me appear too eager, too possessed of a hidden motive. But the old woman remained impenetrable and her attitude bothered me by suggesting that she had a fuller vision of me than I had of her. She gave me no thanks for my somewhat extravagant offer but remarked that the lady I had seen the day before was her niece; she would presently come in. She had asked her to stay away a little on purpose, because she herself wished to see me at first alone. She relapsed into silence, and I asked myself why she had judged this necessary and what was coming yet; also whether I might venture on some judicious remark in praise of her companion. I went so far as to say that I should be delighted to see her again: she had been so very courteous to me, considering how odd she must have thought me—a declaration which drew from Miss Bordereau another of her whimsical speeches.

"She has very good manners; I bred her up myself!" I was on the point of saying that that accounted for the easy grace of the niece, but I arrested myself in time, and the next moment the old woman went on: "I don't care who you may be—I don't want to know; it signifies very little today." This had all the air of being a formula of dismissal, as if her next words would be that I might take myself off now that she had had the amusement of looking on the face of such a monster of indiscretion. Therefore I was all the more surprised when she added, with her soft, venerable quaver, "You may have as many rooms as you like—if you will pay a good deal of money."

I hesitated but for a single instant, long enough to ask myself what she meant in particular by this condition. First it struck me that she must have really a large sum in her mind; then I reasoned quickly that her idea of a large sum would probably not correspond to my own. My deliberation, I think, was not so visible as to diminish the promptitude with which I replied, "I will pay with pleasure and of course in advance whatever you may think is proper to ask me."

"Well then, a thousand francs a month," she rejoined instantly, while her baffling green shade continued to cover her attitude.

The figure, as they say, was startling and my logic had been at fault. The sum she had mentioned was, by the Venetian measure of such matters, exceedingly large; there was many an old palace in an out-of-the-way corner that I might on such terms have enjoyed by the year. But so far as my small means allowed I was prepared to spend money, and my decision was quickly taken. I would pay her with a smiling face what she asked, but in that case I would give myself the compensation of extracting the papers from her for nothing. Moreover if she had asked five times as much I should have risen to the occasion; so odious would it

have appeared to me to stand chaffering with Aspern's Juliana. It was queer enough to have a question of money with her at all. I assured her that her views perfectly met my own and that on the morrow I should have the pleasure of putting three months' rent into her hand. She received this announcement with serenity and with no apparent sense that after all it would be becoming of her to say that I ought to see the rooms first. This did not occur to her and indeed her serenity was mainly what I wanted. Our little bargain was just concluded when the door opened and the younger lady appeared on the threshold. As soon as Miss Bordereau saw her niece she cried out almost gaily, "He will give three thousand—three thousand tomorrow!"

Miss Tita stood still, with her patient eyes turning from one of us to the other; then she inquired, scarcely above her breath, "Do you mean francs?"

"Did you mean francs or dollars?" the old woman asked of me at this.

"I think francs were what you said," I answered, smiling.

"That is very good," said Miss Tita, as if she had become conscious that her own question might have looked overreaching.

"What do YOU know? You are ignorant," Miss Bordereau remarked; not with acerbity but with a strange, soft coldness.

"Yes, of money—certainly of money!" Miss Tita hastened to exclaim.

"I am sure you have your own branches of knowledge," I took the liberty of saying, genially. There was something painful to me, somehow, in the turn the conversation had taken, in the discussion of the rent.

"She had a very good education when she was young. I looked into that myself," said Miss Bordereau. Then she added, "But she has learned nothing since."

"I have always been with you," Miss Tita rejoined very mildly, and evidently with no intention of making an epigram.

"Yes, but for that!" her aunt declared with more satirical force. She evidently meant that but for this her niece would never have got on at all; the point of the observation however being lost on Miss Tita, though she blushed at hearing her history revealed to a stranger. Miss Bordereau went on, addressing herself to me: "And what time will you come tomorrow with the money?"

"The sooner the better. If it suits you I will come at noon."

"I am always here but I have my hours," said the old woman, as if her convenience were not to be taken for granted.

"You mean the times when you receive?"

"I never receive. But I will see you at noon, when you come with the money."

"Very good, I shall be punctual;" and I added, "May I shake hands with you, on our contract?" I thought there ought to be some little form, it would make me really feel easier, for I foresaw that there would be no other. Besides, though Miss Bordereau could not today be called personally attractive and there was something even in her wasted antiquity that bade one stand at one's distance, I felt an irresistible desire to hold in my own for a moment the hand that Jeffrey Aspern had pressed.

For a minute she made no answer, and I saw that my proposal failed to meet with her approbation. She indulged in no movement of withdrawal, which I half-expected; she only said coldly, "I belong to a time when that was not the custom."

I felt rather snubbed but I exclaimed good humoredly to Miss Tita, "Oh, you will do as well!" I shook hands with her while she replied, with a small flutter, "Yes, yes, to show it's all arranged!"

"Shall you bring the money in gold?" Miss Bordereau demanded, as I was turning to the door.

I looked at her for a moment. "Aren't you a little afraid, after all, of keeping such a sum as that in the house?" It was not that I was annoyed at her avidity but I was really struck with the disparity between such a treasure and such scanty means of guarding it.

"Whom should I be afraid of if I am not afraid of you?" she asked with her shrunken grimness.

"Ah well," said I, laughing, "I shall be in point of fact a protector and I will bring gold if you prefer."

"Thank you," the old woman returned with dignity and with an inclination of her head which evidently signified that I might depart. I passed out of the room, reflecting that it would not be easy to circumvent her. As I stood in the sala again I saw that Miss Tita had followed me, and I supposed that as her aunt had neglected to suggest that I should take a look at my quarters it was her purpose to repair the omission. But she made no such suggestion; she only stood there with a dim, though not a languid smile, and with an effect of irresponsible, incompetent youth which was almost comically at variance with the faded facts of her person. She was not infirm, like her aunt, but she struck me as still more helpless, because her inefficiency was spiritual, which was not the case with Miss Bordereau's. I waited to see if she would offer to show me the rest of the house, but I did not precipitate the question, inasmuch as my plan was from this moment to spend as much of my time as possible in her society. I only observed at the end of a minute:

"I have had better fortune than I hoped. It was very kind of her to see me. Perhaps you said a good word for me."

"It was the idea of the money," said Miss Tita.

"And did you suggest that?"

"I told her that you would perhaps give a good deal."

"What made you think that?"

"I told her I thought you were rich."

"And what put that idea into your head?"

"I don't know; the way you talked."

"Dear me, I must talk differently now," I declared. "I'm sorry to say it's not the case."

"Well," said Miss Tita, "I think that in Venice the forestieri, in general, often give a great deal for something that after all isn't much." She appeared to make this remark with a comforting intention, to wish to remind me that if I had been extravagant I was not really foolishly singular. We walked together along the sala, and as I took its magnificent measure I said to her that I was afraid it would not form a part of my quartiere. Were my rooms by chance to be among those that opened into it? "Not if you go above, on the second floor," she

answered with a little startled air, as if she had rather taken for granted I would know my proper place.

“And I infer that that’s where your aunt would like me to be.”

“She said your apartments ought to be very distinct.”

“That certainly would be best.” And I listened with respect while she told me that up above I was free to take whatever I liked; that there was another staircase, but only from the floor on which we stood, and that to pass from it to the garden-story or to come up to my lodging I should have in effect to cross the great hall. This was an immense point gained; I foresaw that it would constitute my whole leverage in my relations with the two ladies. When I asked Miss Tita how I was to manage at present to find my way up she replied with an access of that sociable shyness which constantly marked her manner.

“Perhaps you can’t. I don’t see—unless I should go with you.” She evidently had not thought of this before.

We ascended to the upper floor and visited a long succession of empty rooms. The best of them looked over the garden; some of the others had a view of the blue lagoon, above the opposite rough-tiled housetops. They were all dusty and even a little disfigured with long neglect, but I saw that by spending a few hundred francs I should be able to convert three or four of them into a convenient habitation. My experiment was turning out costly, yet now that I had all but taken possession I ceased to allow this to trouble me. I mentioned to my companion a few of the things that I should put in, but she replied rather more precipitately than usual that I might do exactly what I liked; she seemed to wish to notify me that the Misses Bordereau would take no overt interest in my proceedings. I guessed that her aunt had instructed her to adopt this tone, and I may as well say now that I came afterward to distinguish perfectly (as I believed) between the speeches she made on her own responsibility and those the old lady imposed upon her. She took no notice of the unswept condition of the rooms and indulged in no explanations nor apologies. I said to myself that this was a sign that Juliana and her niece (disenchanted idea!) were untidy persons, with a low Italian standard; but I afterward recognized that a lodger who had forced an entrance had no *locus standi* as a critic. We looked out of a good many windows, for there was nothing within the rooms to look at, and still I wanted to linger. I asked her what several different objects in the prospect might be, but in no case did she appear to know. She was evidently not familiar with the view—it was as if she had not looked at it for years—and I presently saw that she was too preoccupied with something else to pretend to care for it. Suddenly she said—the remark was not suggested:

“I don’t know whether it will make any difference to you, but the money is for me.”

“The money?”

“The money you are going to bring.”

“Why, you’ll make me wish to stay here two or three years.” I spoke as benevolently as possible, though it had begun to act on my nerves that with these women so associated with Aspern the pecuniary question should constantly come back.

“That would be very good for me,” she replied, smiling.

“You put me on my honor!”

She looked as if she failed to understand this, but went on: “She wants me to have more. She thinks she is going to die.”

“Ah, not soon, I hope!” I exclaimed with genuine feeling. I had perfectly considered the possibility that she would destroy her papers on the day she should feel her end really approach. I believed that she would cling to them till then, and I think I had an idea that she read Aspern’s letters over every night or at least pressed them to her withered lips. I would have given a good deal to have a glimpse of the latter spectacle. I asked Miss Tita if the old lady were seriously ill, and she replied that she was only very tired—she had lived so very, very long. That was what she said herself—she wanted to die for a change. Besides, all her friends were dead long ago; either they ought to have remained or she ought to have gone. That was another thing her aunt often said—she was not at all content.

“But people don’t die when they like, do they?” Miss Tita inquired. I took the liberty of asking why, if there was actually enough money to maintain both of them, there would not be more than enough in case of her being left alone. She considered this difficult problem a moment and then she said, “Oh, well, you know, she takes care of me. She thinks that when I’m alone I shall be a great fool, I shall not know how to manage.”

“I should have supposed that you took care of her. I’m afraid she is very proud.”

“Why, have you discovered that already?” Miss Tita cried with the glimmer of an illumination in her face.

“I was shut up with her there for a considerable time, and she struck me, she interested me extremely. It didn’t take me long to make my discovery. She won’t have much to say to me while I’m here.”

“No, I don’t think she will,” my companion averred.

“Do you suppose she has some suspicion of me?”

Miss Tita’s honest eyes gave me no sign that I had touched a mark. “I shouldn’t think so—letting you in after all so easily.”

“Oh, so easily! she has covered her risk. But where is it that one could take an advantage of her?”

“I oughtn’t to tell you if I knew, ought I?” And Miss Tita added, before I had time to reply to this, smiling dolefully, “Do you think we have any weak points?”

“That’s exactly what I’m asking. You would only have to mention them for me to respect them religiously.”

She looked at me, at this, with that air of timid but candid and even gratified curiosity with which she had confronted me from the first; and then she said, “There is nothing to tell. We are terribly quiet. I don’t know how the days pass. We have no life.”

“I wish I might think that I should bring you a little.”

“Oh, we know what we want,” she went on. “It’s all right.”

There were various things I desired to ask her: how in the world they did live; whether they had any friends or visitors, any relations in America or in other countries. But I judged such an inquiry would be premature; I must leave it to a later chance. “Well, don’t YOU be proud,” I contented myself with saying. “Don’t hide from me altogether.”

“Oh, I must stay with my aunt,” she returned, without looking at me. And at the same moment, abruptly, without any ceremony of parting, she quitted me and disappeared, leaving me to make my own way downstairs. I remained a while longer, wandering about the bright desert (the sun was pouring in) of the old house, thinking the situation over on the spot. Not

even the pattering little serva came to look after me, and I reflected that after all this treatment showed confidence.

IV

Perhaps it did, but all the same, six weeks later, toward the middle of June, the moment when Mrs. Prest undertook her annual migration, I had made no measurable advance. I was obliged to confess to her that I had no results to speak of. My first step had been unexpectedly rapid, but there was no appearance that it would be followed by a second. I was a thousand miles from taking tea with my hostesses—that privilege of which, as I reminded Mrs. Prest, we both had had a vision. She reproached me with wanting boldness, and I answered that even to be bold you must have an opportunity: you may push on through a breach but you can't batter down a dead wall. She answered that the breach I had already made was big enough to admit an army and accused me of wasting precious hours in whimpering in her salon when I ought to have been carrying on the struggle in the field. It is true that I went to see her very often, on the theory that it would console me (I freely expressed my discouragement) for my want of success on my own premises. But I began to perceive that it did not console me to be perpetually chaffed for my scruples, especially when I was really so vigilant; and I was rather glad when my derisive friend closed her house for the summer. She had expected to gather amusement from the drama of my intercourse with the Misses Bordereau, and she was disappointed that the intercourse, and consequently the drama, had not come off. "They'll lead you on to your ruin," she said before she left Venice. "They'll get all your money without showing you a scrap." I think I settled down to my business with more concentration after she had gone away.

It was a fact that up to that time I had not, save on a single brief occasion, had even a moment's contact with my queer hostesses. The exception had occurred when I carried them according to my promise the terrible three thousand francs. Then I found Miss Tita waiting for me in the hall, and she took the money from my hand so that I did not see her aunt. The old lady had promised to receive me, but she apparently thought nothing of breaking that vow. The money was contained in a bag of chamois leather, of respectable dimensions, which my banker had given me, and Miss Tita had to make a big fist to receive it. This she did with extreme solemnity, though I tried to treat the affair a little as a joke. It was in no jocular strain, yet it was with simplicity, that she inquired, weighing the money in her two palms: "Don't you think it's too much?" To which I replied that that would depend upon the amount of pleasure I should get for it. Hereupon she turned away from me quickly, as she had done the day before, murmuring in a tone different from any she had used hitherto: "Oh, pleasure, pleasure—there's no pleasure in this house!"

After this, for a long time, I never saw her, and I wondered that the common chances of the day should not have helped us to meet. It could only be evident that she was immensely on her guard against them; and in addition to this the house was so big that for each other we were lost in it. I used to look out for her hopefully as I crossed the sala in my comings and goings, but I was not rewarded with a glimpse of the tail of her dress. It was as if she never peeped out of her aunt's apartment. I used to wonder what she did there week after week and year after year. I had never encountered such a violent parti pris of seclusion; it was more than keeping quiet—it was like hunted creatures feigning death. The two ladies appeared to have no visitors whatever and no sort of contact with the world. I judged at least that people could not have come to the house and that Miss Tita could not have gone out without my having some observation of it. I did what I disliked myself for doing (reflecting that it was only once in a way): I questioned my servant about their habits and let him divine that I should be interested in any information he could pick up. But he picked up amazingly little

for a knowing Venetian: it must be added that where there is a perpetual fast there are very few crumbs on the floor. His cleverness in other ways was sufficient, if it was not quite all that I had attributed to him on the occasion of my first interview with Miss Tita. He had helped my gondolier to bring me round a boatload of furniture; and when these articles had been carried to the top of the palace and distributed according to our associated wisdom he organized my household with such promptitude as was consistent with the fact that it was composed exclusively of himself. He made me in short as comfortable as I could be with my indifferent prospects. I should have been glad if he had fallen in love with Miss Bordereau's maid or, failing this, had taken her in aversion; either event might have brought about some kind of catastrophe, and a catastrophe might have led to some parley. It was my idea that she would have been sociable, and I myself on various occasions saw her flit to and fro on domestic errands, so that I was sure she was accessible. But I tasted of no gossip from that fountain, and I afterward learned that Pasquale's affections were fixed upon an object that made him heedless of other women. This was a young lady with a powdered face, a yellow cotton gown, and much leisure, who used often to come to see him. She practiced, at her convenience, the art of a stringer of beads (these ornaments are made in Venice, in profusion; she had her pocket full of them, and I used to find them on the floor of my apartment), and kept an eye on the maiden in the house. It was not for me of course to make the domestics tattle, and I never said a word to Miss Bordereau's cook.

It seemed to me a proof of the old lady's determination to have nothing to do with me that she should never have sent me a receipt for my three months' rent. For some days I looked out for it and then, when I had given it up, I wasted a good deal of time in wondering what her reason had been for neglecting so indispensable and familiar a form. At first I was tempted to send her a reminder, after which I relinquished the idea (against my judgment as to what was right in the particular case), on the general ground of wishing to keep quiet. If Miss Bordereau suspected me of ulterior aims she would suspect me less if I should be businesslike, and yet I consented not to be so. It was possible she intended her omission as an impertinence, a visible irony, to show how she could overreach people who attempted to overreach her. On that hypothesis it was well to let her see that one did not notice her little tricks. The real reading of the matter, I afterward perceived, was simply the poor old woman's desire to emphasize the fact that I was in the enjoyment of a favor as rigidly limited as it had been liberally bestowed. She had given me part of her house, and now she would not give me even a morsel of paper with her name on it. Let me say that even at first this did not make me too miserable, for the whole episode was essentially delightful to me. I foresaw that I should have a summer after my own literary heart, and the sense of holding my opportunity was much greater than the sense of losing it. There could be no Venetian business without patience, and since I adored the place I was much more in the spirit of it for having laid in a large provision. That spirit kept me perpetual company and seemed to look out at me from the revived immortal face—in which all his genius shone—of the great poet who was my prompter. I had invoked him and he had come; he hovered before me half the time; it was as if his bright ghost had returned to earth to tell me that he regarded the affair as his own no less than mine and that we should see it fraternally, cheerfully to a conclusion. It was as if he had said, "Poor dear, be easy with her; she has some natural prejudices; only give her time. Strange as it may appear to you she was very attractive in 1820. Meanwhile are we not in Venice together, and what better place is there for the meeting of dear friends? See how it glows with the advancing summer; how the sky and the sea and the rosy air and the marble of the palaces all shimmer and melt together." My eccentric private errand became a part of the general romance and the general glory—I felt even a mystic companionship, a moral fraternity with all those who in the past had been in the service of art. They had worked for

beauty, for a devotion; and what else was I doing? That element was in everything that Jeffrey Aspern had written, and I was only bringing it to the light.

I lingered in the sala when I went to and fro; I used to watch—as long as I thought decent—the door that led to Miss Bordereau's part of the house. A person observing me might have supposed I was trying to cast a spell upon it or attempting some odd experiment in hypnotism. But I was only praying it would open or thinking what treasure probably lurked behind it. I hold it singular, as I look back, that I should never have doubted for a moment that the sacred relics were there; never have failed to feel a certain joy at being under the same roof with them. After all they were under my hand—they had not escaped me yet; and they made my life continuous, in a fashion, with the illustrious life they had touched at the other end. I lost myself in this satisfaction to the point of assuming—in my quiet extravagance—that poor Miss Tita also went back, went back, as I used to phrase it. She did indeed, the gentle spinster, but not quite so far as Jeffrey Aspern, who was simply hearsay to her, quite as he was to me. Only she had lived for years with Juliana, she had seen and handled the papers and (even though she was stupid) some esoteric knowledge had rubbed off on her. That was what the old woman represented—esoteric knowledge; and this was the idea with which my editorial heart used to thrill. It literally beat faster often, of an evening, when I had been out, as I stopped with my candle in the re-echoing hall on my way up to bed. It was as if at such a moment as that, in the stillness, after the long contradiction of the day, Miss Bordereau's secrets were in the air, the wonder of her survival more palpable. These were the acute impressions. I had them in another form, with more of a certain sort of reciprocity, during the hours that I sat in the garden looking up over the top of my book at the closed windows of my hostess. In these windows no sign of life ever appeared; it was as if, for fear of my catching a glimpse of them, the two ladies passed their days in the dark. But this only proved to me that they had something to conceal; which was what I had wished to demonstrate. Their motionless shutters became as expressive as eyes consciously closed, and I took comfort in thinking that at all events through invisible themselves they saw me between the lashes.

I made a point of spending as much time as possible in the garden, to justify the picture I had originally given of my horticultural passion. And I not only spent time, but (hang it! as I said) I spent money. As soon as I had got my rooms arranged and could give the proper thought to the matter I surveyed the place with a clever expert and made terms for having it put in order. I was sorry to do this, for personally I liked it better as it was, with its weeds and its wild, rough tangle, its sweet, characteristic Venetian shabbiness. I had to be consistent, to keep my promise that I would smother the house in flowers. Moreover I formed this graceful project that by flowers I would make my way—I would succeed by big nosegays. I would batter the old women with lilies—I would bombard their citadel with roses. Their door would have to yield to the pressure when a mountain of carnations should be piled up against it. The place in truth had been brutally neglected. The Venetian capacity for dawdling is of the largest, and for a good many days unlimited litter was all my gardener had to show for his ministrations. There was a great digging of holes and carting about of earth, and after a while I grew so impatient that I had thoughts of sending for my bouquets to the nearest stand. But I reflected that the ladies would see through the chinks of their shutters that they must have been bought and might make up their minds from this that I was a humbug. So I composed myself and finally, though the delay was long, perceived some appearances of bloom. This encouraged me, and I waited serenely enough till they multiplied. Meanwhile the real summer days arrived and began to pass, and as I look back upon them they seem to me almost the happiest of my life. I took more and more care to be in the garden whenever it was not too hot. I had an arbor arranged and a low table and an armchair put into it; and I carried out books and

portfolios (I had always some business of writing in hand), and worked and waited and mused and hoped, while the golden hours elapsed and the plants drank in the light and the inscrutable old palace turned pale and then, as the day waned, began to flush in it and my papers rustled in the wandering breeze of the Adriatic.

Considering how little satisfaction I got from it at first it is remarkable that I should not have grown more tired of wondering what mystic rites of ennui the Misses Bordereau celebrated in their darkened rooms; whether this had always been the tenor of their life and how in previous years they had escaped elbowing their neighbors. It was clear that they must have had other habits and other circumstances; that they must once have been young or at least middle-aged. There was no end to the questions it was possible to ask about them and no end to the answers it was not possible to frame. I had known many of my country-people in Europe and was familiar with the strange ways they were liable to take up there; but the Misses Bordereau formed altogether a new type of the American absentee. Indeed it was plain that the American name had ceased to have any application to them—I had seen this in the ten minutes I spent in the old woman's room. You could never have said whence they came, from the appearance of either of them; wherever it was they had long ago dropped the local accent and fashion. There was nothing in them that one recognized, and putting the question of speech aside they might have been Norwegians or Spaniards. Miss Bordereau, after all, had been in Europe nearly three-quarters of a century; it appeared by some verses addressed to her by Aspern on the occasion of his own second absence from America—verses of which Cumnor and I had after infinite conjecture established solidly enough the date—that she was even then, as a girl of twenty, on the foreign side of the sea. There was an implication in the poem (I hope not just for the phrase) that he had come back for her sake. We had no real light upon her circumstances at that moment, any more than we had upon her origin, which we believed to be of the sort usually spoken of as modest. Cumnor had a theory that she had been a governess in some family in which the poet visited and that, in consequence of her position, there was from the first something unavowed, or rather something positively clandestine, in their relations. I on the other hand had hatched a little romance according to which she was the daughter of an artist, a painter or a sculptor, who had left the western world when the century was fresh, to study in the ancient schools. It was essential to my hypothesis that this amiable man should have lost his wife, should have been poor and unsuccessful and should have had a second daughter, of a disposition quite different from Juliana's. It was also indispensable that he should have been accompanied to Europe by these young ladies and should have established himself there for the remainder of a struggling, saddened life. There was a further implication that Miss Bordereau had had in her youth a perverse and adventurous, albeit a generous and fascinating character, and that she had passed through some singular vicissitudes. By what passions had she been ravaged, by what sufferings had she been blanched, what store of memories had she laid away for the monotonous future?

I asked myself these things as I sat spinning theories about her in my arbor and the bees droned in the flowers. It was incontestable that, whether for right or for wrong, most readers of certain of Aspern's poems (poems not as ambiguous as the sonnets—scarcely more divine, I think—of Shakespeare) had taken for granted that Juliana had not always adhered to the steep footway of renunciation. There hovered about her name a perfume of reckless passion, an intimation that she had not been exactly as the respectable young person in general. Was this a sign that her singer had betrayed her, had given her away, as we say nowadays, to posterity? Certain it is that it would have been difficult to put one's finger on the passage in which her fair fame suffered an imputation. Moreover was not any fame fair enough that was so sure of duration and was associated with works immortal through their beauty? It was a

part of my idea that the young lady had had a foreign lover (and an unedifying tragical rupture) before her meeting with Jeffrey Aspern. She had lived with her father and sister in a queer old-fashioned, expatriated, artistic Bohemia, in the days when the aesthetic was only the academic and the painters who knew the best models for a contadina and pifferaro wore peaked hats and long hair. It was a society less furnished than the coteries of today (in its ignorance of the wonderful chances, the opportunities of the early bird, with which its path was strewn), with tatters of old stuff and fragments of old crockery; so that Miss Bordereau appeared not to have picked up or have inherited many objects of importance. There was no enviable bric-a-brac, with its provoking legend of cheapness, in the room in which I had seen her. Such a fact as that suggested bareness, but nonetheless it worked happily into the sentimental interest I had always taken in the early movements of my countrymen as visitors to Europe. When Americans went abroad in 1820 there was something romantic, almost heroic in it, as compared with the perpetual ferrying of the present hour, when photography and other conveniences have annihilated surprise. Miss Bordereau sailed with her family on a tossing brig, in the days of long voyages and sharp differences; she had her emotions on the top of yellow diligences, passed the night at inns where she dreamed of travelers' tales, and was struck, on reaching the Eternal City, with the elegance of Roman pearls and scarfs. There was something touching to me in all that, and my imagination frequently went back to the period. If Miss Bordereau carried it there of course Jeffrey Aspern at other times had done so a great deal more. It was a much more important fact, if one were looking at his genius critically, that he had lived in the days before the general transfusion. It had happened to me to regret that he had known Europe at all; I should have liked to see what he would have written without that experience, by which he had incontestably been enriched. But as his fate had ordered otherwise I went with him—I tried to judge how the Old World would have struck him. It was not only there, however, that I watched him; the relations he had entertained with the new had even a livelier interest. His own country after all had had most of his life, and his muse, as they said at that time, was essentially American. That was originally what I had loved him for: that at a period when our native land was nude and crude and provincial, when the famous "atmosphere" it is supposed to lack was not even missed, when literature was lonely there and art and form almost impossible, he had found means to live and write like one of the first; to be free and general and not at all afraid; to feel, understand, and express everything.

V

I was seldom at home in the evening, for when I attempted to occupy myself in my apartments the lamplight brought in a swarm of noxious insects, and it was too hot for closed windows. Accordingly I spent the late hours either on the water (the moonlight of Venice is famous), or in the splendid square which serves as a vast forecourt to the strange old basilica of Saint Mark. I sat in front of Florian's cafe, eating ices, listening to music, talking with acquaintances: the traveler will remember how the immense cluster of tables and little chairs stretches like a promontory into the smooth lake of the Piazza. The whole place, of a summer's evening, under the stars and with all the lamps, all the voices and light footsteps on marble (the only sounds of the arcades that enclose it), is like an open-air saloon dedicated to cooling drinks and to a still finer degustation—that of the exquisite impressions received during the day. When I did not prefer to keep mine to myself there was always a stray tourist, disencumbered of his Baedeker, to discuss them with, or some domesticated painter rejoicing in the return of the season of strong effects. The wonderful church, with its low domes and bristling embroideries, the mystery of its mosaic and sculpture, looking ghostly in the tempered gloom, and the sea breeze passed between the twin columns of the Piazzetta, the lintels of a door no longer guarded, as gently as if a rich curtain were swaying there. I used

sometimes on these occasions to think of the Misses Bordereau and of the pity of their being shut up in apartments which in the Venetian July even Venetian vastness did not prevent from being stuffy. Their life seemed miles away from the life of the Piazza, and no doubt it was really too late to make the austere Juliana change her habits. But poor Miss Tita would have enjoyed one of Florian's ices, I was sure; sometimes I even had thoughts of carrying one home to her. Fortunately my patience bore fruit, and I was not obliged to do anything so ridiculous.

One evening about the middle of July I came in earlier than usual—I forget what chance had led to this—and instead of going up to my quarters made my way into the garden. The temperature was very high; it was such a night as one would gladly have spent in the open air, and I was in no hurry to go to bed. I had floated home in my gondola, listening to the slow splash of the oar in the narrow dark canals, and now the only thought that solicited me was the vague reflection that it would be pleasant to recline at one's length in the fragrant darkness on a garden bench. The odor of the canal was doubtless at the bottom of that aspiration and the breath of the garden, as I entered it, gave consistency to my purpose. It was delicious—just such an air as must have trembled with Romeo's vows when he stood among the flowers and raised his arms to his mistress's balcony. I looked at the windows of the palace to see if by chance the example of Verona (Verona being not far off) had been followed; but everything was dim, as usual, and everything was still. Juliana, on summer nights in her youth, might have murmured down from open windows at Jeffrey Aspern, but Miss Tita was not a poet's mistress any more than I was a poet. This however did not prevent my gratification from being great as I became aware on reaching the end of the garden that Miss Tita was seated in my little bower. At first I only made out an indistinct figure, not in the least counting on such an overture from one of my hostesses; it even occurred to me that some sentimental maidservant had stolen in to keep a tryst with her sweetheart. I was going to turn away, not to frighten her, when the figure rose to its height and I recognized Miss Bordereau's niece. I must do myself the justice to say that I did not wish to frighten her either, and much as I had longed for some such accident I should have been capable of retreating. It was as if I had laid a trap for her by coming home earlier than usual and adding to that eccentricity by creeping into the garden. As she rose she spoke to me, and then I reflected that perhaps, secure in my almost inveterate absence, it was her nightly practice to take a lonely airing. There was no trap, in truth, because I had had no suspicion. At first I took for granted that the words she uttered expressed discomfiture at my arrival; but as she repeated them—I had not caught them clearly—I had the surprise of hearing her say, "Oh, dear, I'm so very glad you've come!" She and her aunt had in common the property of unexpected speeches. She came out of the arbor almost as if she were going to throw herself into my arms.

I hasten to add that she did nothing of the kind; she did not even shake hands with me. It was a gratification to her to see me and presently she told me why—because she was nervous when she was out-of-doors at night alone. The plants and bushes looked so strange in the dark, and there were all sorts of queer sounds—she could not tell what they were—like the noises of animals. She stood close to me, looking about her with an air of greater security but without any demonstration of interest in me as an individual. Then I guessed that nocturnal prowlings were not in the least her habit, and I was also reminded (I had been struck with the circumstance in talking with her before I took possession) that it was impossible to overestimate her simplicity.

"You speak as if you were lost in the backwoods," I said, laughing. "How you manage to keep out of this charming place when you have only three steps to take to get into it is more than I have yet been able to discover. You hide away mighty well so long as I am on the

premises, I know; but I had a hope that you peeped out a little at other times. You and your poor aunt are worse off than Carmelite nuns in their cells. Should you mind telling me how you exist without air, without exercise, without any sort of human contact? I don't see how you carry on the common business of life."

She looked at me as if I were talking some strange tongue, and her answer was so little of an answer that I was considerably irritated. "We go to bed very early—earlier than you would believe." I was on the point of saying that this only deepened the mystery when she gave me some relief by adding, "Before you came we were not so private. But I never have been out at night."

"Never in these fragrant alleys, blooming here under your nose?"

"Ah," said Miss Tita, "they were never nice till now!" There was an unmistakable reference in this and a flattering comparison, so that it seemed to me I had gained a small advantage. As it would help me to follow it up to establish a sort of grievance I asked her why, since she thought my garden nice, she had never thanked me in any way for the flowers I had been sending up in such quantities for the previous three weeks. I had not been discouraged—there had been, as she would have observed, a daily armful; but I had been brought up in the common forms and a word of recognition now and then would have touched me in the right place.

"Why I didn't know they were for me!"

"They were for both of you. Why should I make a difference?"

Miss Tita reflected as if she might by thinking of a reason for that, but she failed to produce one. Instead of this she asked abruptly, "Why in the world do you want to know us?"

"I ought after all to make a difference," I replied. "That question is your aunt's; it isn't yours. You wouldn't ask it if you hadn't been put up to it."

"She didn't tell me to ask you," Miss Tita replied without confusion; she was the oddest mixture of the shrinking and the direct.

"Well, she has often wondered about it herself and expressed her wonder to you. She has insisted on it, so that she has put the idea into your head that I am insufferably pushing. Upon my word I think I have been very discreet. And how completely your aunt must have lost every tradition of sociability, to see anything out of the way in the idea that respectable intelligent people, living as we do under the same roof, should occasionally exchange a remark! What could be more natural? We are of the same country, and we have at least some of the same tastes, since, like you, I am intensely fond of Venice."

My interlocutress appeared incapable of grasping more than one clause in any proposition, and she declared quickly, eagerly, as if she were answering my whole speech: "I am not in the least fond of Venice. I should like to go far away!"

"Has she always kept you back so?" I went on, to show her that I could be as irrelevant as herself.

"She told me to come out tonight; she has told me very often," said Miss Tita. "It is I who wouldn't come. I don't like to leave her."

"Is she too weak, is she failing?" I demanded, with more emotion, I think, than I intended to show. I judged this by the way her eyes rested upon me in the darkness. It embarrassed me a little, and to turn the matter off I continued genially: "Do let us sit down together comfortably somewhere, and you will tell me all about her."

Miss Tita made no resistance to this. We found a bench less secluded, less confidential, as it were, than the one in the arbor; and we were still sitting there when I heard midnight ring out from those clear bells of Venice which vibrate with a solemnity of their own over the lagoon and hold the air so much more than the chimes of other places. We were together more than an hour, and our interview gave, as it struck me, a great lift to my undertaking. Miss Tita accepted the situation without a protest; she had avoided me for three months, yet now she treated me almost as if these three months had made me an old friend. If I had chosen I might have inferred from this that though she had avoided me she had given a good deal of consideration to doing so. She paid no attention to the flight of time—never worried at my keeping her so long away from her aunt. She talked freely, answering questions and asking them and not even taking advantage of certain longish pauses with which they inevitably alternated to say she thought she had better go in. It was almost as if she were waiting for something—something I might say to her—and intended to give me my opportunity. I was the more struck by this as she told me that her aunt had been less well for a good many days and in a way that was rather new. She was weaker; at moments it seemed as if she had no strength at all; yet more than ever before she wished to be left alone. That was why she had told her to come out—not even to remain in her own room, which was alongside; she said her niece irritated her, made her nervous. She sat still for hours together, as if she were asleep; she had always done that, musing and dozing; but at such times formerly she gave at intervals some small sign of life, of interest, liking her companion to be near her with her work. Miss Tita confided to me that at present her aunt was so motionless that she sometimes feared she was dead; moreover she took hardly any food—one couldn't see what she lived on. The great thing was that she still on most days got up; the serious job was to dress her, to wheel her out of her bedroom. She clung to as many of her old habits as possible and she had always, little company as they had received for years, made a point of sitting in the parlor.

I scarcely knew what to think of all this—of Miss Tita's sudden conversion to sociability and of the strange circumstance that the more the old lady appeared to decline toward her end the less she should desire to be looked after. The story did not hang together, and I even asked myself whether it were not a trap laid for me, the result of a design to make me show my hand. I could not have told why my companions (as they could only by courtesy be called) should have this purpose—why they should try to trip up so lucrative a lodger. At any rate I kept on my guard, so that Miss Tita should not have occasion again to ask me if I had an *arriere-pensee*. Poor woman, before we parted for the night my mind was at rest as to HER capacity for entertaining one.

She told me more about their affairs than I had hoped; there was no need to be prying, for it evidently drew her out simply to feel that I listened, that I cared. She ceased wondering why I cared, and at last, as she spoke of the brilliant life they had led years before, she almost chattered. It was Miss Tita who judged it brilliant; she said that when they first came to live in Venice, years and years before (I saw that her mind was essentially vague about dates and the order in which events had occurred), there was scarcely a week that they had not some visitor or did not make some delightful *passaggio* in the city. They had seen all the curiosities; they had even been to the Lido in a boat (she spoke as if I might think there was a way on foot); they had had a collation there, brought in three baskets and spread out on the grass. I asked her what people they had known and she said, Oh! very nice ones—the Cavaliere Bombicci and the Contessa Altemura, with whom they had had a great friendship. Also English people—the Churtons and the Goldies and Mrs. Stock-Stock, whom they had loved dearly; she was dead and gone, poor dear. That was the case with most of their pleasant circle (this expression was Miss Tita's own), though a few were left, which was a wonder considering how they had neglected them. She mentioned the names of two or three Venetian

old women; of a certain doctor, very clever, who was so kind—he came as a friend, he had really given up practice; of the avvocato Pochintesta, who wrote beautiful poems and had addressed one to her aunt. These people came to see them without fail every year, usually at the capo d’anno, and of old her aunt used to make them some little present—her aunt and she together: small things that she, Miss Tita, made herself, like paper lampshades or mats for the decanters of wine at dinner or those woolen things that in cold weather were worn on the wrists. The last few years there had not been many presents; she could not think what to make, and her aunt had lost her interest and never suggested. But the people came all the same; if the Venetians liked you once they liked you forever.

There was something affecting in the good faith of this sketch of former social glories; the picnic at the Lido had remained vivid through the ages, and poor Miss Tita evidently was of the impression that she had had a brilliant youth. She had in fact had a glimpse of the Venetian world in its gossiping, home-keeping, parsimonious, professional walks; for I observed for the first time that she had acquired by contact something of the trick of the familiar, soft-sounding, almost infantile speech of the place. I judged that she had imbibed this invertebrate dialect from the natural way the names of things and people—mostly purely local—rose to her lips. If she knew little of what they represented she knew still less of anything else. Her aunt had drawn in—her failing interest in the table mats and lampshades was a sign of that—and she had not been able to mingle in society or to entertain it alone; so that the matter of her reminiscences struck one as an old world altogether. If she had not been so decent her references would have seemed to carry one back to the queer rococo Venice of Casanova. I found myself falling into the error of thinking of her too as one of Jeffrey Aspern’s contemporaries; this came from her having so little in common with my own. It was possible, I said to myself, that she had not even heard of him; it might very well be that Juliana had not cared to lift even for her the veil that covered the temple of her youth. In this case she perhaps would not know of the existence of the papers, and I welcomed that presumption—it made me feel more safe with her—until I remembered that we had believed the letter of disavowal received by Cumnor to be in the handwriting of the niece. If it had been dictated to her she had of course to know what it was about; yet after all the effect of it was to repudiate the idea of any connection with the poet. I held it probable at all events that Miss Tita had not read a word of his poetry. Moreover if, with her companion, she had always escaped the interviewer there was little occasion for her having got it into her head that people were “after” the letters. People had not been after them, inasmuch as they had not heard of them; and Cumnor’s fruitless feeler would have been a solitary accident.

When midnight sounded Miss Tita got up; but she stopped at the door of the house only after she had wandered two or three times with me round the garden. “When shall I see you again?” I asked before she went in; to which she replied with promptness that she should like to come out the next night. She added however that she should not come—she was so far from doing everything she liked.

“You might do a few things that *I* like,” I said with a sigh.

“Oh, you—I don’t believe you!” she murmured at this, looking at me with her simple solemnity.

“Why don’t you believe me?”

“Because I don’t understand you.”

“That is just the sort of occasion to have faith.” I could not say more, though I should have liked to, as I saw that I only mystified her; for I had no wish to have it on my conscience that I might pass for having made love to her. Nothing less should I have seemed to do had I

continued to beg a lady to “believe in me” in an Italian garden on a midsummer night. There was some merit in my scruples, for Miss Tita lingered and lingered: I perceived that she felt that she should not really soon come down again and wished therefore to protract the present. She insisted too on making the talk between us personal to ourselves; and altogether her behavior was such as would have been possible only to a completely innocent woman.

“I shall like the flowers better now that I know they are also meant for me.”

“How could you have doubted it? If you will tell me the kind you like best I will send a double lot of them.”

“Oh, I like them all best!” Then she went on, familiarly: “Shall you study—shall you read and write—when you go up to your rooms?”

“I don’t do that at night, at this season. The lamplight brings in the animals.”

“You might have known that when you came.”

“I did know it!”

“And in winter do you work at night?”

“I read a good deal, but I don’t often write.” She listened as if these details had a rare interest, and suddenly a temptation quite at variance with the prudence I had been teaching myself associated itself with her plain, mild face. Ah yes, she was safe and I could make her safer! It seemed to me from one moment to another that I could not wait longer—that I really must take a sounding. So I went on: “In general before I go to sleep—very often in bed (it’s a bad habit, but I confess to it), I read some great poet. In nine cases out of ten it’s a volume of Jeffrey Aspern.”

I watched her well as I pronounced that name but I saw nothing wonderful. Why should I indeed—was not Jeffrey Aspern the property of the human race?

“Oh, we read him—we HAVE read him,” she quietly replied.

“He is my poet of poets—I know him almost by heart.”

For an instant Miss Tita hesitated; then her sociability was too much for her.

“Oh, by heart—that’s nothing!” she murmured, smiling. “My aunt used to know him—to know him”—she paused an instant and I wondered what she was going to say—”to know him as a visitor.”

“As a visitor?” I repeated, staring.

“He used to call on her and take her out.”

I continued to stare. “My dear lady, he died a hundred years ago!”

“Well,” she said mirthfully, “my aunt is a hundred and fifty.”

“Mercy on us!” I exclaimed; “why didn’t you tell me before? I should like so to ask her about him.”

“She wouldn’t care for that—she wouldn’t tell you,” Miss Tita replied.

“I don’t care what she cares for! She MUST tell me—it’s not a chance to be lost.”

“Oh, you should have come twenty years ago: then she still talked about him.”

“And what did she say?” I asked eagerly.

“I don’t know—that he liked her immensely.”

“And she—didn’t she like him?”

“She said he was a god.” Miss Tita gave me this information flatly, without expression; her tone might have made it a piece of trivial gossip. But it stirred me deeply as she dropped the words into the summer night; it seemed such a direct testimony.

“Fancy, fancy!” I murmured. And then, “Tell me this, please—has she got a portrait of him? They are distressingly rare.”

“A portrait? I don’t know,” said Miss Tita; and now there was discomfiture in her face.

“Well, good night!” she added; and she turned into the house.

I accompanied her into the wide, dusky, stone-paved passage which on the ground floor corresponded with our grand sala. It opened at one end into the garden, at the other upon the canal, and was lighted now only by the small lamp that was always left for me to take up as I went to bed. An extinguished candle which Miss Tita apparently had brought down with her stood on the same table with it. “Good night, good night!” I replied, keeping beside her as she went to get her light. “Surely you would know, shouldn’t you, if she had one?”

“If she had what?” the poor lady asked, looking at me queerly over the flame of her candle.

“A portrait of the god. I don’t know what I wouldn’t give to see it.”

“I don’t know what she has got. She keeps her things locked up.” And Miss Tita went away, toward the staircase, with the sense evidently that she had said too much.

I let her go—I wished not to frighten her—and I contented myself with remarking that Miss Bordereau would not have locked up such a glorious possession as that—a thing a person would be proud of and hang up in a prominent place on the parlor wall. Therefore of course she had not any portrait. Miss Tita made no direct answer to this and, candle in hand, with her back to me, ascended two or three stairs. Then she stopped short and turned round, looking at me across the dusky space.

“Do you write—do you write?” There was a shake in her voice—she could scarcely bring out what she wanted to ask.

“Do I write? Oh, don’t speak of my writing on the same day with Aspern’s!”

“Do you write about HIM—do you pry into his life?”

“Ah, that’s your aunt’s question; it can’t be yours!” I said, in a tone of slightly wounded sensibility.

“All the more reason then that you should answer it. Do you, please?”

I thought I had allowed for the falsehoods I should have to tell; but I found that in fact when it came to the point I had not. Besides, now that I had an opening there was a kind of relief in being frank. Lastly (it was perhaps fanciful, even fatuous), I guessed that Miss Tita personally would not in the last resort be less my friend. So after a moment’s hesitation I answered, “Yes, I have written about him and I am looking for more material. In heaven’s name have you got any?”

“Santo Dio!” she exclaimed, without heeding my question; and she hurried upstairs and out of sight. I might count upon her in the last resort, but for the present she was visibly alarmed. The proof of it was that she began to hide again, so that for a fortnight I never beheld her. I found my patience ebbing and after four or five days of this I told the gardener to stop the flowers.

VI

One afternoon, as I came down from my quarters to go out, I found Miss Tita in the sala: it was our first encounter on that ground since I had come to the house. She put on no air of being there by accident; there was an ignorance of such arts in her angular, diffident directness. That I might be quite sure she was waiting for me she informed me of the fact and told me that Miss Bordereau wished to see me: she would take me into the room at that moment if I had time. If I had been late for a love tryst I would have stayed for this, and I quickly signified that I should be delighted to wait upon the old lady. "She wants to talk with you—to know you," Miss Tita said, smiling as if she herself appreciated that idea; and she led me to the door of her aunt's apartment. I stopped her a moment before she had opened it, looking at her with some curiosity. I told her that this was a great satisfaction to me and a great honor; but all the same I should like to ask what had made Miss Bordereau change so suddenly. It was only the other day that she wouldn't suffer me near her. Miss Tita was not embarrassed by my question; she had as many little unexpected serenities as if she told fibs, but the odd part of them was that they had on the contrary their source in her truthfulness. "Oh, my aunt changes," she answered; "it's so terribly dull—I suppose she's tired."

"But you told me that she wanted more and more to be alone."

Poor Miss Tita colored, as if she found me over-insistent. "Well, if you don't believe she wants to see you—I haven't invented it! I think people often are capricious when they are very old."

"That's perfectly true. I only wanted to be clear as to whether you have repeated to her what I told you the other night."

"What you told me?"

"About Jeffrey Aspern—that I am looking for materials."

"If I had told her do you think she would have sent for you?"

"That's exactly what I want to know. If she wants to keep him to herself she might have sent for me to tell me so."

"She won't speak of him," said Miss Tita. Then as she opened the door she added in a lower tone, "I have told her nothing."

The old woman was sitting in the same place in which I had seen her last, in the same position, with the same mystifying bandage over her eyes. Her welcome was to turn her almost invisible face to me and show me that while she sat silent she saw me clearly. I made no motion to shake hands with her; I felt too well on this occasion that that was out of place forever. It had been sufficiently enjoined upon me that she was too sacred for that sort of reciprocity—too venerable to touch. There was something so grim in her aspect (it was partly the accident of her green shade), as I stood there to be measured, that I ceased on the spot to feel any doubt as to her knowing my secret, though I did not in the least suspect that Miss Tita had not just spoken the truth. She had not betrayed me, but the old woman's brooding instinct had served her; she had turned me over and over in the long, still hours, and she had guessed. The worst of it was that she looked terribly like an old woman who at a pinch would burn her papers. Miss Tita pushed a chair forward, saying to me, "This will be a good place for you to sit." As I took possession of it I asked after Miss Bordereau's health; expressed the hope that in spite of the very hot weather it was satisfactory. She replied that it was good enough—good enough; that it was a great thing to be alive.

"Oh, as to that, it depends upon what you compare it with!" I exclaimed, laughing.

"I don't compare—I don't compare. If I did that I should have given everything up long ago."

I liked to think that this was a subtle allusion to the rapture she had known in the society of Jeffrey Aspern—though it was true that such an allusion would have accorded ill with the wish I imputed to her to keep him buried in her soul. What it accorded with was my constant conviction that no human being had ever had a more delightful social gift than his, and what it seemed to convey was that nothing in the world was worth speaking of if one pretended to speak of that. But one did not! Miss Tita sat down beside her aunt, looking as if she had reason to believe some very remarkable conversation would come off between us.

“It’s about the beautiful flowers,” said the old lady; “you sent us so many—I ought to have thanked you for them before. But I don’t write letters and I receive only at long intervals.”

She had not thanked me while the flowers continued to come, but she departed from her custom so far as to send for me as soon as she began to fear that they would not come any more. I noted this; I remembered what an acquisitive propensity she had shown when it was a question of extracting gold from me, and I privately rejoiced at the happy thought I had had in suspending my tribute. She had missed it and she was willing to make a concession to bring it back. At the first sign of this concession I could only go to meet her. “I am afraid you have not had many, of late, but they shall begin again immediately—tomorrow, tonight.”

“Oh, do send us some tonight!” Miss Tita cried, as if it were an immense circumstance.

“What else should you do with them? It isn’t a manly taste to make a bower of your room,” the old woman remarked.

“I don’t make a bower of my room, but I am exceedingly fond of growing flowers, of watching their ways. There is nothing unmanly in that: it has been the amusement of philosophers, of statesmen in retirement; even I think of great captains.”

“I suppose you know you can sell them—those you don’t use,” Miss Bordereau went on. “I daresay they wouldn’t give you much for them; still, you could make a bargain.”

“Oh, I have never made a bargain, as you ought to know. My gardener disposes of them and I ask no questions.”

“I would ask a few, I can promise you!” said Miss Bordereau; and it was the first time I had heard her laugh. I could not get used to the idea that this vision of pecuniary profit was what drew out the divine Juliana most.

“Come into the garden yourself and pick them; come as often as you like; come every day. They are all for you,” I pursued, addressing Miss Tita and carrying off this veracious statement by treating it as an innocent joke. “I can’t imagine why she doesn’t come down,” I added, for Miss Bordereau’s benefit.

“You must make her come; you must come up and fetch her,” said the old woman, to my stupefaction. “That odd thing you have made in the corner would be a capital place for her to sit.”

The allusion to my arbor was irreverent; it confirmed the impression I had already received that there was a flicker of impertinence in Miss Bordereau’s talk, a strange mocking lambency which must have been a part of her adventurous youth and which had outlived passions and faculties. Nonetheless I asked, “Wouldn’t it be possible for you to come down there yourself? Wouldn’t it do you good to sit there in the shade, in the sweet air?”

“Oh, sir, when I move out of this it won’t be to sit in the air, and I’m afraid that any that may be stirring around me won’t be particularly sweet! It will be a very dark shade indeed. But that won’t be just yet,” Miss Bordereau continued cannily, as if to correct any hopes that this courageous allusion to the last receptacle of her mortality might lead me to entertain. “I have

sat here many a day and I have had enough of arbors in my time. But I'm not afraid to wait till I'm called."

Miss Tita had expected some interesting talk, but perhaps she found it less genial on her aunt's side (considering that I had been sent for with a civil intention) than she had hoped. As if to give the conversation a turn that would put our companion in a light more favorable she said to me, "Didn't I tell you the other night that she had sent me out? You see that I can do what I like!"

"Do you pity her—do you teach her to pity herself?" Miss Bordereau demanded before I had time to answer this appeal. "She has a much easier life than I had when I was her age."

"You must remember that it has been quite open to me to think you rather inhuman."

"Inhuman? That's what the poets used to call the women a hundred years ago. Don't try that; you won't do as well as they!" Juliana declared. "There is no more poetry in the world—that I know of at least. But I won't bandy words with you," she pursued, and I well remember the old-fashioned, artificial sound she gave to the speech. "You have made me talk, talk! It isn't good for me at all." I got up at this and told her I would take no more of her time; but she detained me to ask, "Do you remember, the day I saw you about the rooms, that you offered us the use of your gondola?" And when I assented, promptly, struck again with her disposition to make a "good thing" of being there and wondering what she now had in her eye, she broke out, "Why don't you take that girl out in it and show her the place?"

"Oh, dear Aunt, what do you want to do with me?" cried the "girl" with a piteous quaver. "I know all about the place!"

"Well then, go with him as a cicerone!" said Miss Bordereau with an effort of something like cruelty in her implacable power of retort—an incongruous suggestion that she was a sarcastic, profane, cynical old woman. "Haven't we heard that there have been all sorts of changes in all these years? You ought to see them and at your age (I don't mean because you're so young) you ought to take the chances that come. You're old enough, my dear, and this gentleman won't hurt you. He will show you the famous sunsets, if they still go on—DO they go on? The sun set for me so long ago. But that's not a reason. Besides, I shall never miss you; you think you are too important. Take her to the Piazza; it used to be very pretty," Miss Bordereau continued, addressing herself to me. "What have they done with the funny old church? I hope it hasn't tumbled down. Let her look at the shops; she may take some money, she may buy what she likes."

Poor Miss Tita had got up, discountenanced and helpless, and as we stood there before her aunt it would certainly have seemed to a spectator of the scene that the old woman was amusing herself at our expense. Miss Tita protested, in a confusion of exclamations and murmurs; but I lost no time in saying that if she would do me the honor to accept the hospitality of my boat I would engage that she should not be bored. Or if she did not want so much of my company the boat itself, with the gondolier, was at her service; he was a capital oar and she might have every confidence. Miss Tita, without definitely answering this speech, looked away from me, out of the window, as if she were going to cry; and I remarked that once we had Miss Bordereau's approval we could easily come to an understanding. We would take an hour, whichever she liked, one of the very next days. As I made my obeisance to the old lady I asked her if she would kindly permit me to see her again.

For a moment she said nothing; then she inquired, "Is it very necessary to your happiness?"

"It diverts me more than I can say."

"You are wonderfully civil. Don't you know it almost kills ME?"

“How can I believe that when I see you more animated, more brilliant than when I came in?”

“That is very true, Aunt,” said Miss Tita. “I think it does you good.”

“Isn’t it touching, the solicitude we each have that the other shall enjoy herself?” sneered Miss Bordereau. “If you think me brilliant today you don’t know what you are talking about; you have never seen an agreeable woman. Don’t try to pay me a compliment; I have been spoiled,” she went on. “My door is shut, but you may sometimes knock.”

With this she dismissed me, and I left the room. The latch closed behind me, but Miss Tita, contrary to my hope, had remained within. I passed slowly across the hall and before taking my way downstairs I waited a little. My hope was answered; after a minute Miss Tita followed me. “That’s a delightful idea about the Piazza,” I said. “When will you go—tonight, tomorrow?”

She had been disconcerted, as I have mentioned, but I had already perceived and I was to observe again that when Miss Tita was embarrassed she did not (as most women would have done) turn away from you and try to escape, but came closer, as it were, with a deprecating, clinging appeal to be spared, to be protected. Her attitude was perpetually a sort of prayer for assistance, for explanation; and yet no woman in the world could have been less of a comedian. From the moment you were kind to her she depended on you absolutely; her self-consciousness dropped from her and she took the greatest intimacy, the innocent intimacy which was the only thing she could conceive, for granted. She told me she did not know what had got into her aunt; she had changed so quickly, she had got some idea. I replied that she must find out what the idea was and then let me know; we would go and have an ice together at Florian’s, and she should tell me while we listened to the band.

“Oh, it will take me a long time to find out!” she said, rather ruefully; and she could promise me this satisfaction neither for that night nor for the next. I was patient now, however, for I felt that I had only to wait; and in fact at the end of the week, one lovely evening after dinner, she stepped into my gondola, to which in honor of the occasion I had attached a second oar.

We swept in the course of five minutes into the Grand Canal; whereupon she uttered a murmur of ecstasy as fresh as if she had been a tourist just arrived. She had forgotten how splendid the great waterway looked on a clear, hot summer evening, and how the sense of floating between marble palaces and reflected lights disposed the mind to sympathetic talk. We floated long and far, and though Miss Tita gave no high-pitched voice to her satisfaction I felt that she surrendered herself. She was more than pleased, she was transported; the whole thing was an immense liberation. The gondola moved with slow strokes, to give her time to enjoy it, and she listened to the plash of the oars, which grew louder and more musically liquid as we passed into narrow canals, as if it were a revelation of Venice. When I asked her how long it was since she had been in a boat she answered, “Oh, I don’t know; a long time—not since my aunt began to be ill.” This was not the only example she gave me of her extreme vagueness about the previous years and the line which marked off the period when Miss Bordereau flourished. I was not at liberty to keep her out too long, but we took a considerable GIRO before going to the Piazza. I asked her no questions, keeping the conversation on purpose away from her domestic situation and the things I wanted to know; I poured treasures of information about Venice into her ears, described Florence and Rome, discoursed to her on the charms and advantages of travel. She reclined, receptive, on the deep leather cushions, turned her eyes conscientiously to everything I pointed out to her, and never mentioned to me till sometime afterward that she might be supposed to know Florence better than I, as she had lived there for years with Miss Bordereau. At last she asked, with the shy impatience of a child, “Are we not really going to the Piazza? That’s what I want to see!” I immediately gave

the order that we should go straight; and then we sat silent with the expectation of arrival. As some time still passed, however, she said suddenly, of her own movement, "I have found out what is the matter with my aunt: she is afraid you will go!"

"What has put that into her head?"

"She has had an idea you have not been happy. That is why she is different now."

"You mean she wants to make me happier?"

"Well, she wants you not to go; she wants you to stay."

"I suppose you mean on account of the rent," I remarked candidly.

Miss Tita's candor showed itself a match for my own. "Yes, you know; so that I shall have more."

"How much does she want you to have?" I asked, laughing. "She ought to fix the sum, so that I may stay till it's made up."

"Oh, that wouldn't please me," said Miss Tita. "It would be unheard of, your taking that trouble."

"But suppose I should have my own reasons for staying in Venice?"

"Then it would be better for you to stay in some other house."

"And what would your aunt say to that?"

"She wouldn't like it at all. But I should think you would do well to give up your reasons and go away altogether."

"Dear Miss Tita," I said, "it's not so easy to give them up!"

She made no immediate answer to this, but after a moment she broke out: "I think I know what your reasons are!"

"I daresay, because the other night I almost told you how I wish you would help me to make them good."

"I can't do that without being false to my aunt."

"What do you mean, being false to her?"

"Why, she would never consent to what you want. She has been asked, she has been written to. It made her fearfully angry."

"Then she HAS got papers of value?" I demanded quickly.

"Oh, she has got everything!" sighed Miss Tita with a curious weariness, a sudden lapse into gloom.

These words caused all my pulses to throb, for I regarded them as precious evidence. For some minutes I was too agitated to speak, and in the interval the gondola approached the Piazzetta. After we had disembarked I asked my companion whether she would rather walk round the square or go and sit at the door of the cafe; to which she replied that she would do whichever I liked best—I must only remember again how little time she had. I assured her there was plenty to do both, and we made the circuit of the long arcades. Her spirits revived at the sight of the bright shop windows, and she lingered and stopped, admiring or disapproving of their contents, asking me what I thought of things, theorizing about prices. My attention wandered from her; her words of a while before, "Oh, she has got everything!" echoed so in my consciousness. We sat down at last in the crowded circle at Florian's,

finding an unoccupied table among those that were ranged in the square. It was a splendid night and all the world was out-of-doors; Miss Tita could not have wished the elements more auspicious for her return to society. I saw that she enjoyed it even more than she told; she was agitated with the multitude of her impressions. She had forgotten what an attractive thing the world is, and it was coming over her that somehow she had for the best years of her life been cheated of it. This did not make her angry; but as she looked all over the charming scene her face had, in spite of its smile of appreciation, the flush of a sort of wounded surprise. She became silent, as if she were thinking with a secret sadness of opportunities, forever lost, which ought to have been easy; and this gave me a chance to say to her, "Did you mean a while ago that your aunt has a plan of keeping me on by admitting me occasionally to her presence?"

"She thinks it will make a difference with you if you sometimes see her. She wants you so much to stay that she is willing to make that concession."

"And what good does she consider that I think it will do me to see her?"

"I don't know; she thinks it's interesting," said Miss Tita simply. "You told her you found it so."

"So I did; but everyone doesn't think so."

"No, of course not, or more people would try."

"Well, if she is capable of making that reflection she is capable of making this further one," I went on: "that I must have a particular reason for not doing as others do, in spite of the interest she offers—for not leaving her alone." Miss Tita looked as if she failed to grasp this rather complicated proposition; so I continued, "If you have not told her what I said to you the other night may she not at least have guessed it?"

"I don't know; she is very suspicious."

"But she has not been made so by indiscreet curiosity, by persecution?"

"No, no; it isn't that," said Miss Tita, turning on me a somewhat troubled face. "I don't know how to say it: it's on account of something—ages ago, before I was born—in her life."

"Something? What sort of thing?" I asked as if I myself could have no idea.

"Oh, she has never told me," Miss Tita answered; and I was sure she was speaking the truth.

Her extreme limpidity was almost provoking, and I felt for the moment that she would have been more satisfactory if she had been less ingenuous. "Do you suppose it's something to which Jeffrey Aspern's letters and papers—I mean the things in her possession—have reference?"

"I daresay it is!" my companion exclaimed as if this were a very happy suggestion. "I have never looked at any of those things."

"None of them? Then how do you know what they are?"

"I don't," said Miss Tita placidly. "I have never had them in my hands. But I have seen them when she has had them out."

"Does she have them out often?"

"Not now, but she used to. She is very fond of them."

"In spite of their being compromising?"

“Compromising?” Miss Tita repeated as if she was ignorant of the meaning of the word. I felt almost as one who corrupts the innocence of youth.

“I mean their containing painful memories.”

“Oh, I don’t think they are painful.”

“You mean you don’t think they affect her reputation?”

At this a singular look came into the face of Miss Bordereau’s niece—a kind of confession of helplessness, an appeal to me to deal fairly, generously with her. I had brought her to the Piazza, placed her among charming influences, paid her an attention she appreciated, and now I seemed to let her perceive that all this had been a bribe—a bribe to make her turn in some way against her aunt. She was of a yielding nature and capable of doing almost anything to please a person who was kind to her; but the greatest kindness of all would be not to presume too much on this. It was strange enough, as I afterward thought, that she had not the least air of resenting my want of consideration for her aunt’s character, which would have been in the worst possible taste if anything less vital (from my point of view) had been at stake. I don’t think she really measured it. “Do you mean that she did something bad?” she asked in a moment.

“Heaven forbid I should say so, and it’s none of my business. Besides, if she did,” I added, laughing, “it was in other ages, in another world. But why should she not destroy her papers?”

“Oh, she loves them too much.”

“Even now, when she may be near her end?”

“Perhaps when she’s sure of that she will.”

“Well, Miss Tita,” I said, “it’s just what I should like you to prevent.”

“How can I prevent it?”

“Couldn’t you get them away from her?”

“And give them to you?”

This put the case very crudely, though I am sure there was no irony in her intention. “Oh, I mean that you might let me see them and look them over. It isn’t for myself; there is no personal avidity in my desire. It is simply that they would be of such immense interest to the public, such immeasurable importance as a contribution to Jeffrey Aspern’s history.”

She listened to me in her usual manner, as if my speech were full of reference to things she had never heard of, and I felt particularly like the reporter of a newspaper who forces his way into a house of mourning. This was especially the case when after a moment she said. “There was a gentleman who some time ago wrote to her in very much those words. He also wanted her papers.”

“And did she answer him?” I asked, rather ashamed of myself for not having her rectitude.

“Only when he had written two or three times. He made her very angry.”

“And what did she say?”

“She said he was a devil,” Miss Tita replied simply.

“She used that expression in her letter?”

“Oh, no; she said it to me. She made me write to him.”

“And what did you say?”

“I told him there were no papers at all.”

“Ah, poor gentleman!” I exclaimed.

“I knew there were, but I wrote what she bade me.”

“Of course you had to do that. But I hope I shall not pass for a devil.”

“It will depend upon what you ask me to do for you,” said Miss Tita, smiling.

“Oh, if there is a chance of YOUR thinking so my affair is in a bad way! I shan’t ask you to steal for me, nor even to fib—for you can’t fib, unless on paper. But the principal thing is this—to prevent her from destroying the papers.”

“Why, I have no control of her,” said Miss Tita. “It’s she who controls me.”

“But she doesn’t control her own arms and legs, does she? The way she would naturally destroy her letters would be to burn them. Now she can’t burn them without fire, and she can’t get fire unless you give it to her.”

“I have always done everything she has asked,” my companion rejoined. “Besides, there’s Olimpia.”

I was on the point of saying that Olimpia was probably corruptible, but I thought it best not to sound that note. So I simply inquired if that faithful domestic could not be managed.

“Everyone can be managed by my aunt,” said Miss Tita. And then she observed that her holiday was over; she must go home.

I laid my hand on her arm, across the table, to stay her a moment. “What I want of you is a general promise to help me.”

“Oh, how can I—how can I?” she asked, wondering and troubled. She was half-surprised, half-frightened at my wishing to make her play an active part.

“This is the main thing: to watch her carefully and warn me in time, before she commits that horrible sacrilege.”

“I can’t watch her when she makes me go out.”

“That’s very true.”

“And when you do, too.”

“Mercy on us; do you think she will have done anything tonight?”

“I don’t know; she is very cunning.”

“Are you trying to frighten me?” I asked.

I felt this inquiry sufficiently answered when my companion murmured in a musing, almost envious way, “Oh, but she loves them—she loves them!”

This reflection, repeated with such emphasis, gave me great comfort; but to obtain more of that balm I said, “If she shouldn’t intend to destroy the objects we speak of before her death she will probably have made some disposition by will.”

“By will?”

“Hasn’t she made a will for your benefit?”

“Why, she has so little to leave. That’s why she likes money,” said Miss Tita.

“Might I ask, since we are really talking things over, what you and she live on?”

“On some money that comes from America, from a lawyer. He sends it every quarter. It isn’t much!”

“And won’t she have disposed of that?”

My companion hesitated—I saw she was blushing. “I believe it’s mine,” she said; and the look and tone which accompanied these words betrayed so the absence of the habit of thinking of herself that I almost thought her charming. The next instant she added, “But she had a lawyer once, ever so long ago. And some people came and signed something.”

“They were probably witnesses. And you were not asked to sign? Well then,” I argued rapidly and hopefully, “it is because you are the legatee; she has left all her documents to you!”

“If she has it’s with very strict conditions,” Miss Tita responded, rising quickly, while the movement gave the words a little character of decision. They seemed to imply that the bequest would be accompanied with a command that the articles bequeathed should remain concealed from every inquisitive eye and that I was very much mistaken if I thought she was the person to depart from an injunction so solemn.

“Oh, of course you will have to abide by the terms,” I said; and she uttered nothing to mitigate the severity of this conclusion. Nonetheless, later, just before we disembarked at her own door, on our return, which had taken place almost in silence, she said to me abruptly, “I will do what I can to help you.” I was grateful for this—it was very well so far as it went; but it did not keep me from remembering that night in a worried waking hour that I now had her word for it to reinforce my own impression that the old woman was very cunning.

VII

The fear of what this side of her character might have led her to do made me nervous for days afterward. I waited for an intimation from Miss Tita; I almost figured to myself that it was her duty to keep me informed, to let me know definitely whether or no Miss Bordereau had sacrificed her treasures. But as she gave no sign I lost patience and determined to judge so far as was possible with my own senses. I sent late one afternoon to ask if I might pay the ladies a visit, and my servant came back with surprising news. Miss Bordereau could be approached without the least difficulty; she had been moved out into the sala and was sitting by the window that overlooked the garden. I descended and found this picture correct; the old lady had been wheeled forth into the world and had a certain air, which came mainly perhaps from some brighter element in her dress, of being prepared again to have converse with it. It had not yet, however, begun to flock about her; she was perfectly alone and, though the door leading to her own quarters stood open, I had at first no glimpse of Miss Tita. The window at which she sat had the afternoon shade and, one of the shutters having been pushed back, she could see the pleasant garden, where the summer sun had by this time dried up too many of the plants—she could see the yellow light and the long shadows.

“Have you come to tell me that you will take the rooms for six months more?” she asked as I approached her, startling me by something coarse in her cupidity almost as much as if she had not already given me a specimen of it. Juliana’s desire to make our acquaintance lucrative had been, as I have sufficiently indicated, a false note in my image of the woman who had inspired a great poet with immortal lines; but I may say here definitely that I recognized after all that it behooved me to make a large allowance for her. It was I who had kindled the unholy flame; it was I who had put into her head that she had the means of making money. She appeared never to have thought of that; she had been living wastefully

for years, in a house five times too big for her, on a footing that I could explain only by the presumption that, excessive as it was, the space she enjoyed cost her next to nothing and that small as were her revenues they left her, for Venice, an appreciable margin. I had descended on her one day and taught her to calculate, and my almost extravagant comedy on the subject of the garden had presented me irresistibly in the light of a victim. Like all persons who achieve the miracle of changing their point of view when they are old she had been intensely converted; she had seized my hint with a desperate, tremulous clutch.

I invited myself to go and get one of the chairs that stood, at a distance, against the wall (she had given herself no concern as to whether I should sit or stand); and while I placed it near her I began, gaily, "Oh, dear madam, what an imagination you have, what an intellectual sweep! I am a poor devil of a man of letters who lives from day to day. How can I take palaces by the year? My existence is precarious. I don't know whether six months hence I shall have bread to put in my mouth. I have treated myself for once; it has been an immense luxury. But when it comes to going on—!"

"Are your rooms too dear? If they are you can have more for the same money," Juliana responded. "We can arrange, we can combinare, as they say here."

"Well yes, since you ask me, they are too dear," I said. "Evidently you suppose me richer than I am."

She looked at me in her barricaded way. "If you write books don't you sell them?"

"Do you mean don't people buy them? A little—not so much as I could wish. Writing books, unless one be a great genius—and even then!—is the last road to fortune. I think there is no more money to be made by literature."

"Perhaps you don't choose good subjects. What do you write about?" Miss Bordereau inquired.

"About the books of other people. I'm a critic, an historian, in a small way." I wondered what she was coming to.

"And what other people, now?"

"Oh, better ones than myself: the great writers mainly—the great philosophers and poets of the past; those who are dead and gone and can't speak for themselves."

"And what do you say about them?"

"I say they sometimes attached themselves to very clever women!" I answered, laughing. I spoke with great deliberation, but as my words fell upon the air they struck me as imprudent. However, I risked them and I was not sorry, for perhaps after all the old woman would be willing to treat. It seemed to be tolerably obvious that she knew my secret: why therefore drag the matter out? But she did not take what I had said as a confession; she only asked:

"Do you think it's right to rake up the past?"

"I don't know that I know what you mean by raking it up; but how can we get at it unless we dig a little? The present has such a rough way of treading it down."

"Oh, I like the past, but I don't like critics," the old woman declared with her fine tranquility.

"Neither do I, but I like their discoveries."

"Aren't they mostly lies?"

"The lies are what they sometimes discover," I said, smiling at the quiet impertinence of this. "They often lay bare the truth."

“The truth is God’s, it isn’t man’s; we had better leave it alone. Who can judge of it—who can say?”

“We are terribly in the dark, I know,” I admitted; “but if we give up trying what becomes of all the fine things? What becomes of the work I just mentioned, that of the great philosophers and poets? It is all vain words if there is nothing to measure it by.”

“You talk as if you were a tailor,” said Miss Bordereau whimsically; and then she added quickly, in a different manner, “This house is very fine; the proportions are magnificent. Today I wanted to look at this place again. I made them bring me out here. When your man came, just now, to learn if I would see you, I was on the point of sending for you, to ask if you didn’t mean to go on. I wanted to judge what I’m letting you have. This sala is very grand,” she pursued, like an auctioneer, moving a little, as I guessed, her invisible eyes. “I don’t believe you often have lived in such a house, eh?”

“I can’t often afford to!” I said.

“Well then, how much will you give for six months?”

I was on the point of exclaiming—and the air of excruciation in my face would have denoted a moral face—“Don’t, Juliana; for HIS sake, don’t!” But I controlled myself and asked less passionately: “Why should I remain so long as that?”

“I thought you liked it,” said Miss Bordereau with her shriveled dignity.

“So I thought I should.”

For a moment she said nothing more, and I left my own words to suggest to her what they might. I half-expected her to say, coldly enough, that if I had been disappointed we need not continue the discussion, and this in spite of the fact that I believed her now to have in her mind (however it had come there) what would have told her that my disappointment was natural. But to my extreme surprise she ended by observing: “If you don’t think we have treated you well enough perhaps we can discover some way of treating you better.” This speech was somehow so incongruous that it made me laugh again, and I excused myself by saying that she talked as if I were a sulky boy, pouting in the corner, to be “brought round.” I had not a grain of complaint to make; and could anything have exceeded Miss Tita’s graciousness in accompanying me a few nights before to the Piazza? At this the old woman went on: “Well, you brought it on yourself!” And then in a different tone, “She is a very nice girl.” I assented cordially to this proposition, and she expressed the hope that I did so not merely to be obliging, but that I really liked her. Meanwhile I wondered still more what Miss Bordereau was coming to. “Except for me, today,” she said, “she has not a relation in the world.” Did she by describing her niece as amiable and unencumbered wish to represent her as a parti?

It was perfectly true that I could not afford to go on with my rooms at a fancy price and that I had already devoted to my undertaking almost all the hard cash I had set apart for it. My patience and my time were by no means exhausted, but I should be able to draw upon them only on a more usual Venetian basis. I was willing to pay the venerable woman with whom my pecuniary dealings were such a discord twice as much as any other padrona di casa would have asked, but I was not willing to pay her twenty times as much. I told her so plainly, and my plainness appeared to have some success, for she exclaimed, “Very good; you have done what I asked—you have made an offer!”

“Yes, but not for half a year. Only by the month.”

“Oh, I must think of that then.” She seemed disappointed that I would not tie myself to a period, and I guessed that she wished both to secure me and to discourage me; to say severely, “Do you dream that you can get off with less than six months? Do you dream that even by the end of that time you will be appreciably nearer your victory?” What was more in my mind was that she had a fancy to play me the trick of making me engage myself when in fact she had annihilated the papers. There was a moment when my suspense on this point was so acute that I all but broke out with the question, and what kept it back was but a kind of instinctive recoil (lest it should be a mistake), from the last violence of self-exposure. She was such a subtle old witch that one could never tell where one stood with her. You may imagine whether it cleared up the puzzle when, just after she had said she would think of my proposal and without any formal transition, she drew out of her pocket with an embarrassed hand a small object wrapped in crumpled white paper. She held it there a moment and then she asked, “Do you know much about curiosities?”

“About curiosities?”

“About antiquities, the old gimcracks that people pay so much for today. Do you know the kind of price they bring?”

I thought I saw what was coming, but I said ingenuously, “Do you want to buy something?”

“No, I want to sell. What would an amateur give me for that?” She unfolded the white paper and made a motion for me to take from her a small oval portrait. I possessed myself of it with a hand of which I could only hope that she did not perceive the tremor, and she added, “I would part with it only for a good price.”

At the first glance I recognized Jeffrey Aspern, and I was well aware that I flushed with the act. As she was watching me however I had the consistency to exclaim, “What a striking face! Do tell me who it is.”

“It’s an old friend of mine, a very distinguished man in his day. He gave it to me himself, but I’m afraid to mention his name, lest you never should have heard of him, critic and historian as you are. I know the world goes fast and one generation forgets another. He was all the fashion when I was young.”

She was perhaps amazed at my assurance, but I was surprised at hers; at her having the energy, in her state of health and at her time of life, to wish to sport with me that way simply for her private entertainment—the humor to test me and practice on me. This, at least, was the interpretation that I put upon her production of the portrait, for I could not believe that she really desired to sell it or cared for any information I might give her. What she wished was to dangle it before my eyes and put a prohibitive price on it. “The face comes back to me, it torments me,” I said, turning the object this way and that and looking at it very critically. It was a careful but not a supreme work of art, larger than the ordinary miniature and representing a young man with a remarkably handsome face, in a high-collared green coat and a buff waistcoat. I judged the picture to have a valuable quality of resemblance and to have been painted when the model was about twenty-five years old. There are, as all the world knows, three other portraits of the poet in existence, but none of them is of so early a date as this elegant production. “I have never seen the original but I have seen other likenesses,” I went on. “You expressed doubt of this generation having heard of the gentleman, but he strikes me for all the world as a celebrity. Now who is he? I can’t put my finger on him—I can’t give him a label. Wasn’t he a writer? Surely he’s a poet.” I was determined that it should be she, not I, who should first pronounce Jeffrey Aspern’s name.

My resolution was taken in ignorance of Miss Bordereau’s extremely resolute character, and her lips never formed in my hearing the syllables that meant so much for her. She neglected

to answer my question but raised her hand to take back the picture, with a gesture which though ineffectual was in a high degree peremptory. "It's only a person who should know for himself that would give me my price," she said with a certain dryness.

"Oh, then, you have a price?" I did not restore the precious thing; not from any vindictive purpose but because I instinctively clung to it. We looked at each other hard while I retained it.

"I know the least I would take. What it occurred to me to ask you about is the most I shall be able to get."

She made a movement, drawing herself together as if, in a spasm of dread at having lost her treasure, she were going to attempt the immense effort of rising to snatch it from me. I instantly placed it in her hand again, saying as I did so, "I should like to have it myself, but with your ideas I could never afford it."

She turned the small oval plate over in her lap, with its face down, and I thought I saw her catch her breath a little, as if she had had a strain or an escape. This however did not prevent her saying in a moment, "You would buy a likeness of a person you don't know, by an artist who has no reputation?"

"The artist may have no reputation, but that thing is wonderfully well painted," I replied, to give myself a reason.

"It's lucky you thought of saying that, because the painter was my father."

"That makes the picture indeed precious!" I exclaimed, laughing; and I may add that a part of my laughter came from my satisfaction in finding that I had been right in my theory of Miss Bordereau's origin. Aspern had of course met the young lady when he went to her father's studio as a sitter. I observed to Miss Bordereau that if she would entrust me with her property for twenty-four hours I should be happy to take advice upon it; but she made no answer to this save to slip it in silence into her pocket. This convinced me still more that she had no sincere intention of selling it during her lifetime, though she may have desired to satisfy herself as to the sum her niece, should she leave it to her, might expect eventually to obtain for it. "Well, at any rate I hope you will not offer it without giving me notice," I said as she remained irresponsive. "Remember that I am a possible purchaser."

"I should want your money first!" she returned with unexpected rudeness; and then, as if she bethought herself that I had just cause to complain of such an insinuation and wished to turn the matter off, asked abruptly what I talked about with her niece when I went out with her that way in the evening.

"You speak as if we had set up the habit," I replied. "Certainly I should be very glad if it were to become a habit. But in that case I should feel a still greater scruple at betraying a lady's confidence."

"Her confidence? Has she got confidence?"

"Here she is—she can tell you herself," I said; for Miss Tita now appeared on the threshold of the old woman's parlor. "Have you got confidence, Miss Tita? Your aunt wants very much to know."

"Not in her, not in her!" the younger lady declared, shaking her head with a dolefulness that was neither jocular nor affected. "I don't know what to do with her; she has fits of horrid imprudence. She is so easily tired—and yet she has begun to roam—to drag herself about the house." And she stood looking down at her immemorial companion with a sort of helpless

wonder, as if all their years of familiarity had not made her perversities, on occasion, any more easy to follow.

“I know what I’m about. I’m not losing my mind. I daresay you would like to think so,” said Miss Bordereau with a cynical little sigh.

“I don’t suppose you came out here yourself. Miss Tita must have had to lend you a hand,” I interposed with a pacifying intention.

“Oh, she insisted that we should push her; and when she insists!” said Miss Tita in the same tone of apprehension; as if there were no knowing what service that she disapproved of her aunt might force her next to render.

“I have always got most things done I wanted, thank God! The people I have lived with have humored me,” the old woman continued, speaking out of the gray ashes of her vanity.

“I suppose you mean that they have obeyed you.”

“Well, whatever it is, when they like you.”

“It’s just because I like you that I want to resist,” said Miss Tita with a nervous laugh.

“Oh, I suspect you’ll bring Miss Bordereau upstairs next to pay me a visit,” I went on; to which the old lady replied:

“Oh, no; I can keep an eye on you from here!”

“You are very tired; you will certainly be ill tonight!” cried Miss Tita.

“Nonsense, my dear; I feel better at this moment than I have done for a month. Tomorrow I shall come out again. I want to be where I can see this clever gentleman.”

“Shouldn’t you perhaps see me better in your sitting room?” I inquired.

“Don’t you mean shouldn’t you have a better chance at me?” she returned, fixing me a moment with her green shade.

“Ah, I haven’t that anywhere! I look at you but I don’t see you.”

“You excite her dreadfully—and that is not good,” said Miss Tita, giving me a reproachful, appealing look.

“I want to watch you—I want to watch you!” the old lady went on.

“Well then, let us spend as much of our time together as possible—I don’t care where—and that will give you every facility.”

“Oh, I’ve seen you enough for today. I’m satisfied. Now I’ll go home.” Miss Tita laid her hands on the back of her aunt’s chair and began to push, but I begged her to let me take her place. “Oh, yes, you may move me this way—you shan’t in any other!” Miss Bordereau exclaimed as she felt herself propelled firmly and easily over the smooth, hard floor. Before we reached the door of her own apartment she commanded me to stop, and she took a long, last look up and down the noble sala. “Oh, it’s a magnificent house!” she murmured; after which I pushed her forward. When we had entered the parlor Miss Tita told me that she should now be able to manage, and at the same moment the little red-haired donna came to meet her mistress. Miss Tita’s idea was evidently to get her aunt immediately back to bed. I confess that in spite of this urgency I was guilty of the indiscretion of lingering; it held me there to think that I was nearer the documents I coveted—that they were probably put away somewhere in the faded, unsociable room. The place had indeed a bareness which did not suggest hidden treasures; there were no dusky nooks nor curtained corners, no massive

cabinets nor chests with iron bands. Moreover it was possible, it was perhaps even probable that the old lady had consigned her relics to her bedroom, to some battered box that was shoved under the bed, to the drawer of some lame dressing table, where they would be in the range of vision by the dim night lamp. Nonetheless I scrutinized every article of furniture, every conceivable cover for a hoard, and noticed that there were half a dozen things with drawers, and in particular a tall old secretary, with brass ornaments of the style of the Empire—a receptacle somewhat rickety but still capable of keeping a great many secrets. I don't know why this article fascinated me so, inasmuch as I certainly had no definite purpose of breaking into it; but I stared at it so hard that Miss Tita noticed me and changed color. Her doing this made me think I was right and that wherever they might have been before the Aspern papers at that moment languished behind the peevish little lock of the secretary. It was hard to remove my eyes from the dull mahogany front when I reflected that a simple panel divided me from the goal of my hopes; but I remembered my prudence and with an effort took leave of Miss Bordereau. To make the effort graceful I said to her that I should certainly bring her an opinion about the little picture.

“The little picture?” Miss Tita asked, surprised.

“What do YOU know about it, my dear?” the old woman demanded. “You needn't mind. I have fixed my price.”

“And what may that be?”

“A thousand pounds.”

“Oh Lord!” cried poor Miss Tita irrepressibly.

“Is that what she talks to you about?” said Miss Bordereau.

“Imagine your aunt's wanting to know!” I had to separate from Miss Tita with only those words, though I should have liked immensely to add, “For heaven's sake meet me tonight in the garden!”

VIII

As it turned out the precaution had not been needed, for three hours later, just as I had finished my dinner, Miss Bordereau's niece appeared, unannounced, in the open doorway of the room in which my simple repasts were served. I remember well that I felt no surprise at seeing her; which is not a proof that I did not believe in her timidity. It was immense, but in a case in which there was a particular reason for boldness it never would have prevented her from running up to my rooms. I saw that she was now quite full of a particular reason; it threw her forward—made her seize me, as I rose to meet her, by the arm.

“My aunt is very ill; I think she is dying!”

“Never in the world,” I answered bitterly. “Don't you be afraid!”

“Do go for a doctor—do, do! Olimpia is gone for the one we always have, but she doesn't come back; I don't know what has happened to her. I told her that if he was not at home she was to follow him where he had gone; but apparently she is following him all over Venice. I don't know what to do—she looks so as if she were sinking.”

“May I see her, may I judge?” I asked. “Of course I shall be delighted to bring someone; but hadn't we better send my man instead, so that I may stay with you?”

Miss Tita assented to this and I dispatched my servant for the best doctor in the neighborhood. I hurried downstairs with her, and on the way she told me that an hour after I quitted them in the afternoon Miss Bordereau had had an attack of “oppression,” a terrible

difficulty in breathing. This had subsided but had left her so exhausted that she did not come up: she seemed all gone. I repeated that she was not gone, that she would not go yet; whereupon Miss Tita gave me a sharper sidelong glance than she had ever directed at me and said, "Really, what do you mean? I suppose you don't accuse her of making believe!" I forget what reply I made to this, but I grant that in my heart I thought the old woman capable of any weird maneuver. Miss Tita wanted to know what I had done to her; her aunt had told her that I had made her so angry. I declared I had done nothing—I had been exceedingly careful; to which my companion rejoined that Miss Bordereau had assured her she had had a scene with me—a scene that had upset her. I answered with some resentment that it was a scene of her own making—that I couldn't think what she was angry with me for unless for not seeing my way to give a thousand pounds for the portrait of Jeffrey Aspern. "And did she show you that? Oh, gracious—oh, deary me!" groaned Miss Tita, who appeared to feel that the situation was passing out of her control and that the elements of her fate were thickening around her. I said that I would give anything to possess it, yet that I had not a thousand pounds; but I stopped when we came to the door of Miss Bordereau's room. I had an immense curiosity to pass it, but I thought it my duty to represent to Miss Tita that if I made the invalid angry she ought perhaps to be spared the sight of me. "The sight of you? Do you think she can SEE?" my companion demanded almost with indignation. I did think so but forebore to say it, and I softly followed my conductress.

I remember that what I said to her as I stood for a moment beside the old woman's bed was, "Does she never show you her eyes then? Have you never seen them?" Miss Bordereau had been divested of her green shade, but (it was not my fortune to behold Juliana in her nightcap) the upper half of her face was covered by the fall of a piece of dingy lacelike muslin, a sort of extemporized hood which, wound round her head, descended to the end of her nose, leaving nothing visible but her white withered cheeks and puckered mouth, closed tightly and, as it were consciously. Miss Tita gave me a glance of surprise, evidently not seeing a reason for my impatience. "You mean that she always wears something? She does it to preserve them."

"Because they are so fine?"

"Oh, today, today!" And Miss Tita shook her head, speaking very low. "But they used to be magnificent!"

"Yes indeed, we have Aspern's word for that." And as I looked again at the old woman's wrappings I could imagine that she had not wished to allow people a reason to say that the great poet had overdone it. But I did not waste my time in considering Miss Bordereau, in whom the appearance of respiration was so slight as to suggest that no human attention could ever help her more. I turned my eyes all over the room, rummaging with them the closets, the chests of drawers, the tables. Miss Tita met them quickly and read, I think, what was in them; but she did not answer it, turning away restlessly, anxiously, so that I felt rebuked, with reason, for a preoccupation that was almost profane in the presence of our dying companion. All the same I took another look, endeavoring to pick out mentally the place to try first, for a person who should wish to put his hand on Miss Bordereau's papers directly after her death. The room was a dire confusion; it looked like the room of an old actress. There were clothes hanging over chairs, odd-looking shabby bundles here and there, and various pasteboard boxes piled together, battered, bulging, and discolored, which might have been fifty years old. Miss Tita after a moment noticed the direction of my eyes again and, as if she guessed how I judged the air of the place (forgetting I had no business to judge it at all), said, perhaps to defend herself from the imputation of complicity in such untidiness:

“She likes it this way; we can’t move things. There are old bandboxes she has had most of her life.” Then she added, half taking pity on my real thought, “Those things were THERE.” And she pointed to a small, low trunk which stood under a sofa where there was just room for it. It appeared to be a queer, superannuated coffer, of painted wood, with elaborate handles and shriveled straps and with the color (it had last been endued with a coat of light green) much rubbed off. It evidently had traveled with Juliana in the olden time—in the days of her adventures, which it had shared. It would have made a strange figure arriving at a modern hotel.

“WERE there—they aren’t now?” I asked, startled by Miss Tita’s implication.

She was going to answer, but at that moment the doctor came in—the doctor whom the little maid had been sent to fetch and whom she had at last overtaken. My servant, going on his own errand, had met her with her companion in tow, and in the sociable Venetian spirit, retracing his steps with them, had also come up to the threshold of Miss Bordereau’s room, where I saw him peeping over the doctor’s shoulder. I motioned him away the more instantly that the sight of his prying face reminded me that I myself had almost as little to do there—an admonition confirmed by the sharp way the little doctor looked at me, appearing to take me for a rival who had the field before him. He was a short, fat, brisk gentleman who wore the tall hat of his profession and seemed to look at everything but his patient. He looked particularly at me, as if it struck him that I should be better for a dose, so that I bowed to him and left him with the women, going down to smoke a cigar in the garden. I was nervous; I could not go further; I could not leave the place. I don’t know exactly what I thought might happen, but it seemed to me important to be there. I wandered about in the alleys—the warm night had come on—smoking cigar after cigar and looking at the light in Miss Bordereau’s windows. They were open now, I could see; the situation was different. Sometimes the light moved, but not quickly; it did not suggest the hurry of a crisis. Was the old woman dying, or was she already dead? Had the doctor said that there was nothing to be done at her tremendous age but to let her quietly pass away; or had he simply announced with a look a little more conventional that the end of the end had come? Were the other two women moving about to perform the offices that follow in such a case? It made me uneasy not to be nearer, as if I thought the doctor himself might carry away the papers with him. I bit my cigar hard as it came over me again that perhaps there were now no papers to carry!

I wandered about for an hour—for an hour and a half. I looked out for Miss Tita at one of the windows, having a vague idea that she might come there to give me some sign. Would she not see the red tip of my cigar moving about in the dark and feel that I wanted eminently to know what the doctor had said? I am afraid it is a proof my anxieties had made me gross that I should have taken in some degree for granted that at such an hour, in the midst of the greatest change that could take place in her life, they were uppermost also in Miss Tita’s mind. My servant came down and spoke to me; he knew nothing save that the doctor had gone after a visit of half an hour. If he had stayed half an hour then Miss Bordereau was still alive: it could not have taken so much time as that to enunciate the contrary. I sent the man out of the house; there were moments when the sense of his curiosity annoyed me, and this was one of them. HE had been watching my cigar tip from an upper window, if Miss Tita had not; he could not know what I was after and I could not tell him, though I was conscious he had fantastic private theories about me which he thought fine and which I, had I known them, should have thought offensive.

I went upstairs at last but I ascended no higher than the sala. The door of Miss Bordereau’s apartment was open, showing from the parlor the dimness of a poor candle. I went toward it with a light tread, and at the same moment Miss Tita appeared and stood looking at me as I

approached. “She’s better—she’s better,” she said, even before I had asked. “The doctor has given her something; she woke up, came back to life while he was there. He says there is no immediate danger.”

“No immediate danger? Surely he thinks her condition strange!”

“Yes, because she had been excited. That affects her dreadfully.”

“It will do so again then, because she excites herself. She did so this afternoon.”

“Yes; she mustn’t come out any more,” said Miss Tita, with one of her lapses into a deeper placidity.

“What is the use of making such a remark as that if you begin to rattle her about again the first time she bids you?”

“I won’t—I won’t do it any more.”

“You must learn to resist her,” I went on.

“Oh, yes, I shall; I shall do so better if you tell me it’s right.”

“You mustn’t do it for me; you must do it for yourself. It all comes back to you, if you are frightened.”

“Well, I am not frightened now,” said Miss Tita cheerfully. “She is very quiet.”

“Is she conscious again—does she speak?”

“No, she doesn’t speak, but she takes my hand. She holds it fast.”

“Yes,” I rejoined, “I can see what force she still has by the way she grabbed that picture this afternoon. But if she holds you fast how comes it that you are here?”

Miss Tita hesitated a moment; though her face was in deep shadow (she had her back to the light in the parlor and I had put down my own candle far off, near the door of the sala), I thought I saw her smile ingenuously. “I came on purpose—I heard your step.”

“Why, I came on tiptoe, as inaudibly as possible.”

“Well, I heard you,” said Miss Tita.

“And is your aunt alone now?”

“Oh, no; Olimpia is sitting there.”

On my side I hesitated. “Shall we then step in there?” And I nodded at the parlor; I wanted more and more to be on the spot.

“We can’t talk there—she will hear us.”

I was on the point of replying that in that case we would sit silent, but I was too conscious that this would not do, as there was something I desired immensely to ask her. So I proposed that we should walk a little in the sala, keeping more at the other end, where we should not disturb the old lady. Miss Tita assented unconditionally; the doctor was coming again, she said, and she would be there to meet him at the door. We strolled through the fine superfluous hall, where on the marble floor—particularly as at first we said nothing—our footsteps were more audible than I had expected. When we reached the other end—the wide window, inveterately closed, connecting with the balcony that overhung the canal—I suggested that we should remain there, as she would see the doctor arrive still better. I opened the window and we passed out on the balcony. The air of the canal seemed even heavier, hotter than that of the sala. The place was hushed and void; the quiet neighborhood had gone to sleep. A

lamp, here and there, over the narrow black water, glimmered in double; the voice of a man going homeward singing, with his jacket on his shoulder and his hat on his ear, came to us from a distance. This did not prevent the scene from being very *comme il faut*, as Miss Bordereau had called it the first time I saw her. Presently a gondola passed along the canal with its slow rhythmical splash, and as we listened we watched it in silence. It did not stop, it did not carry the doctor; and after it had gone on I said to Miss Tita:

“And where are they now—the things that were in the trunk?”

“In the trunk?”

“That green box you pointed out to me in her room. You said her papers had been there; you seemed to imply that she had transferred them.”

“Oh, yes; they are not in the trunk,” said Miss Tita.

“May I ask if you have looked?”

“Yes, I have looked—for you.”

“How for me, dear Miss Tita? Do you mean you would have given them to me if you had found them?” I asked, almost trembling.

She delayed to reply and I waited. Suddenly she broke out, “I don’t know what I would do—what I wouldn’t!”

“Would you look again—somewhere else?”

She had spoken with a strange unexpected emotion, and she went on in the same tone: “I can’t—I can’t—while she lies there. It isn’t decent.”

“No, it isn’t decent,” I replied gravely. “Let the poor lady rest in peace.” And the words, on my lips, were not hypocritical, for I felt reprimanded and shamed.

Miss Tita added in a moment, as if she had guessed this and were sorry for me, but at the same time wished to explain that I did drive her on or at least did insist too much: “I can’t deceive her that way. I can’t deceive her—perhaps on her deathbed.”

“Heaven forbid I should ask you, though I have been guilty myself!”

“You have been guilty?”

“I have sailed under false colors.” I felt now as if I must tell her that I had given her an invented name, on account of my fear that her aunt would have heard of me and would refuse to take me in. I explained this and also that I had really been a party to the letter written to them by John Cunnor months before.

She listened with great attention, looking at me with parted lips, and when I had made my confession she said, “Then your real name—what is it?” She repeated it over twice when I had told her, accompanying it with the exclamation “Gracious, gracious!” Then she added, “I like your own best.”

“So do I,” I said, laughing. “Ouf! it’s a relief to get rid of the other.”

“So it was a regular plot—a kind of conspiracy?”

“Oh, a conspiracy—we were only two,” I replied, leaving out Mrs. Prest of course.

She hesitated; I thought she was perhaps going to say that we had been very base. But she remarked after a moment, in a candid, wondering way, “How much you must want them!”

“Oh, I do, passionately!” I conceded, smiling. And this chance made me go on, forgetting my compunction of a moment before. “How can she possibly have changed their place herself? How can she walk? How can she arrive at that sort of muscular exertion? How can she lift and carry things?”

“Oh, when one wants and when one has so much will!” said Miss Tita, as if she had thought over my question already herself and had simply had no choice but that answer—the idea that in the dead of night, or at some moment when the coast was clear, the old woman had been capable of a miraculous effort.

“Have you questioned Olimpia? Hasn’t she helped her—hasn’t she done it for her?” I asked; to which Miss Tita replied promptly and positively that their servant had had nothing to do with the matter, though without admitting definitely that she had spoken to her. It was as if she were a little shy, a little ashamed now of letting me see how much she had entered into my uneasiness and had me on her mind. Suddenly she said to me, without any immediate relevance:

“I feel as if you were a new person, now that you have got a new name.”

“It isn’t a new one; it is a very good old one, thank heaven!”

She looked at me a moment. “I do like it better.”

“Oh, if you didn’t I would almost go on with the other!”

“Would you really?”

I laughed again, but for all answer to this inquiry I said, “Of course if she can rummage about that way she can perfectly have burnt them.”

“You must wait—you must wait,” Miss Tita moralized mournfully; and her tone ministered little to my patience, for it seemed after all to accept that wretched possibility. I would teach myself to wait, I declared nevertheless; because in the first place I could not do otherwise and in the second I had her promise, given me the other night, that she would help me.

“Of course if the papers are gone that’s no use,” she said; not as if she wished to recede, but only to be conscientious.

“Naturally. But if you could only find out!” I groaned, quivering again.

“I thought you said you would wait.”

“Oh, you mean wait even for that?”

“For what then?”

“Oh, nothing,” I replied, rather foolishly, being ashamed to tell her what had been implied in my submission to delay—the idea that she would do more than merely find out. I know not whether she guessed this; at all events she appeared to become aware of the necessity for being a little more rigid.

“I didn’t promise to deceive, did I? I don’t think I did.”

“It doesn’t much matter whether you did or not, for you couldn’t!”

I don’t think Miss Tita would have contested this event had she not been diverted by our seeing the doctor’s gondola shoot into the little canal and approach the house. I noted that he came as fast as if he believed that Miss Bordereau was still in danger. We looked down at him while he disembarked and then went back into the sala to meet him. When he came up

however I naturally left Miss Tita to go off with him alone, only asking her leave to come back later for news.

I went out of the house and took a long walk, as far as the Piazza, where my restlessness declined to quit me. I was unable to sit down (it was very late now but there were people still at the little tables in front of the cafes); I could only walk round and round, and I did so half a dozen times. I was uncomfortable, but it gave me a certain pleasure to have told Miss Tita who I really was. At last I took my way home again, slowly getting all but inextricably lost, as I did whenever I went out in Venice: so that it was considerably past midnight when I reached my door. The sala, upstairs, was as dark as usual and my lamp as I crossed it found nothing satisfactory to show me. I was disappointed, for I had notified Miss Tita that I would come back for a report, and I thought she might have left a light there as a sign. The door of the ladies' apartment was closed; which seemed an intimation that my faltering friend had gone to bed, tired of waiting for me. I stood in the middle of the place, considering, hoping she would hear me and perhaps peep out, saying to myself too that she would never go to bed with her aunt in a state so critical; she would sit up and watch—she would be in a chair, in her dressing gown. I went nearer the door; I stopped there and listened. I heard nothing at all and at last I tapped gently. No answer came and after another minute I turned the handle. There was no light in the room; this ought to have prevented me from going in, but it had no such effect. If I have candidly narrated the importunities, the indelicacies, of which my desire to possess myself of Jeffrey Aspern's papers had rendered me capable I need not shrink from confessing this last indiscretion. I think it was the worst thing I did; yet there were extenuating circumstances. I was deeply though doubtless not disinterestedly anxious for more news of the old lady, and Miss Tita had accepted from me, as it were, a rendezvous which it might have been a point of honor with me to keep. It may be said that her leaving the place dark was a positive sign that she released me, and to this I can only reply that I desired not to be released.

The door of Miss Bordereau's room was open and I could see beyond it the faintness of a taper. There was no sound—my footstep caused no one to stir. I came further into the room; I lingered there with my lamp in my hand. I wanted to give Miss Tita a chance to come to me if she were with her aunt, as she must be. I made no noise to call her; I only waited to see if she would not notice my light. She did not, and I explained this (I found afterward I was right) by the idea that she had fallen asleep. If she had fallen asleep her aunt was not on her mind, and my explanation ought to have led me to go out as I had come. I must repeat again that it did not, for I found myself at the same moment thinking of something else. I had no definite purpose, no bad intention, but I felt myself held to the spot by an acute, though absurd, sense of opportunity. For what I could not have said, inasmuch as it was not in my mind that I might commit a theft. Even if it had been I was confronted with the evident fact that Miss Bordereau did not leave her secretary, her cupboard, and the drawers of her tables gaping. I had no keys, no tools, and no ambition to smash her furniture. Nonetheless it came to me that I was now, perhaps alone, unmolested, at the hour of temptation and secrecy, nearer to the tormenting treasure than I had ever been. I held up my lamp, let the light play on the different objects as if it could tell me something. Still there came no movement from the other room. If Miss Tita was sleeping she was sleeping sound. Was she doing so—generous creature—on purpose to leave me the field? Did she know I was there and was she just keeping quiet to see what I would do—what I COULD do? But what could I do, when it came to that? She herself knew even better than I how little.

I stopped in front of the secretary, looking at it very idiotically; for what had it to say to me after all? In the first place it was locked, and in the second it almost surely contained nothing in which I was interested. Ten to one the papers had been destroyed; and even if they had not

been destroyed the old woman would not have put them in such a place as that after removing them from the green trunk—would not have transferred them, if she had the idea of their safety on her brain, from the better hiding place to the worse. The secretary was more conspicuous, more accessible in a room in which she could no longer mount guard. It opened with a key, but there was a little brass handle, like a button, as well; I saw this as I played my lamp over it. I did something more than this at that moment: I caught a glimpse of the possibility that Miss Tita wished me really to understand. If she did not wish me to understand, if she wished me to keep away, why had she not locked the door of communication between the sitting room and the sala? That would have been a definite sign that I was to leave them alone. If I did not leave them alone she meant me to come for a purpose—a purpose now indicated by the quick, fantastic idea that to oblige me she had unlocked the secretary. She had not left the key, but the lid would probably move if I touched the button. This theory fascinated me, and I bent over very close to judge. I did not propose to do anything, not even—not in the least—to let down the lid; I only wanted to test my theory, to see if the cover WOULD move. I touched the button with my hand—a mere touch would tell me; and as I did so (it is embarrassing for me to relate it), I looked over my shoulder. It was a chance, an instinct, for I had not heard anything. I almost let my luminary drop and certainly I stepped back, straightening myself up at what I saw. Miss Bordereau stood there in her nightdress, in the doorway of her room, watching me; her hands were raised, she had lifted the everlasting curtain that covered half her face, and for the first, the last, the only time I beheld her extraordinary eyes. They glared at me, they made me horribly ashamed. I never shall forget her strange little bent white tottering figure, with its lifted head, her attitude, her expression; neither shall I forget the tone in which as I turned, looking at her, she hissed out passionately, furiously:

“Ah, you publishing scoundrel!”

I know not what I stammered, to excuse myself, to explain; but I went toward her, to tell her I meant no harm. She waved me off with her old hands, retreating before me in horror; and the next thing I knew she had fallen back with a quick spasm, as if death had descended on her, into Miss Tita’s arms.

IX

I left Venice the next morning, as soon as I learned that the old lady had not succumbed, as I feared at the moment, to the shock I had given her—the shock I may also say she had given me. How in the world could I have supposed her capable of getting out of bed by herself? I failed to see Miss Tita before going; I only saw the donna, whom I entrusted with a note for her younger mistress. In this note I mentioned that I should be absent but for a few days. I went to Treviso, to Bassano, to Castelfranco; I took walks and drives and looked at musty old churches with ill-lighted pictures and spent hours seated smoking at the doors of cafes, where there were flies and yellow curtains, on the shady side of sleepy little squares. In spite of these pastimes, which were mechanical and perfunctory, I scantily enjoyed my journey: there was too strong a taste of the disagreeable in my life. I had been devilish awkward, as the young men say, to be found by Miss Bordereau in the dead of night examining the attachment of her bureau; and it had not been less so to have to believe for a good many hours afterward that it was highly probable I had killed her. In writing to Miss Tita I attempted to minimize these irregularities; but as she gave me no word of answer I could not know what impression I made upon her. It rankled in my mind that I had been called a publishing scoundrel, for certainly I did publish and certainly I had not been very delicate. There was a moment when I stood convinced that the only way to make up for this latter fault was to take myself away altogether on the instant; to sacrifice my hopes and relieve the two poor women forever of the

oppression of my intercourse. Then I reflected that I had better try a short absence first, for I must already have had a sense (unexpressed and dim) that in disappearing completely it would not be merely my own hopes that I should condemn to extinction. It would perhaps be sufficient if I stayed away long enough to give the elder lady time to think she was rid of me. That she would wish to be rid of me after this (if I was not rid of her) was now not to be doubted: that nocturnal scene would have cured her of the disposition to put up with my company for the sake of my dollars. I said to myself that after all I could not abandon Miss Tita, and I continued to say this even while I observed that she quite failed to comply with my earnest request (I had given her two or three addresses, at little towns, *post restante*) that she would let me know how she was getting on. I would have made my servant write to me but that he was unable to manage a pen. It struck me there was a kind of scorn in Miss Tita's silence (little disdainful as she had ever been), so that I was uncomfortable and sore. I had scruples about going back and yet I had others about not doing so, for I wanted to put myself on a better footing. The end of it was that I did return to Venice on the twelfth day; and as my gondola gently bumped against Miss Bordereau's steps a certain palpitation of suspense told me that I had done myself a violence in holding off so long.

I had faced about so abruptly that I had not telegraphed to my servant. He was therefore not at the station to meet me, but he poked out his head from an upper window when I reached the house. "They have put her into the earth, *la vecchia*," he said to me in the lower hall, while he shouldered my valise; and he grinned and almost winked, as if he knew I should be pleased at the news.

"She's dead!" I exclaimed, giving him a very different look.

"So it appears, since they have buried her."

"It's all over? When was the funeral?"

"The other yesterday. But a funeral you could scarcely call it, *signore*; it was a dull little *passeggio* of two gondolas. *Poveretta!*" the man continued, referring apparently to Miss Tita. His conception of funerals was apparently that they were mainly to amuse the living.

I wanted to know about Miss Tita—how she was and where she was—but I asked him no more questions till we had got upstairs. Now that the fact had met me I took a bad view of it, especially of the idea that poor Miss Tita had had to manage by herself after the end. What did she know about arrangements, about the steps to take in such a case? *Poveretta* indeed! I could only hope that the doctor had given her assistance and that she had not been neglected by the old friends of whom she had told me, the little band of the faithful whose fidelity consisted in coming to the house once a year. I elicited from my servant that two old ladies and an old gentleman had in fact rallied round Miss Tita and had supported her (they had come for her in a gondola of their own) during the journey to the cemetery, the little red-walled island of tombs which lies to the north of the town, on the way to Murano. It appeared from these circumstances that the Misses Bordereau were Catholics, a discovery I had never made, as the old woman could not go to church and her niece, so far as I perceived, either did not or went only to early mass in the parish, before I was stirring. Certainly even the priests respected their seclusion; I had never caught the whisk of the curato's skirt. That evening, an hour later, I sent my servant down with five words written on a card, to ask Miss Tita if she would see me for a few moments. She was not in the house, where he had sought her, he told me when he came back, but in the garden walking about to refresh herself and gathering flowers. He had found her there and she would be very happy to see me.

I went down and passed half an hour with poor Miss Tita. She had always had a look of musty mourning (as if she were wearing out old robes of sorrow that would not come to an

end), and in this respect there was no appreciable change in her appearance. But she evidently had been crying, crying a great deal—simply, satisfyingly, refreshingly, with a sort of primitive, retarded sense of loneliness and violence. But she had none of the formalism or the self-consciousness of grief, and I was almost surprised to see her standing there in the first dusk with her hands full of flowers, smiling at me with her reddened eyes. Her white face, in the frame of her mantilla, looked longer, leaner than usual. I had had an idea that she would be a good deal disgusted with me—would consider that I ought to have been on the spot to advise her, to help her; and, though I was sure there was no rancor in her composition and no great conviction of the importance of her affairs, I had prepared myself for a difference in her manner, for some little injured look, half-familiar, half-estranged, which should say to my conscience, “Well, you are a nice person to have professed things!” But historic truth compels me to declare that Tita Bordereau’s countenance expressed unqualified pleasure in seeing her late aunt’s lodger. That touched him extremely, and he thought it simplified his situation until he found it did not. I was as kind to her that evening as I knew how to be, and I walked about the garden with her for half an hour. There was no explanation of any sort between us; I did not ask her why she had not answered my letter. Still less did I repeat what I had said to her in that communication; if she chose to let me suppose that she had forgotten the position in which Miss Bordereau surprised me that night and the effect of the discovery on the old woman I was quite willing to take it that way: I was grateful to her for not treating me as if I had killed her aunt.

We strolled and strolled and really not much passed between us save the recognition of her bereavement, conveyed in my manner and in a visible air that she had of depending on me now, since I let her see that I took an interest in her. Miss Tita had none of the pride that makes a person wish to preserve the look of independence; she did not in the least pretend that she knew at present what would become of her. I forebore to touch particularly on that, however, for I certainly was not prepared to say that I would take charge of her. I was cautious; not ignobly, I think, for I felt that her knowledge of life was so small that in her unsophisticated vision there would be no reason why—since I seemed to pity her—I should not look after her. She told me how her aunt had died, very peacefully at the last, and how everything had been done afterward by the care of her good friends (fortunately, thanks to me, she said, smiling, there was money in the house; and she repeated that when once the Italians like you they are your friends for life); and when we had gone into this she asked me about my giro, my impressions, the places I had seen. I told her what I could, making it up partly, I am afraid, as in my depression I had not seen much; and after she had heard me she exclaimed, quite as if she had forgotten her aunt and her sorrow, “Dear, dear, how much I should like to do such things—to take a little journey!” It came over me for the moment that I ought to propose some tour, say I would take her anywhere she liked; and I remarked at any rate that some excursion—to give her a change—might be managed: we would think of it, talk it over. I said never a word to her about the Aspern documents; asked no questions as to what she had ascertained or what had otherwise happened with regard to them before Miss Bordereau’s death. It was not that I was not on pins and needles to know, but that I thought it more decent not to betray my anxiety so soon after the catastrophe. I hoped she herself would say something, but she never glanced that way, and I thought this natural at the time. Later however, that night, it occurred to me that her silence was somewhat strange; for if she had talked of my movements, of anything so detached as the Giorgione at Castelfranco, she might have alluded to what she could easily remember was in my mind. It was not to be supposed that the emotion produced by her aunt’s death had blotted out the recollection that I was interested in that lady’s relics, and I fidgeted afterward as it came to me that her reticence might very possibly mean simply that nothing had been found. We separated in the garden (it was she who said she must go in); now that she was alone in the rooms I felt that (judged, at

any rate, by Venetian ideas) I was on rather a different footing in regard to visiting her there. As I shook hands with her for goodnight I asked her if she had any general plan—had thought over what she had better do. “Oh, yes, oh, yes, but I haven’t settled anything yet,” she replied quite cheerfully. Was her cheerfulness explained by the impression that I would settle for her?

I was glad the next morning that we had neglected practical questions, for this gave me a pretext for seeing her again immediately. There was a very practical question to be touched upon. I owed it to her to let her know formally that of course I did not expect her to keep me on as a lodger, and also to show some interest in her own tenure, what she might have on her hands in the way of a lease. But I was not destined, as it happened, to converse with her for more than an instant on either of these points. I sent her no message; I simply went down to the sala and walked to and fro there. I knew she would come out; she would very soon discover I was there. Somehow I preferred not to be shut up with her; gardens and big halls seemed better places to talk. It was a splendid morning, with something in the air that told of the waning of the long Venetian summer; a freshness from the sea which stirred the flowers in the garden and made a pleasant draught in the house, less shuttered and darkened now than when the old woman was alive. It was the beginning of autumn, of the end of the golden months. With this it was the end of my experiment—or would be in the course of half an hour, when I should really have learned that the papers had been reduced to ashes. After that there would be nothing left for me but to go to the station; for seriously (and as it struck me in the morning light) I could not linger there to act as guardian to a piece of middle-aged female helplessness. If she had not saved the papers wherein should I be indebted to her? I think I winced a little as I asked myself how much, if she HAD saved them, I should have to recognize and, as it were, to reward such a courtesy. Might not that circumstance after all saddle me with a guardianship? If this idea did not make me more uncomfortable as I walked up and down it was because I was convinced I had nothing to look to. If the old woman had not destroyed everything before she pounced upon me in the parlor she had done so afterward.

It took Miss Tita rather longer than I had expected to guess that I was there; but when at last she came out she looked at me without surprise. I said to her that I had been waiting for her, and she asked why I had not let her know. I was glad the next day that I had checked myself before remarking that I had wished to see if a friendly intuition would not tell her: it became a satisfaction to me that I had not indulged in that rather tender joke. What I did say was virtually the truth—that I was too nervous, since I expected her now to settle my fate.

“Your fate?” said Miss Tita, giving me a queer look; and as she spoke I noticed a rare change in her. She was different from what she had been the evening before—less natural, less quiet. She had been crying the day before and she was not crying now, and yet she struck me as less confident. It was as if something had happened to her during the night, or at least as if she had thought of something that troubled her—something in particular that affected her relations with me, made them more embarrassing and complicated. Had she simply perceived that her aunt’s not being there now altered my position?

“I mean about our papers. ARE there any? You must know now.”

“Yes, there are a great many; more than I supposed.” I was struck with the way her voice trembled as she told me this.

“Do you mean that you have got them in there—and that I may see them?”

“I don’t think you can see them,” said Miss Tita with an extraordinary expression of entreaty in her eyes, as if the dearest hope she had in the world now was that I would not take them

from her. But how could she expect me to make such a sacrifice as that after all that had passed between us? What had I come back to Venice for but to see them, to take them? My delight in learning they were still in existence was such that if the poor woman had gone down on her knees to beseech me never to mention them again I would have treated the proceeding as a bad joke. "I have got them but I can't show them," she added.

"Not even to me? Ah, Miss Tita!" I groaned, with a voice of infinite remonstrance and reproach.

She colored, and the tears came back to her eyes; I saw that it cost her a kind of anguish to take such a stand but that a dreadful sense of duty had descended upon her. It made me quite sick to find myself confronted with that particular obstacle; all the more that it appeared to me I had been extremely encouraged to leave it out of account. I almost considered that Miss Tita had assured me that if she had no greater hindrance than that—! "You don't mean to say you made her a deathbed promise? It was precisely against your doing anything of that sort that I thought I was safe. Oh, I would rather she had burned the papers outright than that!"

"No, it isn't a promise," said Miss Tita.

"Pray what is it then?"

She hesitated and then she said, "She tried to burn them, but I prevented it. She had hid them in her bed."

"In her bed?"

"Between the mattresses. That's where she put them when she took them out of the trunk. I can't understand how she did it, because Olimpia didn't help her. She tells me so, and I believe her. My aunt only told her afterward, so that she shouldn't touch the bed—anything but the sheets. So it was badly made," added Miss Tita simply.

"I should think so! And how did she try to burn them?"

"She didn't try much; she was too weak, those last days. But she told me—she charged me. Oh, it was terrible! She couldn't speak after that night; she could only make signs."

"And what did you do?"

"I took them away. I locked them up."

"In the secretary?"

"Yes, in the secretary," said Miss Tita, reddening again.

"Did you tell her you would burn them?"

"No, I didn't—on purpose."

"On purpose to gratify me?"

"Yes, only for that."

"And what good will you have done me if after all you won't show them?"

"Oh, none; I know that—I know that."

"And did she believe you had destroyed them?"

"I don't know what she believed at the last. I couldn't tell—she was too far gone."

"Then if there was no promise and no assurance I can't see what ties you."

“Oh, she hated it so—she hated it so! She was so jealous. But here’s the portrait—you may have that,” Miss Tita announced, taking the little picture, wrapped up in the same manner in which her aunt had wrapped it, out of her pocket.

“I may have it—do you mean you give it to me?” I questioned, staring, as it passed into my hand.

“Oh, yes.”

“But it’s worth money—a large sum.”

“Well!” said Miss Tita, still with her strange look.

I did not know what to make of it, for it could scarcely mean that she wanted to bargain like her aunt. She spoke as if she wished to make me a present. “I can’t take it from you as a gift,” I said, “and yet I can’t afford to pay you for it according to the ideas Miss Bordereau had of its value. She rated it at a thousand pounds.”

“Couldn’t we sell it?” asked Miss Tita.

“God forbid! I prefer the picture to the money.”

“Well then keep it.”

“You are very generous.”

“So are you.”

“I don’t know why you should think so,” I replied; and this was a truthful speech, for the singular creature appeared to have some very fine reference in her mind, which I did not in the least seize.

“Well, you have made a great difference for me,” said Miss Tita.

I looked at Jeffrey Aspern’s face in the little picture, partly in order not to look at that of my interlocutress, which had begun to trouble me, even to frighten me a little—it was so self-conscious, so unnatural. I made no answer to this last declaration; I only privately consulted Jeffrey Aspern’s delightful eyes with my own (they were so young and brilliant, and yet so wise, so full of vision); I asked him what on earth was the matter with Miss Tita. He seemed to smile at me with friendly mockery, as if he were amused at my case. I had got into a pickle for him—as if he needed it! He was unsatisfactory, for the only moment since I had known him. Nevertheless, now that I held the little picture in my hand I felt that it would be a precious possession. “Is this a bribe to make me give up the papers?” I demanded in a moment, perversely. “Much as I value it, if I were to be obliged to choose, the papers are what I should prefer. Ah, but ever so much!”

“How can you choose—how can you choose?” Miss Tita asked, slowly, lamentably.

“I see! Of course there is nothing to be said, if you regard the interdiction that rests upon you as quite insurmountable. In this case it must seem to you that to part with them would be an impiety of the worst kind, a simple sacrilege!”

Miss Tita shook her head, full of her dolefulness. “You would understand if you had known her. I’m afraid,” she quavered suddenly—“I’m afraid! She was terrible when she was angry.”

“Yes, I saw something of that, that night. She was terrible. Then I saw her eyes. Lord, they were fine!”

“I see them—they stare at me in the dark!” said Miss Tita.

“You are nervous, with all you have been through.”

“Oh, yes, very—very!”

“You mustn’t mind; that will pass away,” I said, kindly. Then I added, resignedly, for it really seemed to me that I must accept the situation, “Well, so it is, and it can’t be helped. I must renounce.” Miss Tita, at this, looking at me, gave a low, soft moan, and I went on: “I only wish to heaven she had destroyed them; then there would be nothing more to say. And I can’t understand why, with her ideas, she didn’t.”

“Oh, she lived on them!” said Miss Tita.

“You can imagine whether that makes me want less to see them,” I answered, smiling. “But don’t let me stand here as if I had it in my soul to tempt you to do anything base. Naturally you will understand if I give up my rooms. I leave Venice immediately.” And I took up my hat, which I had placed on a chair. We were still there rather awkwardly, on our feet, in the middle of the sala. She had left the door of the apartments open behind her but she had not led me that way.

A kind of spasm came into her face as she saw me take my hat. “Immediately—do you mean today?” The tone of the words was tragical—they were a cry of desolation.

“Oh, no; not so long as I can be of the least service to you.”

“Well, just a day or two more—just two or three days,” she panted. Then controlling herself, she added in another manner, “She wanted to say something to me—the last day—something very particular, but she couldn’t.”

“Something very particular?”

“Something more about the papers.”

“And did you guess—have you any idea?”

“No, I have thought—but I don’t know. I have thought all kinds of things.”

“And for instance?”

“Well, that if you were a relation it would be different.”

“If I were a relation?”

“If you were not a stranger. Then it would be the same for you as for me. Anything that is mine—would be yours, and you could do what you like. I couldn’t prevent you—and you would have no responsibility.”

She brought out this droll explanation with a little nervous rush, as if she were speaking words she had got by heart. They gave me an impression of subtlety and at first I failed to follow. But after a moment her face helped me to see further, and then a light came into my mind. It was embarrassing, and I bent my head over Jeffrey Aspern’s portrait. What an odd expression was in his face! “Get out of it as you can, my dear fellow!” I put the picture into the pocket of my coat and said to Miss Tita, “Yes, I’ll sell it for you. I shan’t get a thousand pounds by any means, but I shall get something good.”

She looked at me with tears in her eyes, but she seemed to try to smile as she remarked, “We can divide the money.”

“No, no, it shall be all yours.” Then I went on, “I think I know what your poor aunt wanted to say. She wanted to give directions that her papers should be buried with her.”

Miss Tita appeared to consider this suggestion for a moment; after which she declared, with striking decision, “Oh no, she wouldn’t have thought that safe!”

“It seems to me nothing could be safer.”

“She had an idea that when people want to publish they are capable—” And she paused, blushing.

“Of violating a tomb? Mercy on us, what must she have thought of me!”

“She was not just, she was not generous!” Miss Tita cried with sudden passion.

The light that had come into my mind a moment before increased. “Ah, don’t say that, for we ARE a dreadful race.” Then I pursued, “If she left a will, that may give you some idea.”

“I have found nothing of the sort—she destroyed it. She was very fond of me,” Miss Tita added incongruously. “She wanted me to be happy. And if any person should be kind to me—she wanted to speak of that.”

I was almost awestricken at the astuteness with which the good lady found herself inspired, transparent astuteness as it was and sewn, as the phrase is, with white thread. “Depend upon it she didn’t want to make any provision that would be agreeable to me.”

“No, not to you but to me. She knew I should like it if you could carry out your idea. Not because she cared for you but because she did think of me,” Miss Tita went on with her unexpected, persuasive volubility. “You could see them—you could use them.” She stopped, seeing that I perceived the sense of that conditional—stopped long enough for me to give some sign which I did not give. She must have been conscious, however, that though my face showed the greatest embarrassment that was ever painted on a human countenance it was not set as a stone, it was also full of compassion. It was a comfort to me a long time afterward to consider that she could not have seen in me the smallest symptom of disrespect. “I don’t know what to do; I’m too tormented, I’m too ashamed!” she continued with vehemence. Then turning away from me and burying her face in her hands she burst into a flood of tears. If she did not know what to do it may be imagined whether I did any better. I stood there dumb, watching her while her sobs resounded in the great empty hall. In a moment she was facing me again, with her streaming eyes. “I would give you everything—and she would understand, where she is—she would forgive me!”

“Ah, Miss Tita—ah, Miss Tita,” I stammered, for all reply. I did not know what to do, as I say, but at a venture I made a wild, vague movement in consequence of which I found myself at the door. I remember standing there and saying, “It wouldn’t do—it wouldn’t do!” pensively, awkwardly, grotesquely, while I looked away to the opposite end of the sala as if there were a beautiful view there. The next thing I remember is that I was downstairs and out of the house. My gondola was there and my gondolier, reclining on the cushions, sprang up as soon as he saw me. I jumped in and to his usual “Dove commanda?” I replied, in a tone that made him stare, “Anywhere, anywhere; out into the lagoon!”

He rowed me away and I sat there prostrate, groaning softly to myself, with my hat pulled over my face. What in the name of the preposterous did she mean if she did not mean to offer me her hand? That was the price—that was the price! And did she think I wanted it, poor deluded, infatuated, extravagant lady? My gondolier, behind me, must have seen my ears red as I wondered, sitting there under the fluttering tenda, with my hidden face, noticing nothing as we passed—wondered whether her delusion, her infatuation had been my own reckless work. Did she think I had made love to her, even to get the papers? I had not, I had not; I repeated that over to myself for an hour, for two hours, till I was wearied if not convinced. I don’t know where my gondolier took me; we floated aimlessly about in the lagoon, with slow, rare strokes. At last I became conscious that we were near the Lido, far up, on the right hand, as you turn your back to Venice, and I made him put me ashore. I wanted to walk, to

move, to shed some of my bewilderment. I crossed the narrow strip and got to the sea beach—I took my way toward Malamocco. But presently I flung myself down again on the warm sand, in the breeze, on the coarse dry grass. It took it out of me to think I had been so much at fault, that I had unwittingly but nonetheless deplorably trifled. But I had not given her cause—distinctly I had not. I had said to Mrs. Prest that I would make love to her; but it had been a joke without consequences and I had never said it to Tita Bordereau. I had been as kind as possible, because I really liked her; but since when had that become a crime where a woman of such an age and such an appearance was concerned? I am far from remembering clearly the succession of events and feelings during this long day of confusion, which I spent entirely in wandering about, without going home, until late at night; it only comes back to me that there were moments when I pacified my conscience and others when I lashed it into pain. I did not laugh all day—that I do recollect; the case, however it might have struck others, seemed to me so little amusing. It would have been better perhaps for me to feel the comic side of it. At any rate, whether I had given cause or not it went without saying that I could not pay the price. I could not accept. I could not, for a bundle of tattered papers, marry a ridiculous, pathetic, provincial old woman. It was a proof that she did not think the idea would come to me, her having determined to suggest it herself in that practical, argumentative, heroic way, in which the timidity however had been so much more striking than the boldness that her reasons appeared to come first and her feelings afterward.

As the day went on I grew to wish that I had never heard of Aspern's relics, and I cursed the extravagant curiosity that had put John Cumnor on the scent of them. We had more than enough material without them, and my predicament was the just punishment of that most fatal of human follies, our not having known when to stop. It was very well to say it was no predicament, that the way out was simple, that I had only to leave Venice by the first train in the morning, after writing a note to Miss Tita, to be placed in her hand as soon as I got clear of the house; for it was a strong sign that I was embarrassed that when I tried to make up the note in my mind in advance (I would put it on paper as soon as I got home, before going to bed), I could not think of anything but "How can I thank you for the rare confidence you have placed in me?" That would never do; it sounded exactly as if an acceptance were to follow. Of course I might go away without writing a word, but that would be brutal and my idea was still to exclude brutal solutions. As my confusion cooled I was lost in wonder at the importance I had attached to Miss Bordereau's crumpled scraps; the thought of them became odious to me, and I was as vexed with the old witch for the superstition that had prevented her from destroying them as I was with myself for having already spent more money than I could afford in attempting to control their fate. I forget what I did, where I went after leaving the Lido and at what hour or with what recovery of composure I made my way back to my boat. I only know that in the afternoon, when the air was aglow with the sunset, I was standing before the church of Saints John and Paul and looking up at the small square-jawed face of Bartolommeo Colleoni, the terrible condottiere who sits so sturdily astride of his huge bronze horse, on the high pedestal on which Venetian gratitude maintains him. The statue is incomparable, the finest of all mounted figures, unless that of Marcus Aurelius, who rides benignant before the Roman Capitol, be finer: but I was not thinking of that; I only found myself staring at the triumphant captain as if he had an oracle on his lips. The western light shines into all his grimness at that hour and makes it wonderfully personal. But he continued to look far over my head, at the red immersion of another day—he had seen so many go down into the lagoon through the centuries—and if he were thinking of battles and stratagems they were of a different quality from any I had to tell him of. He could not direct me what to do, gaze up at him as I might. Was it before this or after that I wandered about for an hour in the small canals, to the continued stupefaction of my gondolier, who had never seen me so restless and yet so void of a purpose and could extract from me no order but "Go anywhere—

everywhere—all over the place”? He reminded me that I had not lunched and expressed therefore respectfully the hope that I would dine earlier. He had had long periods of leisure during the day, when I had left the boat and rambled, so that I was not obliged to consider him, and I told him that that day, for a change, I would touch no meat. It was an effect of poor Miss Tita’s proposal, not altogether auspicious, that I had quite lost my appetite. I don’t know why it happened that on this occasion I was more than ever struck with that queer air of sociability, of cousinship and family life, which makes up half the expression of Venice. Without streets and vehicles, the uproar of wheels, the brutality of horses, and with its little winding ways where people crowd together, where voices sound as in the corridors of a house, where the human step circulates as if it skirted the angles of furniture and shoes never wear out, the place has the character of an immense collective apartment, in which Piazza San Marco is the most ornamented corner and palaces and churches, for the rest, play the part of great divans of repose, tables of entertainment, expanses of decoration. And somehow the splendid common domicile, familiar, domestic, and resonant, also resembles a theater, with actors clicking over bridges and, in straggling processions, tripping along fondamentas. As you sit in your gondola the footways that in certain parts edge the canals assume to the eye the importance of a stage, meeting it at the same angle, and the Venetian figures, moving to and fro against the battered scenery of their little houses of comedy, strike you as members of an endless dramatic troupe.

I went to bed that night very tired, without being able to compose a letter to Miss Tita. Was this failure the reason why I became conscious the next morning as soon as I awoke of a determination to see the poor lady again the first moment she would receive me? That had something to do with it, but what had still more was the fact that during my sleep a very odd revulsion had taken place in my spirit. I found myself aware of this almost as soon as I opened my eyes; it made me jump out of my bed with the movement of a man who remembers that he has left the house door ajar or a candle burning under a shelf. Was I still in time to save my goods? That question was in my heart; for what had now come to pass was that in the unconscious cerebration of sleep I had swung back to a passionate appreciation of Miss Bordereau’s papers. They were now more precious than ever, and a kind of ferocity had come into my desire to possess them. The condition Miss Tita had attached to the possession of them no longer appeared an obstacle worth thinking of, and for an hour, that morning, my repentant imagination brushed it aside. It was absurd that I should be able to invent nothing; absurd to renounce so easily and turn away helpless from the idea that the only way to get hold of the papers was to unite myself to her for life. I would not unite myself and yet I would have them. I must add that by the time I sent down to ask if she would see me I had invented no alternative, though to do so I had had all the time that I was dressing. This failure was humiliating, yet what could the alternative be? Miss Tita sent back word that I might come; and as I descended the stairs and crossed the sala to her door—this time she received me in her aunt’s forlorn parlor—I hoped she would not think my errand was to tell her I accepted her hand. She certainly would have made the day before the reflection that I declined it.

As soon as I came into the room I saw that she had drawn this inference, but I also saw something which had not been in my forecast. Poor Miss Tita’s sense of her failure had produced an extraordinary alteration in her, but I had been too full of my literary concupiscence to think of that. Now I perceived it; I can scarcely tell how it startled me. She stood in the middle of the room with a face of mildness bent upon me, and her look of forgiveness, of absolution, made her angelic. It beautified her; she was younger; she was not a ridiculous old woman. This optical trick gave her a sort of phantasmagoric brightness, and while I was still the victim of it I heard a whisper somewhere in the depths of my conscience:

“Why not, after all—why not?” It seemed to me I was ready to pay the price. Still more distinctly however than the whisper I heard Miss Tita’s own voice. I was so struck with the different effect she made upon me that at first I was not clearly aware of what she was saying; then I perceived she had bade me goodbye—she said something about hoping I should be very happy.

“Goodbye—goodbye?” I repeated with an inflection interrogative and probably foolish.

I saw she did not feel the interrogation, she only heard the words; she had strung herself up to accepting our separation and they fell upon her ear as a proof. “Are you going today?” she asked. “But it doesn’t matter, for whenever you go I shall not see you again. I don’t want to.” And she smiled strangely, with an infinite gentleness. She had never doubted that I had left her the day before in horror. How could she, since I had not come back before night to contradict, even as a simple form, such an idea? And now she had the force of soul—Miss Tita with force of soul was a new conception—to smile at me in her humiliation.

“What shall you do—where shall you go?” I asked.

“Oh, I don’t know. I have done the great thing. I have destroyed the papers.”

“Destroyed them?” I faltered.

“Yes; what was I to keep them for? I burned them last night, one by one, in the kitchen.”

“One by one?” I repeated, mechanically.

“It took a long time—there were so many.” The room seemed to go round me as she said this, and a real darkness for a moment descended upon my eyes. When it passed Miss Tita was there still, but the transfiguration was over and she had changed back to a plain, dingy, elderly person. It was in this character she spoke as she said, “I can’t stay with you longer, I can’t;” and it was in this character that she turned her back upon me, as I had turned mine upon her twenty-four hours before, and moved to the door of her room. Here she did what I had not done when I quitted her—she paused long enough to give me one look. I have never forgotten it and I sometimes still suffer from it, though it was not resentful. No, there was no resentment, nothing hard or vindictive in poor Miss Tita; for when, later, I sent her in exchange for the portrait of Jeffrey Aspern a larger sum of money than I had hoped to be able to gather for her, writing to her that I had sold the picture, she kept it with thanks; she never sent it back. I wrote to her that I had sold the picture, but I admitted to Mrs. Prest, at the time (I met her in London, in the autumn), that it hangs above my writing table. When I look at it my chagrin at the loss of the letters becomes almost intolerable.

The Liar

I

The train was half an hour late and the drive from the station longer than he had supposed, so that when he reached the house its inmates had dispersed to dress for dinner and he was conducted straight to his room. The curtains were drawn in this asylum, the candles were lighted, the fire was bright, and when the servant had quickly put out his clothes the comfortable little place became suggestive—seemed to promise a pleasant house, a various party, talks, acquaintances, affinities, to say nothing of very good cheer. He was too occupied with his profession to pay many country visits, but he had heard people who had more time for them speak of establishments where ‘they do you very well.’ He foresaw that the proprietors of Stayes would do him very well. In his bedroom at a country house he always looked first at the books on the shelf and the prints on the walls; he considered that these things gave a sort of measure of the culture and even of the character of his hosts. Though he had but little time to devote to them on this occasion a cursory inspection assured him that if the literature, as usual, was mainly American and humorous the art consisted neither of the water-colour studies of the children nor of ‘goody’ engravings. The walls were adorned with old-fashioned lithographs, principally portraits of country gentlemen with high collars and riding gloves: this suggested—and it was encouraging—that the tradition of portraiture was held in esteem. There was the customary novel of Mr. Le Fanu, for the bedside; the ideal reading in a country house for the hours after midnight. Oliver Lyon could scarcely forbear beginning it while he buttoned his shirt.

Perhaps that is why he not only found every one assembled in the hall when he went down, but perceived from the way the move to dinner was instantly made that they had been waiting for him. There was no delay, to introduce him to a lady, for he went out in a group of unmatched men, without this appendage. The men, straggling behind, sidled and edged as usual at the door of the dining-room, and the *dénouement* of this little comedy was that he came to his place last of all. This made him think that he was in a sufficiently distinguished company, for if he had been humiliated (which he was not), he could not have consoled himself with the reflection that such a fate was natural to an obscure, struggling young artist. He could no longer think of himself as very young, alas, and if his position was not so brilliant as it ought to be he could no longer justify it by calling it a struggle. He was something of a celebrity and he was apparently in a society of celebrities. This idea added to the curiosity with which he looked up and down the long table as he settled himself in his place.

It was a numerous party—five and twenty people; rather an odd occasion to have proposed to him, as he thought. He would not be surrounded by the quiet that ministers to good work; however, it had never interfered with his work to see the spectacle of human life before him in the intervals. And though he did not know it, it was never quiet at Stayes. When he was working well he found himself in that happy state—the happiest of all for an artist—in which things in general contribute to the particular idea and fall in with it, help it on and justify it, so that he feels for the hour as if nothing in the world can happen to him, even if it come in the guise of disaster or suffering, that will not be an enhancement of his subject. Moreover there was an exhilaration (he had felt it before) in the rapid change of scene—the jump, in the dusk of the afternoon, from foggy London and his familiar studio to a centre of festivity in the middle of Hertfordshire and a drama half acted, a drama of pretty women and noted men and wonderful orchids in silver jars. He observed as a not unimportant fact that one of the pretty

women was beside him: a gentleman sat on his other hand. But he went into his neighbours little as yet: he was busy looking out for Sir David, whom he had never seen and about whom he naturally was curious.

Evidently, however, Sir David was not at dinner, a circumstance sufficiently explained by the other circumstance which constituted our friend's principal knowledge of him—his being ninety years of age. Oliver Lyon had looked forward with great pleasure to the chance of painting a nonagenarian, and though the old man's absence from table was something of a disappointment (it was an opportunity the less to observe him before going to work), it seemed a sign that he was rather a sacred and perhaps therefore an impressive relic. Lyon looked at his son with the greater interest—wondered whether the glazed bloom of his cheek had been transmitted from Sir David. That would be jolly to paint, in the old man—the withered ruddiness of a winter apple, especially if the eye were still alive and the white hair carried out the frosty look. Arthur Ashmore's hair had a midsummer glow, but Lyon was glad his commission had been to delineate the father rather than the son, in spite of his never having seen the one and of the other being seated there before him now in the happy expansion of liberal hospitality.

Arthur Ashmore was a fresh-coloured, thick-necked English gentleman, but he was just not a subject; he might have been a farmer and he might have been a banker: you could scarcely paint him in characters. His wife did not make up the amount; she was a large, bright, negative woman, who had the same air as her husband of being somehow tremendously new; a sort of appearance of fresh varnish (Lyon could scarcely tell whether it came from her complexion or from her clothes), so that one felt she ought to sit in a gilt frame, suggesting reference to a catalogue or a price-list. It was as if she were already rather a bad though expensive portrait, knocked off by an eminent hand, and Lyon had no wish to copy that work. The pretty woman on his right was engaged with her neighbour and the gentleman on his other side looked shrinking and scared, so that he had time to lose himself in his favourite diversion of watching face after face. This amusement gave him the greatest pleasure he knew, and he often thought it a mercy that the human mask did interest him and that it was not less vivid than it was (sometimes it ran its success in this line very close), since he was to make his living by reproducing it. Even if Arthur Ashmore would not be inspiring to paint (a certain anxiety rose in him lest if he should make a hit with her father-in-law Mrs. Arthur should take it into her head that he had now proved himself worthy to *aborder* her husband); even if he had looked a little less like a page (fine as to print and margin) without punctuation, he would still be a refreshing, iridescent surface. But the gentleman four persons off—what was he? Would he be a subject, or was his face only the legible door-plate of his identity, burnished with punctual washing and shaving—the least thing that was decent that you would know him by?

This face arrested Oliver Lyon: it struck him at first as very handsome. The gentleman might still be called young, and his features were regular: he had a plentiful, fair moustache that curled up at the ends, a brilliant, gallant, almost adventurous air, and a big shining breastpin in the middle of his shirt. He appeared a fine satisfied soul, and Lyon perceived that wherever he rested his friendly eye there fell an influence as pleasant as the September sun—as if he could make grapes and pears or even human affection ripen by looking at them. What was odd in him was a certain mixture of the correct and the extravagant: as if he were an adventurer imitating a gentleman with rare perfection or a gentleman who had taken a fancy to go about with hidden arms. He might have been a dethroned prince or the war-correspondent of a newspaper: he represented both enterprise and tradition, good manners and bad taste. Lyon at length fell into conversation with the lady beside him—they dispensed,

as he had had to dispense at dinner-parties before, with an introduction—by asking who this personage might be.

‘Oh, he’s Colonel Capadose, don’t you know?’ Lyon didn’t know and he asked for further information. His neighbour had a sociable manner and evidently was accustomed to quick transitions; she turned from her other interlocutor with a methodical air, as a good cook lifts the cover of the next saucepan. ‘He has been a great deal in India—isn’t he rather celebrated?’ she inquired. Lyon confessed he had never heard of him, and she went on, ‘Well, perhaps he isn’t; but he says he is, and if you think it, that’s just the same, isn’t it?’

‘If *you* think it?’

‘I mean if he thinks it—that’s just as good, I suppose.’

‘Do you mean that he says that which is not?’

‘Oh dear, no—because I never know. He is exceedingly clever and amusing—quite the cleverest person in the house, unless indeed you are more so. But that I can’t tell yet, can I? I only know about the people I know; I think that’s celebrity enough!’

‘Enough for them?’

‘Oh, I see you’re clever. Enough for me! But I have heard of you,’ the lady went on. ‘I know your pictures; I admire them. But I don’t think you look like them.’

‘They are mostly portraits,’ Lyon said; ‘and what I usually try for is not my own resemblance.’

‘I see what you mean. But they have much more colour. And now you are going to do some one here?’

‘I have been invited to do Sir David. I’m rather disappointed at not seeing him this evening.’

‘Oh, he goes to bed at some unnatural hour—eight o’clock or something of that sort. You know he’s rather an old mummy.’

‘An old mummy?’ Oliver Lyon repeated.

‘I mean he wears half a dozen waistcoats, and that sort of thing. He’s always cold.’

‘I have never seen him and never seen any portrait or photograph of him,’ Lyon said. ‘I’m surprised at his never having had anything done—at their waiting all these years.’

‘Ah, that’s because he was afraid, you know; it was a kind of superstition. He was sure that if anything were done he would die directly afterwards. He has only consented to-day.’

‘He’s ready to die then?’

‘Oh, now he’s so old he doesn’t care.’

‘Well, I hope I shan’t kill him,’ said Lyon. ‘It was rather unnatural in his son to send for me.’

‘Oh, they have nothing to gain—everything is theirs already!’ his companion rejoined, as if she took this speech quite literally. Her talkativeness was systematic—she fraternised as seriously as she might have played whist. ‘They do as they like—they fill the house with people—they have *carte blanche*.’

‘I see—but there’s still the title.’

‘Yes, but what is it?’

Our artist broke into laughter at this, whereat his companion stared. Before he had recovered himself she was scouring the plain with her other neighbour. The gentleman on his left at last

risked an observation, and they had some fragmentary talk. This personage played his part with difficulty: he uttered a remark as a lady fires a pistol, looking the other way. To catch the ball Lyon had to bend his ear, and this movement led to his observing a handsome creature who was seated on the same side, beyond his interlocutor. Her profile was presented to him and at first he was only struck with its beauty; then it produced an impression still more agreeable—a sense of undimmed remembrance and intimate association. He had not recognised her on the instant only because he had so little expected to see her there; he had not seen her anywhere for so long, and no news of her ever came to him. She was often in his thoughts, but she had passed out of his life. He thought of her twice a week; that may be called often in relation to a person one has not seen for twelve years. The moment after he recognised her he felt how true it was that it was only she who could look like that: of the most charming head in the world (and this lady had it) there could never be a replica. She was leaning forward a little; she remained in profile, apparently listening to some one on the other side of her. She was listening, but she was also looking, and after a moment Lyon followed the direction of her eyes. They rested upon the gentleman who had been described to him as Colonel Capadose—rested, as it appeared to him, with a kind of habitual, visible complacency. This was not strange, for the Colonel was unmistakably formed to attract the sympathetic gaze of woman; but Lyon was slightly disappointed that she could let *him* look at her so long without giving him a glance. There was nothing between them to-day and he had no rights, but she must have known he was coming (it was of course not such a tremendous event, but she could not have been staying in the house without hearing of it), and it was not natural that that should absolutely fail to affect her.

She was looking at Colonel Capadose as if she were in love with him—a queer accident for the proudest, most reserved of women. But doubtless it was all right, if her husband liked it or didn't notice it: he had heard indefinitely, years before, that she was married, and he took for granted (as he had not heard that she had become a widow) the presence of the happy man on whom she had conferred what she had refused to *him*, the poor art-student at Munich. Colonel Capadose appeared to be aware of nothing, and this circumstance, incongruously enough, rather irritated Lyon than gratified him. Suddenly the lady turned her head, showing her full face to our hero. He was so prepared with a greeting that he instantly smiled, as a shaken jug overflows; but she gave him no response, turned away again and sank back in her chair. All that her face said in that instant was, 'You see I'm as handsome as ever.' To which he mentally subjoined, 'Yes, and as much good it does me!' He asked the young man beside him if he knew who that beautiful being was—the fifth person beyond him. The young man leaned forward, considered and then said, 'I think she's Mrs. Capadose.'

'Do you mean his wife—that fellow's?' And Lyon indicated the subject of the information given him by his other neighbour.

'Oh, is *he* Mr. Capadose?' said the young man, who appeared very vague. He admitted his vagueness and explained it by saying that there were so many people and he had come only the day before. What was definite to Lyon was that Mrs. Capadose was in love with her husband; so that he wished more than ever that he had married her.

'She's very faithful,' he found himself saying three minutes later to the lady on his right. He added that he meant Mrs. Capadose.

'Ah, you know her then?'

'I knew her once upon a time—when I was living abroad.'

'Why then were you asking me about her husband?'

'Precisely for that reason. She married after that—I didn't even know her present name.'

‘How then do you know it now?’

‘This gentleman has just told me—he appears to know.’

‘I didn’t know he knew anything,’ said the lady, glancing forward.

‘I don’t think he knows anything but that.’

‘Then you have found out for yourself that she is faithful. What do you mean by that?’

‘Ah, you mustn’t question me—I want to question you,’ Lyon said. ‘How do you all like her here?’

‘You ask too much! I can only speak for myself. I think she’s hard.’

‘That’s only because she’s honest and straightforward.’

‘Do you mean I like people in proportion as they deceive?’

‘I think we all do, so long as we don’t find them out,’ Lyon said. ‘And then there’s something in her face—a sort of Roman type, in spite of her having such an English eye. In fact she’s English down to the ground; but her complexion, her low forehead and that beautiful close little wave in her dark hair make her look like a glorified *contadina*.’

‘Yes, and she always sticks pins and daggers into her head, to increase that effect. I must say I like her husband better: he is so clever.’

‘Well, when I knew her there was no comparison that could injure her. She was altogether the most delightful thing in Munich.’

‘In Munich?’

‘Her people lived there; they were not rich—in pursuit of economy in fact, and Munich was very cheap. Her father was the younger son of some noble house; he had married a second time and had a lot of little mouths to feed. She was the child of the first wife and she didn’t like her stepmother, but she was charming to her little brothers and sisters. I once made a sketch of her as Werther’s Charlotte, cutting bread and butter while they clustered all round her. All the artists in the place were in love with her but she wouldn’t look at ‘the likes’ of us. She was too proud—I grant you that; but she wasn’t stuck up nor young ladyish; she was simple and frank and kind about it. She used to remind me of Thackeray’s Ethel Newcome. She told me she must marry well: it was the one thing she could do for her family. I suppose you would say that she *has* married well.’

‘She told *you*?’ smiled Lyon’s neighbour.

‘Oh, of course I proposed to her too. But she evidently thinks so herself!’ he added.

When the ladies left the table the host as usual bade the gentlemen draw together, so that Lyon found himself opposite to Colonel Capadose. The conversation was mainly about the ‘run,’ for it had apparently been a great day in the hunting-field. Most of the gentlemen communicated their adventures and opinions, but Colonel Capadose’s pleasant voice was the most audible in the chorus. It was a bright and fresh but masculine organ, just such a voice as, to Lyon’s sense, such a ‘fine man’ ought to have had. It appeared from his remarks that he was a very straight rider, which was also very much what Lyon would have expected. Not that he swaggered, for his allusions were very quietly and casually made; but they were all too dangerous experiments and close shaves. Lyon perceived after a little that the attention paid by the company to the Colonel’s remarks was not in direct relation to the interest they seemed to offer; the result of which was that the speaker, who noticed that *he* at least was listening, began to treat him as his particular auditor and to fix his eyes on him as he talked.

Lyon had nothing to do but to look sympathetic and assent—Colonel Capadose appeared to take so much sympathy and assent for granted. A neighbouring squire had had an accident; he had come a cropper in an awkward place—just at the finish—with consequences that looked grave. He had struck his head; he remained insensible, up to the last accounts: there had evidently been concussion of the brain. There was some exchange of views as to his recovery—how soon it would take place or whether it would take place at all; which led the Colonel to confide to our artist across the table that *he* shouldn't despair of a fellow even if he didn't come round for weeks—for weeks and weeks and weeks—for months, almost for years. He leaned forward; Lyon leaned forward to listen, and Colonel Capadose mentioned that he knew from personal experience that there was really no limit to the time one might lie unconscious without being any the worse for it. It had happened to him in Ireland, years before; he had been pitched out of a dogcart, had turned a sheer somersault and landed on his head. They thought he was dead, but he wasn't; they carried him first to the nearest cabin, where he lay for some days with the pigs, and then to an inn in a neighbouring town—it was a near thing they didn't put him under ground. He had been completely insensible—without a ray of recognition of any human thing—for three whole months; had not a glimmer of consciousness of any blessed thing. It was touch and go to that degree that they couldn't come near him, they couldn't feed him, they could scarcely look at him. Then one day he had opened his eyes—as fit as a flea!

'I give you my honour it had done me good—it rested my brain.' He appeared to intimate that with an intelligence so active as his these periods of repose were providential. Lyon thought his story very striking, but he wanted to ask him whether he had not shammed a little—not in relating it, but in keeping so quiet. He hesitated however, in time, to imply a doubt—he was so impressed with the tone in which Colonel Capadose said that it was the turn of a hair that they hadn't buried him alive. That had happened to a friend of his in India—a fellow who was supposed to have died of jungle fever—they clapped him into a coffin. He was going on to recite the further fate of this unfortunate gentleman when Mr. Ashmore made a move and every one got up to adjourn to the drawing-room. Lyon noticed that by this time no one was heeding what his new friend said to him. They came round on either side of the table and met while the gentlemen dawdled before going out.

'And do you mean that your friend was literally buried alive?' asked Lyon, in some suspense.

Colonel Capadose looked at him a moment, as if he had already lost the thread of the conversation. Then his face brightened—and when it brightened it was doubly handsome.

'Upon my soul he was chucked into the ground!'

'And was he left there?'

'He was left there till I came and hauled him out.'

'*You* came?'

'I dreamed about him—it's the most extraordinary story: I heard him calling to me in the night. I took upon myself to dig him up. You know there are people in India—a kind of beastly race, the ghouls—who violate graves. I had a sort of presentiment that they would get at him first. I rode straight, I can tell you; and, by Jove, a couple of them had just broken ground! Crack—crack, from a couple of barrels, and they showed me their heels, as you may believe. Would you credit that I took him out myself? The air brought him to and he was none the worse. He has got his pension—he came home the other day; he would do anything for me.'

'He called to you in the night?' said Lyon, much startled.

‘That’s the interesting point. Now *what was it?* It wasn’t his ghost, because he wasn’t dead. It wasn’t himself, because he couldn’t. It was something or other! You see India’s a strange country—there’s an element of the mysterious: the air is full of things you can’t explain.’

They passed out of the dining-room, and Colonel Capadose, who went among the first, was separated from Lyon; but a minute later, before they reached the drawing-room, he joined him again. ‘Ashmore tells me who you are. Of course I have often heard of you—I’m very glad to make your acquaintance; my wife used to know you.’

‘I’m glad she remembers me. I recognised her at dinner and I was afraid she didn’t.’

‘Ah, I daresay she was ashamed,’ said the Colonel, with indulgent humour.

‘Ashamed of me?’ Lyon replied, in the same key.

‘Wasn’t there something about a picture? Yes; you painted her portrait.’

‘Many times,’ said the artist; ‘and she may very well have been ashamed of what I made of her.’

‘Well, I wasn’t, my dear sir; it was the sight of that picture, which you were so good as to present to her, that made me first fall in love with her.’

‘Do you mean that one with the children—cutting bread and butter?’

‘Bread and butter? Bless me, no—vine leaves and a leopard skin—a kind of Bacchante.’

‘Ah, yes,’ said Lyon; ‘I remember. It was the first decent portrait I painted. I should be curious to see it to-day.’

‘Don’t ask her to show it to you—she’ll be mortified!’ the Colonel exclaimed.

‘Mortified?’

‘We parted with it—in the most disinterested manner,’ he laughed. ‘An old friend of my wife’s—her family had known him intimately when they lived in Germany—took the most extraordinary fancy to it: the Grand Duke of Silberstadt-Schreckenstein, don’t you know? He came out to Bombay while we were there and he spotted your picture (you know he’s one of the greatest collectors in Europe), and made such eyes at it that, upon my word—it happened to be his birthday—she told him he might have it, to get rid of him. He was perfectly enchanted—but we miss the picture.’

‘It is very good of you,’ Lyon said. ‘If it’s in a great collection—a work of my incompetent youth—I am infinitely honoured.’

‘Oh, he has got it in one of his castles; I don’t know which—you know he has so many. He sent us, before he left India—to return the compliment—a magnificent old vase.’

‘That was more than the thing was worth,’ Lyon remarked.

Colonel Capadose gave no heed to this observation; he seemed to be thinking of something. After a moment he said, ‘If you’ll come and see us in town she’ll show you the vase.’ And as they passed into the drawing-room he gave the artist a friendly propulsion. ‘Go and speak to her; there she is—she’ll be delighted.’

Oliver Lyon took but a few steps into the wide saloon; he stood there a moment looking at the bright composition of the lamplit group of fair women, the single figures, the great setting of white and gold, the panels of old damask, in the centre of each of which was a single celebrated picture. There was a subdued lustre in the scene and an air as of the shining trains of dresses tumbled over the carpet. At the furthest end of the room sat Mrs. Capadose, rather

isolated; she was on a small sofa, with an empty place beside her. Lyon could not flatter himself she had been keeping it for him; her failure to respond to his recognition at table contradicted that, but he felt an extreme desire to go and occupy it. Moreover he had her husband's sanction; so he crossed the room, stepping over the tails of gowns, and stood before his old friend.

'I hope you don't mean to repudiate me,' he said.

She looked up at him with an expression of unalloyed pleasure. 'I am so glad to see you. I was delighted when I heard you were coming.'

'I tried to get a smile from you at dinner—but I couldn't.'

'I didn't see—I didn't understand. Besides, I hate smirking and telegraphing. Also I'm very shy—you won't have forgotten that. Now we can communicate comfortably.' And she made a better place for him on the little sofa. He sat down and they had a talk that he enjoyed, while the reason for which he used to like her so came back to him, as well as a good deal of the very same old liking. She was still the least spoiled beauty he had ever seen, with an absence of coquetry or any insinuating art that seemed almost like an omitted faculty; there were moments when she struck her interlocutor as some fine creature from an asylum—a surprising deaf-mute or one of the operative blind. Her noble pagan head gave her privileges that she neglected, and when people were admiring her brow she was wondering whether there were a good fire in her bedroom. She was simple, kind and good; inexpressive but not inhuman or stupid. Now and again she dropped something that had a sifted, selected air—the sound of an impression at first hand. She had no imagination, but she had added up her feelings, some of her reflections, about life. Lyon talked of the old days in Munich, reminded her of incidents, pleasures and pains, asked her about her father and the others; and she told him in return that she was so impressed with his own fame, his brilliant position in the world, that she had not felt very sure he would speak to her or that his little sign at table was meant for her. This was plainly a perfectly truthful speech—she was incapable of any other—and he was affected by such humility on the part of a woman whose grand line was unique. Her father was dead; one of her brothers was in the navy and the other on a ranch in America; two of her sisters were married and the youngest was just coming out and very pretty. She didn't mention her stepmother. She asked him about his own personal history and he said that the principal thing that had happened to him was that he had never married.

'Oh, you ought to,' she answered. 'It's the best thing.'

'I like that—from you!' he returned.

'Why not from me? I am very happy.'

'That's just why I can't be. It's cruel of you to praise your state. But I have had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of your husband. We had a good bit of talk in the other room.'

'You must know him better—you must know him really well,' said Mrs. Capadose.

'I am sure that the further you go the more you find. But he makes a fine show, too.'

She rested her good gray eyes on Lyon. 'Don't you think he's handsome?'

'Handsome and clever and entertaining. You see I'm generous.'

'Yes; you must know him well,' Mrs. Capadose repeated.

'He has seen a great deal of life,' said her companion.

'Yes, we have been in so many places. You must see my little girl. She is nine years old—she's too beautiful.'

‘You must bring her to my studio some day—I should like to paint her.’

‘Ah, don’t speak of that,’ said Mrs. Capadose. ‘It reminds me of something so distressing.’

‘I hope you don’t mean when *you* used to sit to me—though that may well have bored you.’

‘It’s not what you did—it’s what we have done. It’s a confession I must make—it’s a weight on my mind! I mean about that beautiful picture you gave me—it used to be so much admired. When you come to see me in London (I count on your doing that very soon) I shall see you looking all round. I can’t tell you I keep it in my own room because I love it so, for the simple reason——’ And she paused a moment.

‘Because you can’t tell wicked lies,’ said Lyon.

‘No, I can’t. So before you ask for it——’

‘Oh, I know you parted with it—the blow has already fallen,’ Lyon interrupted.

‘Ah then, you have heard? I was sure you would! But do you know what we got for it? Two hundred pounds.’

‘You might have got much more,’ said Lyon, smiling.

‘That seemed a great deal at the time. We were in want of the money—it was a good while ago, when we first married. Our means were very small then, but fortunately that has changed rather for the better. We had the chance; it really seemed a big sum, and I am afraid we jumped at it. My husband had expectations which have partly come into effect, so that now we do well enough. But meanwhile the picture went.’

‘Fortunately the original remained. But do you mean that two hundred was the value of the vase?’ Lyon asked.

‘Of the vase?’

‘The beautiful old Indian vase—the Grand Duke’s offering.’

‘The Grand Duke?’

‘What’s his name?—Silberstadt-Schreckenstein. Your husband mentioned the transaction.’

‘Oh, my husband,’ said Mrs. Capadose; and Lyon saw that she coloured a little.

Not to add to her embarrassment, but to clear up the ambiguity, which he perceived the next moment he had better have left alone, he went on: ‘He tells me it’s now in his collection.’

‘In the Grand Duke’s? Ah, you know its reputation? I believe it contains treasures.’ She was bewildered, but she recovered herself, and Lyon made the mental reflection that for some reason which would seem good when he knew it the husband and the wife had prepared different versions of the same incident. It was true that he did not exactly see Everina Brant preparing a version; that was not her line of old, and indeed it was not in her eyes to-day. At any rate they both had the matter too much on their conscience. He changed the subject, said Mrs. Capadose must really bring the little girl. He sat with her some time longer and thought—perhaps it was only a fancy—that she was rather absent, as if she were annoyed at their having been even for a moment at cross-purposes. This did not prevent him from saying to her at the last, just as the ladies began to gather themselves together to go to bed: ‘You seem much impressed, from what you say, with my renown and my prosperity, and you are so good as greatly to exaggerate them. Would you have married me if you had known that I was destined to success?’

‘I did know it.’

‘Well, I didn’t’

‘You were too modest.’

‘You didn’t think so when I proposed to you.’

‘Well, if I had married you I couldn’t have married *him*—and he’s so nice,’ Mrs. Capadose said. Lyon knew she thought it—he had learned that at dinner—but it vexed him a little to hear her say it. The gentleman designated by the pronoun came up, amid the prolonged handshaking for good-night, and Mrs. Capadose remarked to her husband as she turned away, ‘He wants to paint Amy.’

‘Ah, she’s a charming child, a most interesting little creature,’ the Colonel said to Lyon. ‘She does the most remarkable things.’

Mrs. Capadose stopped, in the rustling procession that followed the hostess out of the room. ‘Don’t tell him, please don’t,’ she said.

‘Don’t tell him what?’

‘Why, what she does. Let him find out for himself.’ And she passed on.

‘She thinks I swagger about the child—that I bore people,’ said the Colonel. ‘I hope you smoke.’ He appeared ten minutes later in the smoking-room, in a brilliant equipment, a suit of crimson foulard covered with little white spots. He gratified Lyon’s eye, made him feel that the modern age has its splendour too and its opportunities for costume. If his wife was an antique he was a fine specimen of the period of colour: he might have passed for a Venetian of the sixteenth century. They were a remarkable couple, Lyon thought, and as he looked at the Colonel standing in bright erectness before the chimney-piece while he emitted great smoke-puffs he did not wonder that Everina could not regret she had not married *him*. All the gentlemen collected at Stayes were not smokers and some of them had gone to bed. Colonel Capadose remarked that there probably would be a smallish muster, they had had such a hard day’s work. That was the worst of a hunting-house—the men were so sleepy after dinner; it was devilish stupid for the ladies, even for those who hunted themselves—for women were so extraordinary, they never showed it. But most fellows revived under the stimulating influences of the smoking-room, and some of them, in this confidence, would turn up yet. Some of the grounds of their confidence—not all of them—might have been seen in a cluster of glasses and bottles on a table near the fire, which made the great salver and its contents twinkle sociably. The others lurked as yet in various improper corners of the minds of the most loquacious. Lyon was alone with Colonel Capadose for some moments before their companions, in varied eccentricities of uniform, straggled in, and he perceived that this wonderful man had but little loss of vital tissue to repair.

They talked about the house, Lyon having noticed an oddity of construction in the smoking-room; and the Colonel explained that it consisted of two distinct parts, one of which was of very great antiquity. They were two complete houses in short, the old one and the new, each of great extent and each very fine in its way. The two formed together an enormous structure—Lyon must make a point of going all over it. The modern portion had been erected by the old man when he bought the property; oh yes, he had bought it, forty years before—it hadn’t been in the family: there hadn’t been any particular family for it to be in. He had had the good taste not to spoil the original house—he had not touched it beyond what was just necessary for joining it on. It was very curious indeed—a most irregular, rambling, mysterious pile, where they every now and then discovered a walled-up room or a secret staircase. To his mind it was essentially gloomy, however; even the modern additions, splendid as they were, failed to make it cheerful. There was some story about a skeleton

having been found years before, during some repairs, under a stone slab of the floor of one of the passages; but the family were rather shy of its being talked about. The place they were in was of course in the old part, which contained after all some of the best rooms: he had an idea it had been the primitive kitchen, half modernised at some intermediate period.

‘My room is in the old part too then—I’m very glad,’ Lyon said. ‘It’s very comfortable and contains all the latest conveniences, but I observed the depth of the recess of the door and the evident antiquity of the corridor and staircase—the first short one—after I came out. That panelled corridor is admirable; it looks as if it stretched away, in its brown dimness (the lamps didn’t seem to me to make much impression on it), for half a mile.’

‘Oh, don’t go to the end of it!’ exclaimed the Colonel, smiling.

‘Does it lead to the haunted room?’ Lyon asked.

His companion looked at him a moment. ‘Ah, you know about that?’

‘No, I don’t speak from knowledge, only from hope. I have never had any luck—I have never stayed in a dangerous house. The places I go to are always as safe as Charing Cross. I want to see—whatever there is, the regular thing. *Is* there a ghost here?’

‘Of course there is—a rattling good one.’

‘And have you seen him?’

‘Oh, don’t ask me what *I’ve* seen—I should tax your credulity. I don’t like to talk of these things. But there are two or three as bad—that is, as good!—rooms as you’ll find anywhere.’

‘Do you mean in my corridor?’ Lyon asked.

‘I believe the worst is at the far end. But you would be ill-advised to sleep there.’

‘Ill-advised?’

‘Until you’ve finished your job. You’ll get letters of importance the next morning, and you’ll take the 10.20.’

‘Do you mean I will invent a pretext for running away?’

‘Unless you are braver than almost any one has ever been. They don’t often put people to sleep there, but sometimes the house is so crowded that they have to. The same thing always happens—ill-concealed agitation at the breakfast-table and letters of the greatest importance. Of course it’s a bachelor’s room, and my wife and I are at the other end of the house. But we saw the comedy three days ago—the day after we got here. A young fellow had been put there—I forget his name—the house was so full; and the usual consequence followed. Letters at breakfast—an awfully queer face—an urgent call to town—so very sorry his visit was cut short. Ashmore and his wife looked at each other, and off the poor devil went.’

‘Ah, that wouldn’t suit me; I must paint my picture,’ said Lyon. ‘But do they mind your speaking of it? Some people who have a good ghost are very proud of it, you know.’

What answer Colonel Capadose was on the point of making to this inquiry our hero was not to learn, for at that moment their host had walked into the room accompanied by three or four gentlemen. Lyon was conscious that he was partly answered by the Colonel’s not going on with the subject. This however on the other hand was rendered natural by the fact that one of the gentlemen appealed to him for an opinion on a point under discussion, something to do with the everlasting history of the day’s run. To Lyon himself Mr. Ashmore began to talk, expressing his regret at having had so little direct conversation with him as yet. The topic that suggested itself was naturally that most closely connected with the motive of the artist’s visit.

Lyon remarked that it was a great disadvantage to him not to have had some preliminary acquaintance with Sir David—in most cases he found that so important. But the present sitter was so far advanced in life that there was doubtless no time to lose. ‘Oh, I can tell you all about him,’ said Mr. Ashmore; and for half an hour he told him a good deal. It was very interesting as well as very eulogistic, and Lyon could see that he was a very nice old man, to have endeared himself so to a son who was evidently not a gusher. At last he got up—he said he must go to bed if he wished to be fresh for his work in the morning. To which his host replied, ‘Then you must take your candle; the lights are out; I don’t keep my servants up.’

In a moment Lyon had his glimmering taper in hand, and as he was leaving the room (he did not disturb the others with a good-night; they were absorbed in the lemon-squeezer and the soda-water cork) he remembered other occasions on which he had made his way to bed alone through a darkened country-house; such occasions had not been rare, for he was almost always the first to leave the smoking-room. If he had not stayed in houses conspicuously haunted he had, none the less (having the artistic temperament), sometimes found the great black halls and staircases rather ‘creepy’: there had been often a sinister effect, to his imagination, in the sound of his tread in the long passages or the way the winter moon peeped into tall windows on landings. It occurred to him that if houses without supernatural pretensions could look so wicked at night, the old corridors of Stayes would certainly give him a sensation. He didn’t know whether the proprietors were sensitive; very often, as he had said to Colonel Capadose, people enjoyed the impeachment. What determined him to speak, with a certain sense of the risk, was the impression that the Colonel told queer stories. As he had his hand on the door he said to Arthur Ashmore, ‘I hope I shan’t meet any ghosts.’

‘Any ghosts?’

‘You ought to have some—in this fine old part.’

‘We do our best, but *que voulez-vous?*’ said Mr. Ashmore. ‘I don’t think they like the hot-water pipes.’

‘They remind them too much of their own climate? But haven’t you a haunted room—at the end of my passage?’

‘Oh, there are stories—we try to keep them up.’

‘I should like very much to sleep there,’ Lyon said.

‘Well, you can move there to-morrow if you like.’

‘Perhaps I had better wait till I have done my work.’

‘Very good; but you won’t work there, you know. My father will sit to you in his own apartments.’

‘Oh, it isn’t that; it’s the fear of running away, like that gentleman three days ago.’

‘Three days ago? What gentleman?’ Mr. Ashmore asked.

‘The one who got urgent letters at breakfast and fled by the 10.20. Did he stand more than one night?’

‘I don’t know what you are talking about. There was no such gentleman—three days ago.’

‘Ah, so much the better,’ said Lyon, nodding good-night and departing. He took his course, as he remembered it, with his wavering candle, and, though he encountered a great many gruesome objects, safely reached the passage out of which his room opened. In the complete darkness it seemed to stretch away still further, but he followed it, for the curiosity of the thing, to the end. He passed several doors with the name of the room painted upon them, but

he found nothing else. He was tempted to try the last door—to look into the room of evil fame; but he reflected that this would be indiscreet, since Colonel Capadose handled the brush—as a *raconteur*—with such freedom. There might be a ghost and there might not; but the Colonel himself, he inclined to think, was the most mystifying figure in the house.

II

Lyon found Sir David Ashmore a capital subject and a very comfortable sitter into the bargain. Moreover he was a very agreeable old man, tremendously puckered but not in the least dim; and he wore exactly the furred dressing-gown that Lyon would have chosen. He was proud of his age but ashamed of his infirmities, which however he greatly exaggerated and which did not prevent him from sitting there as submissive as if portraiture in oils had been a branch of surgery. He demolished the legend of his having feared the operation would be fatal, giving an explanation which pleased our friend much better. He held that a gentleman should be painted but once in his life—that it was eager and fatuous to be hung up all over the place. That was good for women, who made a pretty wall-pattern; but the male face didn't lend itself to decorative repetition. The proper time for the likeness was at the last, when the whole man was there—you got the totality of his experience. Lyon could not reply that that period was not a real compendium—you had to allow so for leakage; for there had been no crack in Sir David's crystallisation. He spoke of his portrait as a plain map of the country, to be consulted by his children in a case of uncertainty. A proper map could be drawn up only when the country had been travelled. He gave Lyon his mornings, till luncheon, and they talked of many things, not neglecting, as a stimulus to gossip, the people in the house. Now that he did not 'go out,' as he said, he saw much less of the visitors at Stayes: people came and went whom he knew nothing about, and he liked to hear Lyon describe them. The artist sketched with a fine point and did not caricature, and it usually befell that when Sir David did not know the sons and daughters he had known the fathers and mothers. He was one of those terrible old gentlemen who are a repository of antecedents. But in the case of the Capadose family, at whom they arrived by an easy stage, his knowledge embraced two, or even three, generations. General Capadose was an old crony, and he remembered his father before him. The general was rather a smart soldier, but in private life of too speculative a turn—always sneaking into the City to put his money into some rotten thing. He married a girl who brought him something and they had half a dozen children. He scarcely knew what had become of the rest of them, except that one was in the Church and had found preferment—wasn't he Dean of Rockingham? Clement, the fellow who was at Stayes, had some military talent; he had served in the East, he had married a pretty girl. He had been at Eton with his son, and he used to come to Stayes in his holidays. Lately, coming back to England, he had turned up with his wife again; that was before he—the old man—had been put to grass. He was a taking dog, but he had a monstrous foible.

'A monstrous foible?' said Lyon.

'He's a thumping liar.'

Lyon's brush stopped short, while he repeated, for somehow the formula startled him, 'A thumping liar?'

'You are very lucky not to have found it out.'

'Well, I confess I have noticed a romantic tinge——'

'Oh, it isn't always romantic. He'll lie about the time of day, about the name of his hatter. It appears there are people like that.'

‘Well, they are precious scoundrels,’ Lyon declared, his voice trembling a little with the thought of what Everina Brant had done with herself.

‘Oh, not always,’ said the old man. ‘This fellow isn’t in the least a scoundrel. There is no harm in him and no bad intention; he doesn’t steal nor cheat nor gamble nor drink; he’s very kind—he sticks to his wife, is fond of his children. He simply can’t give you a straight answer.’

‘Then everything he told me last night, I suppose, was mendacious: he delivered himself of a series of the stiffest statements. They stuck, when I tried to swallow them, but I never thought of so simple an explanation.’

‘No doubt he was in the vein,’ Sir David went on. ‘It’s a natural peculiarity—as you might limp or stutter or be left-handed. I believe it comes and goes, like intermittent fever. My son tells me that his friends usually understand it and don’t haul him up—for the sake of his wife.’

‘Oh, his wife—his wife!’ Lyon murmured, painting fast.

‘I daresay she’s used to it.’

‘Never in the world, Sir David. How can she be used to it?’

‘Why, my dear sir, when a woman’s fond!—And don’t they mostly handle the long bow themselves? They are connoisseurs—they have a sympathy for a fellow-performer.’

Lyon was silent a moment; he had no ground for denying that Mrs. Capadose was attached to her husband. But after a little he rejoined: ‘Oh, not this one! I knew her years ago—before her marriage; knew her well and admired her. She was as clear as a bell.’

‘I like her very much,’ Sir David said, ‘but I have seen her back him up.’

Lyon considered Sir David for a moment, not in the light of a model. ‘Are you very sure?’

The old man hesitated; then he answered, smiling, ‘You’re in love with her.’

‘Very likely. God knows I used to be!’

‘She must help him out—she can’t expose him.’

‘She can hold her tongue,’ Lyon remarked.

‘Well, before you probably she will.’

‘That’s what I am curious to see.’ And Lyon added, privately, ‘Mercy on us, what he must have made of her!’ He kept this reflection to himself, for he considered that he had sufficiently betrayed his state of mind with regard to Mrs. Capadose. None the less it occupied him now immensely, the question of how such a woman would arrange herself in such a predicament. He watched her with an interest deeply quickened when he mingled with the company; he had had his own troubles in life, but he had rarely been so anxious about anything as he was now to see what the loyalty of a wife and the infection of an example would have made of an absolutely truthful mind. Oh, he held it as immutably established that whatever other women might be prone to do she, of old, had been perfectly incapable of a deviation. Even if she had not been too simple to deceive she would have been too proud; and if she had not had too much conscience she would have had too little eagerness. It was the last thing she would have endured or condoned—the particular thing she would not have forgiven. Did she sit in torment while her husband turned his somersaults, or was she now too so perverse that she thought it a fine thing to be striking at the expense of one’s honour? It would have taken a wondrous alchemy—working backwards, as it were—to produce this

latter result. Besides these two alternatives (that she suffered tortures in silence and that she was so much in love that her husband's humiliating idiosyncrasy seemed to her only an added richness—a proof of life and talent), there was still the possibility that she had not found him out, that she took his false pieces at his own valuation. A little reflection rendered this hypothesis untenable; it was too evident that the account he gave of things must repeatedly have contradicted her own knowledge. Within an hour or two of his meeting them Lyon had seen her confronted with that perfectly gratuitous invention about the profit they had made off his early picture. Even then indeed she had not, so far as he could see, smarted, and—but for the present he could only contemplate the case.

Even if it had not been interfused, through his uneradicated tenderness for Mrs. Capadose, with an element of suspense, the question would still have presented itself to him as a very curious problem, for he had not painted portraits during so many years without becoming something of a psychologist. His inquiry was limited for the moment to the opportunity that the following three days might yield, as the Colonel and his wife were going on to another house. It fixed itself largely of course upon the Colonel too—this gentleman was such a rare anomaly. Moreover it had to go on very quickly. Lyon was too scrupulous to ask other people what they thought of the business—he was too afraid of exposing the woman he once had loved. It was probable also that light would come to him from the talk of the rest of the company: the Colonel's queer habit, both as it affected his own situation and as it affected his wife, would be a familiar theme in any house in which he was in the habit of staying. Lyon had not observed in the circles in which he visited any marked abstention from comment on the singularities of their members. It interfered with his progress that the Colonel hunted all day, while he plied his brushes and chatted with Sir David; but a Sunday intervened and that partly made it up. Mrs. Capadose fortunately did not hunt, and when his work was over she was not inaccessible. He took a couple of longish walks with her (she was fond of that), and beguiled her at tea into a friendly nook in the hall. Regard her as he might he could not make out to himself that she was consumed by a hidden shame; the sense of being married to a man whose word had no worth was not, in her spirit, so far as he could guess, the canker within the rose. Her mind appeared to have nothing on it but its own placid frankness, and when he looked into her eyes (deeply, as he occasionally permitted himself to do), they had no uncomfortable consciousness. He talked to her again and still again of the dear old days—reminded her of things that he had not (before this reunion) the least idea that he remembered. Then he spoke to her of her husband, praised his appearance, his talent for conversation, professed to have felt a quick friendship for him and asked (with an inward audacity at which he trembled a little) what manner of man he was. 'What manner?' said Mrs. Capadose. 'Dear me, how can one describe one's husband? I like him very much.'

'Ah, you have told me that already!' Lyon exclaimed, with exaggerated ruefulness.

'Then why do you ask me again?' She added in a moment, as if she were so happy that she could afford to take pity on him, 'He is everything that's good and kind. He's a soldier—and a gentleman—and a dear! He hasn't a fault. And he has great ability.'

'Yes; he strikes one as having great ability. But of course I can't think him a dear.'

'I don't care what you think him!' said Mrs. Capadose, looking, it seemed to him, as she smiled, handsomer than he had ever seen her. She was either deeply cynical or still more deeply impenetrable, and he had little prospect of winning from her the intimation that he longed for—some hint that it had come over her that after all she had better have married a man who was not a by-word for the most contemptible, the least heroic, of vices. Had she not seen—had she not felt—the smile go round when her husband executed some especially characteristic conversational caper? How could a woman of her quality endure that day after

day, year after year, except by her quality's altering? But he would believe in the alteration only when he should have heard *her* lie. He was fascinated by his problem and yet half exasperated, and he asked himself all kinds of questions. Did she not lie, after all, when she let his falsehoods pass without a protest? Was not her life a perpetual complicity, and did she not aid and abet him by the simple fact that she was not disgusted with him? Then again perhaps she *was* disgusted and it was the mere desperation of her pride that had given her an inscrutable mask. Perhaps she protested in private, passionately; perhaps every night, in their own apartments, after the day's hideous performance, she made him the most scorching scene. But if such scenes were of no avail and he took no more trouble to cure himself, how could she regard him, and after so many years of marriage too, with the perfectly artless complacency that Lyon had surprised in her in the course of the first day's dinner? If our friend had not been in love with her he could have taken the diverting view of the Colonel's delinquencies; but as it was they turned to the tragical in his mind, even while he had a sense that his solicitude might also have been laughed at.

The observation of these three days showed him that if Capadose was an abundant he was not a malignant liar and that his fine faculty exercised itself mainly on subjects of small direct importance. 'He is the liar platonic,' he said to himself; 'he is disinterested, he doesn't operate with a hope of gain or with a desire to injure. It is art for art and he is prompted by the love of beauty. He has an inner vision of what might have been, of what ought to be, and he helps on the good cause by the simple substitution of a *nuance*. He paints, as it were, and so do I!' His manifestations had a considerable variety, but a family likeness ran through them, which consisted mainly of their singular futility. It was this that made them offensive; they encumbered the field of conversation, took up valuable space, converted it into a sort of brilliant sun-shot fog. For a fib told under pressure a convenient place can usually be found, as for a person who presents himself with an author's order at the first night of a play. But the supererogatory lie is the gentleman without a voucher or a ticket who accommodates himself with a stool in the passage.

In one particular Lyon acquitted his successful rival; it had puzzled him that irrepressible as he was he had not got into a mess in the service. But he perceived that he respected the service—that august institution was sacred from his depredations. Moreover though there was a great deal of swagger in his talk it was, oddly enough, rarely swagger about his military exploits. He had a passion for the chase, he had followed it in far countries and some of his finest flowers were reminiscences of lonely danger and escape. The more solitary the scene the bigger of course the flower. A new acquaintance, with the Colonel, always received the tribute of a bouquet: that generalisation Lyon very promptly made. And this extraordinary man had inconsistencies and unexpected lapses—lapses into flat veracity. Lyon recognised what Sir David had told him, that his aberrations came in fits or periods—that he would sometimes keep the truce of God for a month at a time. The muse breathed upon him at her pleasure; she often left him alone. He would neglect the finest openings and then set sail in the teeth of the breeze. As a general thing he affirmed the false rather than denied the true; yet this proportion was sometimes strikingly reversed. Very often he joined in the laugh against himself—he admitted that he was trying it on and that a good many of his anecdotes had an experimental character. Still he never completely retracted nor retreated—he dived and came up in another place. Lyon divined that he was capable at intervals of defending his position with violence, but only when it was a very bad one. Then he might easily be dangerous—then he would hit out and become calumnious. Such occasions would test his wife's equanimity—Lyon would have liked to see her there. In the smoking-room and elsewhere the company, so far as it was composed of his familiars, had an hilarious protest always at hand; but among the men who had known him long his rich tone was an old story,

so old that they had ceased to talk about it, and Lyon did not care, as I have said, to elicit the judgment of those who might have shared his own surprise.

The oddest thing of all was that neither surprise nor familiarity prevented the Colonel's being liked; his largest drafts on a sceptical attention passed for an overflow of life and gaiety—almost of good looks. He was fond of portraying his bravery and used a very big brush, and yet he was unmistakably brave. He was a capital rider and shot, in spite of his fund of anecdote illustrating these accomplishments: in short he was very nearly as clever and his career had been very nearly as wonderful as he pretended. His best quality however remained that indiscriminate sociability which took interest and credulity for granted and about which he bragged least. It made him cheap, it made him even in a manner vulgar; but it was so contagious that his listener was more or less on his side as against the probabilities. It was a private reflection of Oliver Lyon's that he not only lied but made one feel one's self a bit of a liar, even (or especially) if one contradicted him. In the evening, at dinner and afterwards, our friend watched his wife's face to see if some faint shade or spasm never passed over it. But she showed nothing, and the wonder was that when he spoke she almost always listened. That was her pride: she wished not to be even suspected of not facing the music. Lyon had none the less an importunate vision of a veiled figure coming the next day in the dusk to certain places to repair the Colonel's ravages, as the relatives of kleptomaniacs punctually call at the shops that have suffered from their pilferings.

'I must apologise, of course it wasn't true, I hope no harm is done, it is only his incorrigible——' Oh, to hear that woman's voice in that deep abasement! Lyon had no nefarious plan, no conscious wish to practise upon her shame or her loyalty; but he did say to himself that he should like to bring her round to feel that there would have been more dignity in a union with a certain other person. He even dreamed of the hour when, with a burning face, she would ask *him* not to take it up. Then he should be almost consoled—he would be magnanimous.

Lyon finished his picture and took his departure, after having worked in a glow of interest which made him believe in his success, until he found he had pleased every one, especially Mr. and Mrs. Ashmore, when he began to be sceptical. The party at any rate changed: Colonel and Mrs. Capadose went their way. He was able to say to himself however that his separation from the lady was not so much an end as a beginning, and he called on her soon after his return to town. She had told him the hours she was at home—she seemed to like him. If she liked him why had she not married him or at any rate why was she not sorry she had not? If she was sorry she concealed it too well. Lyon's curiosity on this point may strike the reader as fatuous, but something must be allowed to a disappointed man. He did not ask much after all; not that she should love him to-day or that she should allow him to tell her that he loved her, but only that she should give him some sign she was sorry. Instead of this, for the present, she contented herself with exhibiting her little daughter to him. The child was beautiful and had the prettiest eyes of innocence he had ever seen: which did not prevent him from wondering whether she told horrid fibs. This idea gave him much entertainment—the picture of the anxiety with which her mother would watch as she grew older for the symptoms of heredity. That was a nice occupation for Everina Brant! Did she lie to the child herself, about her father—was that necessary, when she pressed her daughter to her bosom, to cover up his tracks? Did he control himself before the little girl—so that she might not hear him say things she knew to be other than he said? Lyon doubted this: his genius would be too strong for him, and the only safety for the child would be in her being too stupid to analyse. One couldn't judge yet—she was too young. If she should grow up clever she would be sure to tread in his steps—a delightful improvement in her mother's situation! Her little face was not shifty, but neither was her father's big one: so that proved nothing.

Lyon reminded his friends more than once of their promise that Amy should sit to him, and it was only a question of his leisure. The desire grew in him to paint the Colonel also—an operation from which he promised himself a rich private satisfaction. He would draw him out, he would set him up in that totality about which he had talked with Sir David, and none but the initiated would know. They, however, would rank the picture high, and it would be indeed six rows deep—a masterpiece of subtle characterisation, of legitimate treachery. He had dreamed for years of producing something which should bear the stamp of the psychologist as well as of the painter, and here at last was his subject. It was a pity it was not better, but that was not *his* fault. It was his impression that already no one drew the Colonel out more than he, and he did it not only by instinct but on a plan. There were moments when he was almost frightened at the success of his plan—the poor gentleman went so terribly far. He would pull up some day, look at Lyon between the eyes—guess he was being played upon—which would lead to his wife’s guessing it also. Not that Lyon cared much for that however, so long as she failed to suppose (as she must) that she was a part of his joke. He formed such a habit now of going to see her of a Sunday afternoon that he was angry when she went out of town. This occurred often, as the couple were great visitors and the Colonel was always looking for sport, which he liked best when it could be had at other people’s expense. Lyon would have supposed that this sort of life was particularly little to her taste, for he had an idea that it was in country-houses that her husband came out strongest. To let him go off without her, not to see him expose himself—that ought properly to have been a relief and a luxury to her. She told Lyon in fact that she preferred staying at home; but she neglected to say it was because in other people’s houses she was on the rack: the reason she gave was that she liked so to be with the child. It was not perhaps criminal to draw such a bow, but it was vulgar: poor Lyon was delighted when he arrived at that formula. Certainly some day too he would cross the line—he would become a noxious animal. Yes, in the meantime he was vulgar, in spite of his talents, his fine person, his impunity. Twice, by exception, toward the end of the winter, when he left town for a few days’ hunting, his wife remained at home. Lyon had not yet reached the point of asking himself whether the desire not to miss two of his visits had something to do with her immobility. That inquiry would perhaps have been more in place later, when he began to paint the child and she always came with her. But it was not in her to give the wrong name, to pretend, and Lyon could see that she had the maternal passion, in spite of the bad blood in the little girl’s veins.

She came inveterately, though Lyon multiplied the sittings: Amy was never entrusted to the governess or the maid. He had knocked off poor old Sir David in ten days, but the portrait of the simple-faced child bade fair to stretch over into the following year. He asked for sitting after sitting, and it would have struck any one who might have witnessed the affair that he was wearing the little girl out. He knew better however and Mrs. Capadose also knew: they were present together at the long intermissions he gave her, when she left her pose and roamed about the great studio, amusing herself with its curiosities, playing with the old draperies and costumes, having unlimited leave to handle. Then her mother and Mr. Lyon sat and talked; he laid aside his brushes and leaned back in his chair; he always gave her tea. What Mrs. Capadose did not know was the way that during these weeks he neglected other orders: women have no faculty of imagination with regard to a man’s work beyond a vague idea that it doesn’t matter. In fact Lyon put off everything and made several celebrities wait. There were half-hours of silence, when he plied his brushes, during which he was mainly conscious that Everina was sitting there. She easily fell into that if he did not insist on talking, and she was not embarrassed nor bored by it. Sometimes she took up a book—there were plenty of them about; sometimes, a little way off, in her chair, she watched his progress (though without in the least advising or correcting), as if she cared for every stroke that represented her daughter. These strokes were occasionally a little wild; he was thinking so

much more of his heart than of his hand. He was not more embarrassed than she was, but he was agitated: it was as if in the sittings (for the child, too, was beautifully quiet) something was growing between them or had already grown—a tacit confidence, an inexpressible secret. He felt it that way; but after all he could not be sure that she did. What he wanted her to do for him was very little; it was not even to confess that she was unhappy. He would be superabundantly gratified if she should simply let him know, even by a silent sign, that she recognised that with him her life would have been finer. Sometimes he guessed—his presumption went so far—that he might see this sign in her contentedly sitting there.

III

At last he broached the question of painting the Colonel: it was now very late in the season—there would be little time before the general dispersal. He said they must make the most of it; the great thing was to begin; then in the autumn, with the resumption of their London life, they could go forward. Mrs. Capadose objected to this that she really could not consent to accept another present of such value. Lyon had given her the portrait of herself of old, and he had seen what they had had the indelicacy to do with it. Now he had offered her this beautiful memorial of the child—beautiful it would evidently be when it was finished, if he could ever satisfy himself; a precious possession which they would cherish for ever. But his generosity must stop there—they couldn't be so tremendously 'beholden' to him. They couldn't order the picture—of course he would understand that, without her explaining: it was a luxury beyond their reach, for they knew the great prices he received. Besides, what had they ever done—what above all had *she* ever done, that he should overload them with benefits? No, he was too dreadfully good; it was really impossible that Clement should sit. Lyon listened to her without protest, without interruption, while he bent forward at his work, and at last he said: 'Well, if you won't take it why not let him sit for me for my own pleasure and profit? Let it be a favour, a service I ask of him. It will do me a lot of good to paint him and the picture will remain in my hands.'

'How will it do you a lot of good?' Mrs. Capadose asked.

'Why, he's such a rare model—such an interesting subject. He has such an expressive face. It will teach me no end of things.'

'Expressive of what?' said Mrs. Capadose.

'Why, of his nature.'

'And do you want to paint his nature?'

'Of course I do. That's what a great portrait gives you, and I shall make the Colonel's a great one. It will put me up high. So you see my request is eminently interested.'

'How can you be higher than you are?'

'Oh, I'm insatiable! Do consent,' said Lyon.

'Well, his nature is very noble,' Mrs. Capadose remarked.

'Ah, trust me, I shall bring it out!' Lyon exclaimed, feeling a little ashamed of himself.

Mrs. Capadose said before she went away that her husband would probably comply with his invitation, but she added, 'Nothing would induce me to let you pry into *me* that way!'

'Oh, you,' Lyon laughed—'I could do you in the dark!'

The Colonel shortly afterwards placed his leisure at the painter's disposal and by the end of July had paid him several visits. Lyon was disappointed neither in the quality of his sitter nor in the degree to which he himself rose to the occasion; he felt really confident that he should

produce a fine thing. He was in the humour; he was charmed with his *motif* and deeply interested in his problem. The only point that troubled him was the idea that when he should send his picture to the Academy he should not be able to give the title, for the catalogue, simply as 'The Liar.' However, it little mattered, for he had now determined that this character should be perceptible even to the meanest intelligence—as overtopping as it had become to his own sense in the living man. As he saw nothing else in the Colonel to-day, so he gave himself up to the joy of painting nothing else. How he did it he could not have told you, but it seemed to him that the mystery of how to do it was revealed to him afresh every time he sat down to his work. It was in the eyes and it was in the mouth, it was in every line of the face and every fact of the attitude, in the indentation of the chin, in the way the hair was planted, the moustache was twisted, the smile came and went, the breath rose and fell. It was in the way he looked out at a bamboozled world in short—the way he would look out for ever. There were half a dozen portraits in Europe that Lyon rated as supreme; he regarded them as immortal, for they were as perfectly preserved as they were consummately painted. It was to this small exemplary group that he aspired to annex the canvas on which he was now engaged. One of the productions that helped to compose it was the magnificent Moroni of the National Gallery—the young tailor, in the white jacket, at his board with his shears. The Colonel was not a tailor, nor was Moroni's model, unlike many tailors, a liar; but as regards the masterly clearness with which the individual should be rendered his work would be on the same line as that. He had to a degree in which he had rarely had it before the satisfaction of feeling life grow and grow under his brush. The Colonel, as it turned out, liked to sit and he liked to talk while he was sitting: which was very fortunate, as his talk largely constituted Lyon's inspiration. Lyon put into practice that idea of drawing him out which he had been nursing for so many weeks: he could not possibly have been in a better relation to him for the purpose. He encouraged, beguiled, excited him, manifested an unfathomable credulity, and his only interruptions were when the Colonel did not respond to it. He had his intermissions, his hours of sterility, and then Lyon felt that the picture also languished. The higher his companion soared, the more gyrations he executed, in the blue, the better he painted; he couldn't make his flights long enough. He lashed him on when he flagged; his apprehension became great at moments that the Colonel would discover his game. But he never did, apparently; he basked and expanded in the fine steady light of the painter's attention. In this way the picture grew very fast; it was astonishing what a short business it was, compared with the little girl's. By the fifth of August it was pretty well finished: that was the date of the last sitting the Colonel was for the present able to give, as he was leaving town the next day with his wife. Lyon was amply content—he saw his way so clear: he should be able to do at his convenience what remained, with or without his friend's attendance. At any rate, as there was no hurry, he would let the thing stand over till his own return to London, in November, when he would come back to it with a fresh eye. On the Colonel's asking him if his wife might come and see it the next day, if she should find a minute—this was so greatly her desire—Lyon begged as a special favour that she would wait: he was so far from satisfied as yet. This was the repetition of a proposal Mrs. Capadose had made on the occasion of his last visit to her, and he had then asked for a delay—declared that he was by no means content. He was really delighted, and he was again a little ashamed of himself.

By the fifth of August the weather was very warm, and on that day, while the Colonel sat straight and gossiped, Lyon opened for the sake of ventilation a little subsidiary door which led directly from his studio into the garden and sometimes served as an entrance and an exit for models and for visitors of the humbler sort, and as a passage for canvases, frames, packing-boxes and other professional gear. The main entrance was through the house and his own apartments, and this approach had the charming effect of admitting you first to a high gallery, from which a crooked picturesque staircase enabled you to descend to the wide,

decorated, encumbered room. The view of this room, beneath them, with all its artistic ingenuities and the objects of value that Lyon had collected, never failed to elicit exclamations of delight from persons stepping into the gallery. The way from the garden was plainer and at once more practicable and more private. Lyon's domain, in St. John's Wood, was not vast, but when the door stood open of a summer's day it offered a glimpse of flowers and trees, you smelt something sweet and you heard the birds. On this particular morning the side-door had been found convenient by an unannounced visitor, a youngish woman who stood in the room before the Colonel perceived her and whom he perceived before she was noticed by his friend. She was very quiet, and she looked from one of the men to the other. 'Oh, dear, here's another!' Lyon exclaimed, as soon as his eyes rested on her. She belonged, in fact, to a somewhat importunate class—the model in search of employment, and she explained that she had ventured to come straight in, that way, because very often when she went to call upon gentlemen the servants played her tricks, turned her off and wouldn't take in her name.

'But how did you get into the garden?' Lyon asked.

'The gate was open, sir—the servants' gate. The butcher's cart was there.'

'The butcher ought to have closed it,' said Lyon.

'Then you don't require me, sir?' the lady continued.

Lyon went on with his painting; he had given her a sharp look at first, but now his eyes lighted on her no more. The Colonel, however, examined her with interest. She was a person of whom you could scarcely say whether being young she looked old or old she looked young; she had at any rate evidently rounded several of the corners of life and had a face that was rosy but that somehow failed to suggest freshness. Nevertheless she was pretty and even looked as if at one time she might have sat for the complexion. She wore a hat with many feathers, a dress with many bugles, long black gloves, encircled with silver bracelets, and very bad shoes. There was something about her that was not exactly of the governess out of place nor completely of the actress seeking an engagement, but that savoured of an interrupted profession or even of a blighted career. She was rather soiled and tarnished, and after she had been in the room a few moments the air, or at any rate the nostril, became acquainted with a certain alcoholic waft. She was unpractised in the *h*, and when Lyon at last thanked her and said he didn't want her—he was doing nothing for which she could be useful—she replied with rather a wounded manner, 'Well, you know you *'ave* 'ad me!'

'I don't remember you,' Lyon answered.

'Well, I daresay the people that saw your pictures do! I haven't much time, but I thought I would look in.'

'I am much obliged to you.'

'If ever you should require me, if you just send me a postcard——'

'I never send postcards,' said Lyon.

'Oh well, I should value a private letter! Anything to Miss Geraldine, Mortimer Terrace Mews, Notting 'ill——'

'Very good; I'll remember,' said Lyon.

Miss Geraldine lingered. 'I thought I'd just stop, on the chance.'

'I'm afraid I can't hold out hopes, I'm so busy with portraits,' Lyon continued.

'Yes; I see you are. I wish I was in the gentleman's place.'

‘I’m afraid in that case it wouldn’t look like me,’ said the Colonel, laughing.

‘Oh, of course it couldn’t compare—it wouldn’t be so ‘andsome! But I do hate them portraits!’ Miss Geraldine declared. ‘It’s so much bread out of our mouths.’

‘Well, there are many who can’t paint them,’ Lyon suggested, comfortingly.

‘Oh, I’ve sat to the very first—and only to the first! There’s many that couldn’t do anything without me.’

‘I’m glad you’re in such demand.’ Lyon was beginning to be bored and he added that he wouldn’t detain her—he would send for her in case of need.

‘Very well; remember it’s the Mews—more’s the pity! You don’t sit so well as *us*!’ Miss Geraldine pursued, looking at the Colonel. ‘If *you* should require me, sir——’

‘You put him out; you embarrass him,’ said Lyon.

‘Embarrass him, oh gracious!’ the visitor cried, with a laugh which diffused a fragrance. ‘Perhaps *you* send postcards, eh?’ she went on to the Colonel; and then she retreated with a wavering step. She passed out into the garden as she had come.

‘How very dreadful—she’s drunk!’ said Lyon. He was painting hard, but he looked up, checking himself: Miss Geraldine, in the open doorway, had thrust back her head.

‘Yes, I do hate it—that sort of thing!’ she cried with an explosion of mirth which confirmed Lyon’s declaration. And then she disappeared.

‘What sort of thing—what does she mean?’ the Colonel asked.

‘Oh, my painting you, when I might be painting her.’

‘And have you ever painted her?’

‘Never in the world; I have never seen her. She is quite mistaken.’

The Colonel was silent a moment; then he remarked, ‘She was very pretty—ten years ago.’

‘I daresay, but she’s quite ruined. For me the least drop too much spoils them; I shouldn’t care for her at all.’

‘My dear fellow, she’s not a model,’ said the Colonel, laughing.

‘To-day, no doubt, she’s not worthy of the name; but she has been one.’

‘*Jamais de la vie!* That’s all a pretext.’

‘A pretext?’ Lyon pricked up his ears—he began to wonder what was coming now.

‘She didn’t want you—she wanted me.’

‘I noticed she paid you some attention. What does she want of you?’

‘Oh, to do me an ill turn. She hates me—lots of women do. She’s watching me—she follows me.’

Lyon leaned back in his chair—he didn’t believe a word of this. He was all the more delighted with it and with the Colonel’s bright, candid manner. The story had bloomed, fragrant, on the spot. ‘My dear Colonel!’ he murmured, with friendly interest and commiseration.

‘I was annoyed when she came in—but I wasn’t startled,’ his sitter continued.

‘You concealed it very well, if you were.’

‘Ah, when one has been through what I have! To-day however I confess I was half prepared. I have seen her hanging about—she knows my movements. She was near my house this morning—she must have followed me.’

‘But who is she then—with such a *toupet*?’

‘Yes, she has that,’ said the Colonel; ‘but as you observe she was primed. Still, there was a cheek, as they say, in her coming in. Oh, she’s a bad one! She isn’t a model and she never was; no doubt she has known some of those women and picked up their form. She had hold of a friend of mine ten years ago—a stupid young gander who might have been left to be plucked but whom I was obliged to take an interest in for family reasons. It’s a long story—I had really forgotten all about it. She’s thirty-seven if she’s a day. I cut in and made him get rid of her—I sent her about her business. She knew it was me she had to thank. She has never forgiven me—I think she’s off her head. Her name isn’t Geraldine at all and I doubt very much if that’s her address.’

‘Ah, what is her name?’ Lyon asked, most attentive. The details always began to multiply, to abound, when once his companion was well launched—they flowed forth in battalions.

‘It’s Pearson—Harriet Pearson; but she used to call herself Grenadine—wasn’t that a rum appellation? Grenadine—Geraldine—the jump was easy.’ Lyon was charmed with the promptitude of this response, and his interlocutor went on: ‘I hadn’t thought of her for years—I had quite lost sight of her. I don’t know what her idea is, but practically she’s harmless. As I came in I thought I saw her a little way up the road. She must have found out I come here and have arrived before me. I daresay—or rather I’m sure—she is waiting for me there now.’

‘Hadn’t you better have protection?’ Lyon asked, laughing.

‘The best protection is five shillings—I’m willing to go that length. Unless indeed she has a bottle of vitriol. But they only throw vitriol on the men who have deceived them, and I never deceived her—I told her the first time I saw her that it wouldn’t do. Oh, if she’s there we’ll walk a little way together and talk it over and, as I say, I’ll go as far as five shillings.’

‘Well,’ said Lyon, ‘I’ll contribute another five.’ He felt that this was little to pay for his entertainment.

That entertainment was interrupted however for the time by the Colonel’s departure. Lyon hoped for a letter recounting the fictive sequel; but apparently his brilliant sitter did not operate with the pen. At any rate he left town without writing; they had taken a rendezvous for three months later. Oliver Lyon always passed the holidays in the same way; during the first weeks he paid a visit to his elder brother, the happy possessor, in the south of England, of a rambling old house with formal gardens, in which he delighted, and then he went abroad—usually to Italy or Spain. This year he carried out his custom after taking a last look at his all but finished work and feeling as nearly pleased with it as he ever felt with the translation of the idea by the hand—always, as it seemed to him, a pitiful compromise. One yellow afternoon, in the country, as he was smoking his pipe on one of the old terraces he was seized with the desire to see it again and do two or three things more to it: he had thought of it so often while he lounged there. The impulse was too strong to be dismissed, and though he expected to return to town in the course of another week he was unable to face the delay. To look at the picture for five minutes would be enough—it would clear up certain questions which hummed in his brain; so that the next morning, to give himself this luxury, he took the train for London. He sent no word in advance; he would lunch at his club and probably return into Sussex by the 5.45.

In St. John's Wood the tide of human life flows at no time very fast, and in the first days of September Lyon found unmitigated emptiness in the straight sunny roads where the little plastered garden-walls, with their incommunicative doors, looked slightly Oriental. There was definite stillness in his own house, to which he admitted himself by his pass-key, having a theory that it was well sometimes to take servants unprepared. The good woman who was mainly in charge and who cumulated the functions of cook and housekeeper was, however, quickly summoned by his step, and (he cultivated frankness of intercourse with his domestics) received him without the confusion of surprise. He told her that she needn't mind the place being not quite straight, he had only come up for a few hours—he should be busy in the studio. To this she replied that he was just in time to see a lady and a gentleman who were there at the moment—they had arrived five minutes before. She had told them he was away from home but they said it was all right; they only wanted to look at a picture and would be very careful of everything. 'I hope it is all right, sir,' the housekeeper concluded. 'The gentleman says he's a sitter and he gave me his name—rather an odd name; I think it's military. The lady's a very fine lady, sir; at any rate there they are.'

'Oh, it's all right,' Lyon said, the identity of his visitors being clear. The good woman couldn't know, for she usually had little to do with the comings and goings; his man, who showed people in and out, had accompanied him to the country. He was a good deal surprised at Mrs. Capadose's having come to see her husband's portrait when she knew that the artist himself wished her to forbear; but it was a familiar truth to him that she was a woman of a high spirit. Besides, perhaps the lady was not Mrs. Capadose; the Colonel might have brought some inquisitive friend, a person who wanted a portrait of *her* husband. What were they doing in town, at any rate, at that moment? Lyon made his way to the studio with a certain curiosity; he wondered vaguely what his friends were 'up to.' He pushed aside the curtain that hung in the door of communication—the door opening upon the gallery which it had been found convenient to construct at the time the studio was added to the house. When I say he pushed it aside I should amend my phrase; he laid his hand upon it, but at that moment he was arrested by a very singular sound. It came from the floor of the room beneath him and it startled him extremely, consisting apparently as it did of a passionate wail—a sort of smothered shriek—accompanied by a violent burst of tears. Oliver Lyon listened intently a moment, and then he passed out upon the balcony, which was covered with an old thick Moorish rug. His step was noiseless, though he had not endeavoured to make it so, and after that first instant he found himself profiting irresistibly by the accident of his not having attracted the attention of the two persons in the studio, who were some twenty feet below him. In truth they were so deeply and so strangely engaged that their unconsciousness of observation was explained. The scene that took place before Lyon's eyes was one of the most extraordinary they had ever rested upon. Delicacy and the failure to comprehend kept him at first from interrupting it—for what he saw was a woman who had thrown herself in a flood of tears on her companion's bosom—and these influences were succeeded after a minute (the minutes were very few and very short) by a definite motive which presently had the force to make him step back behind the curtain. I may add that it also had the force to make him avail himself for further contemplation of a crevice formed by his gathering together the two halves of the *portière*. He was perfectly aware of what he was about—he was for the moment an eavesdropper, a spy; but he was also aware that a very odd business, in which his confidence had been trifled with, was going forward, and that if in a measure it didn't concern him, in a measure it very definitely did. His observation, his reflections, accomplished themselves in a flash.

His visitors were in the middle of the room; Mrs. Capadose clung to her husband, weeping, sobbing as if her heart would break. Her distress was horrible to Oliver Lyon but his

astonishment was greater than his horror when he heard the Colonel respond to it by the words, vehemently uttered, 'Damn him, damn him, damn him!' What in the world had happened? Why was she sobbing and whom was he damning? What had happened, Lyon saw the next instant, was that the Colonel had finally rummaged out his unfinished portrait (he knew the corner where the artist usually placed it, out of the way, with its face to the wall) and had set it up before his wife on an empty easel. She had looked at it a few moments and then—apparently—what she saw in it had produced an explosion of dismay and resentment. She was too busy sobbing and the Colonel was too busy holding her and reiterating his objurgation, to look round or look up. The scene was so unexpected to Lyon that he could not take it, on the spot, as a proof of the triumph of his hand—of a tremendous hit: he could only wonder what on earth was the matter. The idea of the triumph came a little later. Yet he could see the portrait from where he stood; he was startled with its look of life—he had not thought it so masterly. Mrs. Capadose flung herself away from her husband—she dropped into the nearest chair, buried her face in her arms, leaning on a table. Her weeping suddenly ceased to be audible, but she shuddered there as if she were overwhelmed with anguish and shame. Her husband remained a moment staring at the picture; then he went to her, bent over her, took hold of her again, soothed her. 'What is it, darling, what the devil is it?' he demanded.

Lyon heard her answer. 'It's cruel—oh, it's too cruel!'

'Damn him—damn him—damn him!' the Colonel repeated.

'It's all there—it's all there!' Mrs. Capadose went on.

'Hang it, what's all there?'

'Everything there oughtn't to be—everything he has seen—it's too dreadful!'

'Everything he has seen? Why, ain't I a good-looking fellow? He has made me rather handsome.'

Mrs. Capadose had sprung up again; she had darted another glance at the painted betrayal.

'Handsome? Hideous, hideous! Not that—never, never!'

'Not *what*, in heaven's name?' the Colonel almost shouted. Lyon could see his flushed, bewildered face.

'What he has made of you—what you know! *He* knows—he has seen. Every one will know—every one will see. Fancy that thing in the Academy!'

'You're going wild, darling; but if you hate it so it needn't go.'

'Oh, he'll send it—it's so good! Come away—come away!' Mrs. Capadose wailed, seizing her husband.

'It's so good?' the poor man cried.

'Come away—come away,' she only repeated; and she turned toward the staircase that ascended to the gallery.

'Not that way—not through the house, in the state you're in,' Lyon heard the Colonel object. 'This way—we can pass,' he added; and he drew his wife to the small door that opened into the garden. It was bolted, but he pushed the bolt and opened the door. She passed out quickly, but he stood there looking back into the room. 'Wait for me a moment!' he cried out to her; and with an excited stride he re-entered the studio. He came up to the picture again, and again he stood looking at it. 'Damn him—damn him—damn him!' he broke out once more. It was not clear to Lyon whether this malediction had for its object the original or the painter of the portrait. The Colonel turned away and moved rapidly about the room, as if he were looking

for something; Lyon was unable for the instant to guess his intention. Then the artist said to himself, below his breath, 'He's going to do it a harm!' His first impulse was to rush down and stop him; but he paused, with the sound of Everina Brant's sobs still in his ears. The Colonel found what he was looking for—found it among some odds and ends on a small table and rushed back with it to the easel. At one and the same moment Lyon perceived that the object he had seized was a small Eastern dagger and that he had plunged it into the canvas. He seemed animated by a sudden fury, for with extreme vigour of hand he dragged the instrument down (Lyon knew it to have no very fine edge) making a long, abominable gash. Then he plucked it out and dashed it again several times into the face of the likeness, exactly as if he were stabbing a human victim: it had the oddest effect—that of a sort of figurative suicide. In a few seconds more the Colonel had tossed the dagger away—he looked at it as he did so, as if he expected it to reek with blood—and hurried out of the place, closing the door after him.

The strangest part of all was—as will doubtless appear—that Oliver Lyon made no movement to save his picture. But he did not feel as if he were losing it or cared not if he were, so much more did he feel that he was gaining a certitude. His old friend *was* ashamed of her husband, and he had made her so, and he had scored a great success, even though the picture had been reduced to rags. The revelation excited him so—as indeed the whole scene did—that when he came down the steps after the Colonel had gone he trembled with his happy agitation; he was dizzy and had to sit down a moment. The portrait had a dozen jagged wounds—the Colonel literally had hacked it to death. Lyon left it where it was, never touched it, scarcely looked at it; he only walked up and down his studio, still excited, for an hour. At the end of this time his good woman came to recommend that he should have some luncheon; there was a passage under the staircase from the offices.

'Ah, the lady and gentleman have gone, sir? I didn't hear them.'

'Yes; they went by the garden.'

But she had stopped, staring at the picture on the easel. 'Gracious, how you 'ave served it, sir!'

Lyon imitated the Colonel. 'Yes, I cut it up—in a fit of disgust.'

'Mercy, after all your trouble! Because they weren't pleased, sir?'

'Yes; they weren't pleased.'

'Well, they must be very grand! Blessed if I would!'

'Have it chopped up; it will do to light fires,' Lyon said.

He returned to the country by the 3.30 and a few days later passed over to France. During the two months that he was absent from England he expected something—he could hardly have said what; a manifestation of some sort on the Colonel's part. Wouldn't he write, wouldn't he explain, wouldn't he take for granted Lyon had discovered the way he had, as the cook said, served him and deem it only decent to take pity in some fashion or other on his mystification? Would he plead guilty or would he repudiate suspicion? The latter course would be difficult and make a considerable draft upon his genius, in view of the certain testimony of Lyon's housekeeper, who had admitted the visitors and would establish the connection between their presence and the violence wrought. Would the Colonel proffer some apology or some amends, or would any word from him be only a further expression of that destructive petulance which our friend had seen his wife so suddenly and so potently communicate to him? He would have either to declare that he had not touched the picture or to admit that he had, and in either case he would have to tell a fine story. Lyon was impatient for the story

and, as no letter came, disappointed that it was not produced. His impatience however was much greater in respect to Mrs. Capadose's version, if version there was to be; for certainly that would be the real test, would show how far she would go for her husband, on the one side, or for him, Oliver Lyon, on the other. He could scarcely wait to see what line she would take; whether she would simply adopt the Colonel's, whatever it might be. He wanted to draw her out without waiting, to get an idea in advance. He wrote to her, to this end, from Venice, in the tone of their established friendship, asking for news, narrating his wanderings, hoping they should soon meet in town and not saying a word about the picture. Day followed day, after the time, and he received no answer; upon which he reflected that she couldn't trust herself to write—was still too much under the influence of the emotion produced by his 'betrayal.' Her husband had espoused that emotion and she had espoused the action he had taken in consequence of it, and it was a complete rupture and everything was at an end. Lyon considered this prospect rather ruefully, at the same time that he thought it deplorable that such charming people should have put themselves so grossly in the wrong. He was at last cheered, though little further enlightened, by the arrival of a letter, brief but breathing good-humour and hinting neither at a grievance nor at a bad conscience. The most interesting part of it to Lyon was the postscript, which consisted of these words: 'I have a confession to make to you. We were in town for a couple of days, the 1st of September, and I took the occasion to defy your authority—it was very bad of me but I couldn't help it. I made Clement take me to your studio—I wanted so dreadfully to see what you had done with him, your wishes to the contrary notwithstanding. We made your servants let us in and I took a good look at the picture. It is really wonderful!' 'Wonderful' was non-committal, but at least with this letter there was no rupture.

The third day after Lyon's return to London was a Sunday, so that he could go and ask Mrs. Capadose for luncheon. She had given him in the spring a general invitation to do so and he had availed himself of it several times. These had been the occasions (before he sat to him) when he saw the Colonel most familiarly. Directly after the meal his host disappeared (he went out, as he said, to call on *his* women) and the second half-hour was the best, even when there were other people. Now, in the first days of December, Lyon had the luck to find the pair alone, without even Amy, who appeared but little in public. They were in the drawing-room, waiting for the repast to be announced, and as soon as he came in the Colonel broke out, 'My dear fellow, I'm delighted to see you! I'm so keen to begin again.'

'Oh, do go on, it's so beautiful,' Mrs. Capadose said, as she gave him her hand.

Lyon looked from one to the other; he didn't know what he had expected, but he had not expected this. 'Ah, then, you think I've got something?'

'You've got everything,' said Mrs. Capadose, smiling from her golden-brown eyes.

'She wrote you of our little crime?' her husband asked. 'She dragged me there—I had to go.' Lyon wondered for a moment whether he meant by their little crime the assault on the canvas; but the Colonel's next words didn't confirm this interpretation. 'You know I like to sit—it gives such a chance to my *bavardise*. And just now I have time.'

'You must remember I had almost finished,' Lyon remarked.

'So you had. More's the pity. I should like you to begin again.'

'My dear fellow, I shall have to begin again!' said Oliver Lyon with a laugh, looking at Mrs. Capadose. She did not meet his eyes—she had got up to ring for luncheon. 'The picture has been smashed,' Lyon continued.

‘Smashed? Ah, what did you do that for?’ Mrs. Capadose asked, standing there before him in all her clear, rich beauty. Now that she looked at him she was impenetrable.

‘I didn’t—I found it so—with a dozen holes punched in it!’

‘I say!’ cried the Colonel.

Lyon turned his eyes to him, smiling. ‘I hope *you* didn’t do it?’

‘Is it ruined?’ the Colonel inquired. He was as brightly true as his wife and he looked simply as if Lyon’s question could not be serious. ‘For the love of sitting to you? My dear fellow, if I had thought of it I would!’

‘Nor you either?’ the painter demanded of Mrs. Capadose.

Before she had time to reply her husband had seized her arm, as if a highly suggestive idea had come to him. ‘I say, my dear, that woman—that woman!’

‘That woman?’ Mrs. Capadose repeated; and Lyon too wondered what woman he meant.

‘Don’t you remember when we came out, she was at the door—or a little way from it? I spoke to you of her—I told you about her. Geraldine—Grenadine—the one who burst in that day,’ he explained to Lyon. ‘We saw her hanging about—I called Everina’s attention to her.’

‘Do you mean she got at my picture?’

‘Ah yes, I remember,’ said Mrs. Capadose, with a sigh.

‘She burst in again—she had learned the way—she was waiting for her chance,’ the Colonel continued. ‘Ah, the little brute!’

Lyon looked down; he felt himself colouring. This was what he had been waiting for—the day the Colonel should wantonly sacrifice some innocent person. And could his wife be a party to that final atrocity? Lyon had reminded himself repeatedly during the previous weeks that when the Colonel perpetrated his misdeed she had already quitted the room; but he had argued none the less—it was a virtual certainty—that he had on rejoining her immediately made his achievement plain to her. He was in the flush of performance; and even if he had not mentioned what he had done she would have guessed it. He did not for an instant believe that poor Miss Geraldine had been hovering about his door, nor had the account given by the Colonel the summer before of his relations with this lady deceived him in the slightest degree. Lyon had never seen her before the day she planted herself in his studio; but he knew her and classified her as if he had made her. He was acquainted with the London female model in all her varieties—in every phase of her development and every step of her decay. When he entered his house that September morning just after the arrival of his two friends there had been no symptoms whatever, up and down the road, of Miss Geraldine’s reappearance. That fact had been fixed in his mind by his recollecting the vacancy of the prospect when his cook told him that a lady and a gentleman were in his studio: he had wondered there was not a carriage nor a cab at his door. Then he had reflected that they would have come by the underground railway; he was close to the Marlborough Road station and he knew the Colonel, coming to his sittings, more than once had availed himself of that convenience. ‘How in the world did she get in?’ He addressed the question to his companions indifferently.

‘Let us go down to luncheon,’ said Mrs. Capadose, passing out of the room.

‘We went by the garden—without troubling your servant—I wanted to show my wife.’ Lyon followed his hostess with her husband and the Colonel stopped him at the top of the stairs.

‘My dear fellow, I *can’t* have been guilty of the folly of not fastening the door?’

‘I am sure I don’t know, Colonel,’ Lyon said as they went down. ‘It was a very determined hand—a perfect wild-cat.’

‘Well, she *is* a wild-cat—confound her! That’s why I wanted to get him away from her.’

‘But I don’t understand her motive.’

‘She’s off her head—and she hates me; that was her motive.’

‘But she doesn’t hate me, my dear fellow!’ Lyon said, laughing.

‘She hated the picture—don’t you remember she said so? The more portraits there are the less employment for such as her.’

‘Yes; but if she is not really the model she pretends to be, how can that hurt her?’ Lyon asked.

The inquiry baffled the Colonel an instant—but only an instant. ‘Ah, she was in a vicious muddle! As I say, she’s off her head.’

They went into the dining-room, where Mrs. Capadose was taking her place. ‘It’s too bad, it’s too horrid!’ she said. ‘You see the fates are against you. Providence won’t let you be so disinterested—painting masterpieces for nothing.’

‘Did *you* see the woman?’ Lyon demanded, with something like a sternness that he could not mitigate.

Mrs. Capadose appeared not to perceive it or not to heed it if she did. ‘There was a person, not far from your door, whom Clement called my attention to. He told me something about her but we were going the other way.’

‘And do you think she did it?’

‘How can I tell? If she did she was mad, poor wretch.’

‘I should like very much to get hold of her,’ said Lyon. This was a false statement, for he had no desire for any further conversation with Miss Geraldine. He had exposed his friends to himself, but he had no desire to expose them to any one else, least of all to themselves.

‘Oh, depend upon it she will never show again. You’re safe!’ the Colonel exclaimed.

‘But I remember her address—Mortimer Terrace Mews, Notting Hill.’

‘Oh, that’s pure humbug; there isn’t any such place.’

‘Lord, what a deceiver!’ said Lyon.

‘Is there any one else you suspect?’ the Colonel went on.

‘Not a creature.’

‘And what do your servants say?’

‘They say it wasn’t *them*, and I reply that I never said it was. That’s about the substance of our conferences.’

‘And when did they discover the havoc?’

‘They never discovered it at all. I noticed it first—when I came back.’

‘Well, she could easily have stepped in,’ said the Colonel. ‘Don’t you remember how she turned up that day, like the clown in the ring?’

‘Yes, yes; she could have done the job in three seconds, except that the picture wasn’t out.’

‘My dear fellow, don’t curse me!—but of course I dragged it out.’

‘You didn’t put it back?’ Lyon asked tragically.

‘Ah, Clement, Clement, didn’t I tell you to?’ Mrs. Capadose exclaimed in a tone of exquisite reproach.

The Colonel groaned, dramatically; he covered his face with his hands. His wife’s words were for Lyon the finishing touch; they made his whole vision crumble—his theory that she had secretly kept herself true. Even to her old lover she wouldn’t be so! He was sick; he couldn’t eat; he knew that he looked very strange. He murmured something about it being useless to cry over spilled milk—he tried to turn the conversation to other things. But it was a horrid effort and he wondered whether they felt it as much as he. He wondered all sorts of things: whether they guessed he disbelieved them (that he had seen them of course they would never guess); whether they had arranged their story in advance or it was only an inspiration of the moment; whether she had resisted, protested, when the Colonel proposed it to her, and then had been borne down by him; whether in short she didn’t loathe herself as she sat there. The cruelty, the cowardice of fastening their unholy act upon the wretched woman struck him as monstrous—no less monstrous indeed than the levity that could make them run the risk of her giving them, in her righteous indignation, the lie. Of course that risk could only exculpate her and not inculpate them—the probabilities protected them so perfectly; and what the Colonel counted on (what he would have counted upon the day he delivered himself, after first seeing her, at the studio, if he had thought about the matter then at all and not spoken from the pure spontaneity of his genius) was simply that Miss Geraldine had really vanished for ever into her native unknown. Lyon wanted so much to quit the subject that when after a little Mrs. Capadose said to him, ‘But can nothing be done, can’t the picture be repaired? You know they do such wonders in that way now,’ he only replied, ‘I don’t know, I don’t care, it’s all over, *n’en parlons plus!*’ Her hypocrisy revolted him. And yet, by way of plucking off the last veil of her shame, he broke out to her again, shortly afterward, ‘And you *did* like it, really?’ To which she returned, looking him straight in his face, without a blush, a pallor, an evasion, ‘Oh, I loved it!’ Truly her husband had trained her well. After that Lyon said no more and his companions forbore temporarily to insist, like people of tact and sympathy aware that the odious accident had made him sore.

When they quitted the table the Colonel went away without coming upstairs; but Lyon returned to the drawing-room with his hostess, remarking to her however on the way that he could remain but a moment. He spent that moment—it prolonged itself a little—standing with her before the chimney-piece. She neither sat down nor asked him to; her manner denoted that she intended to go out. Yes, her husband had trained her well; yet Lyon dreamed for a moment that now he was alone with her she would perhaps break down, retract, apologise, confide, say to him, ‘My dear old friend, forgive this hideous comedy—you understand!’ And then how he would have loved her and pitied her, guarded her, helped her always! If she were not ready to do something of that sort why had she treated him as if he were a dear old friend; why had she let him for months suppose certain things—or almost; why had she come to his studio day after day to sit near him on the pretext of her child’s portrait, as if she liked to think what might have been? Why had she come so near a tacit confession, in a word, if she was not willing to go an inch further? And she was not willing—she was not; he could see that as he lingered there. She moved about the room a little, rearranging two or three objects on the tables, but she did nothing more. Suddenly he said to her: ‘Which way was she going, when you came out?’

‘She—the woman we saw?’

‘Yes, your husband’s strange friend. It’s a clew worth following.’ He had no desire to frighten her; he only wanted to communicate the impulse which would make her say, ‘Ah, spare me—and spare *him*! There was no such person.’

Instead of this Mrs. Capadose replied, ‘She was going away from us—she crossed the road. We were coming towards the station.’

‘And did she appear to recognise the Colonel—did she look round?’

‘Yes; she looked round, but I didn’t notice much. A hansom came along and we got into it. It was not till then that Clement told me who she was: I remember he said that she was there for no good. I suppose we ought to have gone back.’

‘Yes; you would have saved the picture.’

For a moment she said nothing; then she smiled. ‘For you, I am very sorry. But you must remember that I possess the original!’

At this Lyon turned away. ‘Well, I must go,’ he said; and he left her without any other farewell and made his way out of the house. As he went slowly up the street the sense came back to him of that first glimpse of her he had had at Stayes—the way he had seen her gaze across the table at her husband. Lyon stopped at the corner, looking vaguely up and down. He would never go back—he couldn’t. She was still in love with the Colonel—he had trained her too well.

A London Life

I

It was raining, apparently, but she didn't mind—she would put on stout shoes and walk over to Plash. She was restless and so fidgety that it was a pain; there were strange voices that frightened her—they threw out the ugliest intimations—in the empty rooms at home. She would see old Mrs. Berrington, whom she liked because she was so simple, and old Lady Davenant, who was staying with her and who was interesting for reasons with which simplicity had nothing to do. Then she would come back to the children's tea—she liked even better the last half-hour in the schoolroom, with the bread and butter, the candles and the red fire, the little spasms of confidence of Miss Steet the nursery-governess, and the society of Scratch and Parson (their nicknames would have made you think they were dogs) her small, magnificent nephews, whose flesh was so firm yet so soft and their eyes so charming when they listened to stories. Plash was the dower-house and about a mile and a half, through the park, from Mellows. It was not raining after all, though it had been; there was only a grayness in the air, covering all the strong, rich green, and a pleasant damp, earthy smell, and the walks were smooth and hard, so that the expedition was not arduous.

The girl had been in England more than a year, but there were some satisfactions she had not got used to yet nor ceased to enjoy, and one of these was the accessibility, the convenience of the country. Within the lodge-gates or without them it seemed all alike a park—it was all so intensely 'property.' The very name of Plash, which was quaint and old, had not lost its effect upon her, nor had it become indifferent to her that the place was a dower-house—the little red-walled, ivied asylum to which old Mrs. Berrington had retired when, on his father's death, her son came into the estates. Laura Wing thought very ill of the custom of the expropriation of the widow in the evening of her days, when honour and abundance should attend her more than ever; but her condemnation of this wrong forgot itself when so many of the consequences looked right—barring a little dampness: which was the fate sooner or later of most of her unfavourable judgments of English institutions. Iniquities in such a country somehow always made pictures; and there had been dower-houses in the novels, mainly of fashionable life, on which her later childhood was fed. The iniquity did not as a general thing prevent these retreats from being occupied by old ladies with wonderful reminiscences and rare voices, whose reverses had not deprived them of a great deal of becoming hereditary lace. In the park, half-way, suddenly, Laura stopped, with a pain—a moral pang—that almost took away her breath; she looked at the misty glades and the dear old beeches (so familiar they were now and loved as much as if she owned them); they seemed in their unlighted December bareness conscious of all the trouble, and they made her conscious of all the change. A year ago she knew nothing, and now she knew almost everything; and the worst of her knowledge (or at least the worst of the fears she had raised upon it) had come to her in that beautiful place, where everything was so full of peace and purity, of the air of happy submission to immemorial law. The place was the same but her eyes were different: they had seen such sad, bad things in so short a time. Yes, the time was short and everything was strange. Laura Wing was too uneasy even to sigh, and as she walked on she lightened her tread almost as if she were going on tiptoe.

At Plash the house seemed to shine in the wet air—the tone of the mottled red walls and the limited but perfect lawn to be the work of an artist's brush. Lady Davenant was in the drawing-room, in a low chair by one of the windows, reading the second volume of a novel. There was the same look of crisp chintz, of fresh flowers wherever flowers could be put, of a

wall-paper that was in the bad taste of years before, but had been kept so that no more money should be spent, and was almost covered over with amateurish drawings and superior engravings, framed in narrow gilt with large margins. The room had its bright, durable, sociable air, the air that Laura Wing liked in so many English things—that of being meant for daily life, for long periods, for uses of high decency. But more than ever to-day was it incongruous that such an habitation, with its chintzes and its British poets, its well-worn carpets and domestic art—the whole aspect so unmeretricious and sincere—should have to do with lives that were not right. Of course however it had to do only indirectly, and the wrong life was not old Mrs. Berrington's nor yet Lady Davenant's. If Selina and Selina's doings were not an implication of such an interior any more than it was for them an explication, this was because she had come from so far off, was a foreign element altogether. Yet it was there she had found her occasion, all the influences that had altered her so (her sister had a theory that she was metamorphosed, that when she was young she seemed born for innocence) if not at Plash at least at Mellows, for the two places after all had ever so much in common, and there were rooms at the great house that looked remarkably like Mrs. Berrington's parlour.

Lady Davenant always had a head-dress of a peculiar style, original and appropriate—a sort of white veil or cape which came in a point to the place on her forehead where her smooth hair began to show and then covered her shoulders. It was always exquisitely fresh and was partly the reason why she struck the girl rather as a fine portrait than as a living person. And yet she was full of life, old as she was, and had been made finer, sharper and more delicate, by nearly eighty years of it. It was the hand of a master that Laura seemed to see in her face, the witty expression of which shone like a lamp through the ground-glass of her good breeding; nature was always an artist, but not so much of an artist as that. Infinite knowledge the girl attributed to her, and that was why she liked her a little fearfully. Lady Davenant was not as a general thing fond of the young or of invalids; but she made an exception as regards youth for the little girl from America, the sister of the daughter-in-law of her dearest friend. She took an interest in Laura partly perhaps to make up for the tepidity with which she regarded Selina. At all events she had assumed the general responsibility of providing her with a husband. She pretended to care equally little for persons suffering from other forms of misfortune, but she was capable of finding excuses for them when they had been sufficiently to blame. She expected a great deal of attention, always wore gloves in the house and never had anything in her hand but a book. She neither embroidered nor wrote—only read and talked. She had no special conversation for girls but generally addressed them in the same manner that she found effective with her contemporaries. Laura Wing regarded this as an honour, but very often she didn't know what the old lady meant and was ashamed to ask her. Once in a while Lady Davenant was ashamed to tell. Mrs. Berrington had gone to a cottage to see an old woman who was ill—an old woman who had been in her service for years, in the old days. Unlike her friend she was fond of young people and invalids, but she was less interesting to Laura, except that it was a sort of fascination to wonder how she could have such abysses of placidity. She had long cheeks and kind eyes and was devoted to birds; somehow she always made Laura think secretly of a tablet of fine white soap—nothing else was so smooth and clean.

'And what's going on *chez vous*—who is there and what are they doing?' Lady Davenant asked, after the first greetings.

'There isn't any one but me—and the children—and the governess.'

'What, no party—no private theatricals? How do you live?'

‘Oh, it doesn’t take so much to keep me going,’ said Laura. ‘I believe there were some people coming on Saturday, but they have been put off, or they can’t come. Selina has gone to London.’

‘And what has she gone to London for?’

‘Oh, I don’t know—she has so many things to do.’

‘And where is Mr. Berrington?’

‘He has been away somewhere; but I believe he is coming back to-morrow—or next day.’

‘Or the day after?’ said Lady Davenant. ‘And do they never go away together?’ she continued after a pause.

‘Yes, sometimes—but they don’t come back together.’

‘Do you mean they quarrel on the way?’

‘I don’t know what they do, Lady Davenant—I don’t understand,’ Laura Wing replied, with an unguarded tremor in her voice. ‘I don’t think they are very happy.’

‘Then they ought to be ashamed of themselves. They have got everything so comfortable—what more do they want?’

‘Yes, and the children are such dears!’

‘Certainly—charming. And is she a good person, the present governess? Does she look after them properly?’

‘Yes—she seems very good—it’s a blessing. But I think she’s unhappy too.’

‘Bless us, what a house! Does she want some one to make love to her?’

‘No, but she wants Selina to see—to appreciate,’ said the young girl.

‘And doesn’t she appreciate—when she leaves them that way quite to the young woman?’

‘Miss Steet thinks she doesn’t notice how they come on—she is never there.’

‘And has she wept and told you so? You know they are always crying, governesses—whatever line you take. You shouldn’t draw them out too much—they are always looking for a chance. She ought to be thankful to be let alone. You mustn’t be too sympathetic—it’s mostly wasted,’ the old lady went on.

‘Oh, I’m not—I assure you I’m not,’ said Laura Wing. ‘On the contrary, I see so much about me that I don’t sympathise with.’

‘Well, you mustn’t be an impertinent little American either!’ her interlocutress exclaimed. Laura sat with her for half an hour and the conversation took a turn through the affairs of Plash and through Lady Davenant’s own, which were visits in prospect and ideas suggested more or less directly by them as well as by the books she had been reading, a heterogeneous pile on a table near her, all of them new and clean, from a circulating library in London. The old woman had ideas and Laura liked them, though they often struck her as very sharp and hard, because at Mellows she had no diet of that sort. There had never been an idea in the house, since she came at least, and there was wonderfully little reading. Lady Davenant still went from country-house to country-house all winter, as she had done all her life, and when Laura asked her she told her the places and the people she probably should find at each of them. Such an enumeration was much less interesting to the girl than it would have been a year before: she herself had now seen a great many places and people and the freshness of her curiosity was gone. But she still cared for Lady Davenant’s descriptions and judgments,

because they were the thing in her life which (when she met the old woman from time to time) most represented talk—the rare sort of talk that was not mere chaff. That was what she had dreamed of before she came to England, but in Selina's set the dream had not come true. In Selina's set people only harried each other from morning till night with extravagant accusations—it was all a kind of horse-play of false charges. When Lady Davenant was accusatory it was within the limits of perfect verisimilitude.

Laura waited for Mrs. Berrington to come in but she failed to appear, so that the girl gathered her waterproof together with an intention of departure. But she was secretly reluctant, because she had walked over to Plash with a vague hope that some soothing hand would be laid upon her pain. If there was no comfort at the dower-house she knew not where to look for it, for there was certainly none at home—not even with Miss Steet and the children. It was not Lady Davenant's leading characteristic that she was comforting, and Laura had not aspired to be coaxed or coddled into forgetfulness: she wanted rather to be taught a certain fortitude—how to live and hold up one's head even while knowing that things were very bad. A brazen indifference—it was not exactly that that she wished to acquire; but were there not some sorts of indifference that were philosophic and noble? Could Lady Davenant not teach them, if she should take the trouble? The girl remembered to have heard that there had been years before some disagreeable occurrences in *her* family; it was not a race in which the ladies inveterately turned out well. Yet who to-day had the stamp of honour and credit—of a past which was either no one's business or was part and parcel of a fair public record—and carried it so much as a matter of course? She herself had been a good woman and that was the only thing that told in the long run. It was Laura's own idea to be a good woman and that this would make it an advantage for Lady Davenant to show her how not to feel too much. As regards feeling enough, that was a branch in which she had no need to take lessons.

The old woman liked cutting new books, a task she never remitted to her maid, and while her young visitor sat there she went through the greater part of a volume with the paper-knife. She didn't proceed very fast—there was a kind of patient, awkward fumbling of her aged hands; but as she passed her knife into the last leaf she said abruptly—'And how is your sister going on? She's very light!' Lady Davenant added before Laura had time to reply.

'Oh, Lady Davenant!' the girl exclaimed, vaguely, slowly, vexed with herself as soon as she had spoken for having uttered the words as a protest, whereas she wished to draw her companion out. To correct this impression she threw back her waterproof.

'Have you ever spoken to her?' the old woman asked.

'Spoken to her?'

'About her behaviour. I daresay you haven't—you Americans have such a lot of false delicacy. I daresay Selina wouldn't speak to you if you were in her place (excuse the supposition!) and yet she is capable——' But Lady Davenant paused, preferring not to say of what young Mrs. Berrington was capable. 'It's a bad house for a girl.'

'It only gives me a horror,' said Laura, pausing in turn.

'A horror of your sister? That's not what one should aim at. You ought to get married—and the sooner the better. My dear child, I have neglected you dreadfully.'

'I am much obliged to you, but if you think marriage looks to me happy!' the girl exclaimed, laughing without hilarity.

'Make it happy for some one else and you will be happy enough yourself. You ought to get out of your situation.'

Laura Wing was silent a moment, though this was not a new reflection to her. ‘Do you mean that I should leave Selina altogether? I feel as if I should abandon her—as if I should be a coward.’

‘Oh, my dear, it isn’t the business of little girls to serve as parachutes to fly-away wives! That’s why if you haven’t spoken to her you needn’t take the trouble at this time of day. Let her go—let her go!’

‘Let her go?’ Laura repeated, staring.

Her companion gave her a sharper glance. ‘Let her stay, then! Only get out of the house. You can come to me, you know, whenever you like. I don’t know another girl I would say that to.’

‘Oh, Lady Davenant,’ Laura began again, but she only got as far as this; in a moment she had covered her face with her hands—she had burst into tears.

‘Ah my dear, don’t cry or I shall take back my invitation! It would never do if you were to *larmoyer*. If I have offended you by the way I have spoken of Selina I think you are too sensitive. We shouldn’t feel more for people than they feel for themselves. She has no tears, I’m sure.’

‘Oh, she has, she has!’ cried the girl, sobbing with an odd effect as she put forth this pretension for her sister.

‘Then she’s worse than I thought. I don’t mind them so much when they are merry but I hate them when they are sentimental.’

‘She’s so changed—so changed!’ Laura Wing went on.

‘Never, never, my dear: *c’est de naissance*.’

‘You never knew my mother,’ returned the girl; ‘when I think of mother——’ The words failed her while she sobbed.

‘I daresay she was very nice,’ said Lady Davenant gently. ‘It would take that to account for you: such women as Selina are always easily enough accounted for. I didn’t mean it was inherited—for that sort of thing skips about. I daresay there was some improper ancestress—except that you Americans don’t seem to have ancestresses.’

Laura gave no sign of having heard these observations; she was occupied in brushing away her tears. ‘Everything is so changed—you don’t know,’ she remarked in a moment. ‘Nothing could have been happier—nothing could have been sweeter. And now to be so dependent—so helpless—so poor!’

‘Have you nothing at all?’ asked Lady Davenant, with simplicity.

‘Only enough to pay for my clothes.’

‘That’s a good deal, for a girl. You are uncommonly dressy, you know.’

‘I’m sorry I seem so. That’s just the way I don’t want to look.’

‘You Americans can’t help it; you “wear” your very features and your eyes look as if they had just been sent home. But I confess you are not so smart as Selina.’

‘Yes, isn’t she splendid?’ Laura exclaimed, with proud inconsequence. ‘And the worse she is the better she looks.’

‘Oh my child, if the bad women looked as bad as they are——! It’s only the good ones who can afford that,’ the old lady murmured.

‘It was the last thing I ever thought of—that I should be ashamed,’ said Laura.

‘Oh, keep your shame till you have more to do with it. It’s like lending your umbrella—when you have only one.’

‘If anything were to happen—publicly—I should die, I should die!’ the girl exclaimed passionately and with a motion that carried her to her feet. This time she settled herself for departure. Lady Davenant’s admonition rather frightened than sustained her.

The old woman leaned back in her chair, looking up at her. ‘It would be very bad, I daresay. But it wouldn’t prevent me from taking you in.’

Laura Wing returned her look, with eyes slightly distended, musing. ‘Think of having to come to that!’

Lady Davenant burst out laughing. ‘Yes, yes, you must come; you are so original!’

‘I don’t mean that I don’t feel your kindness,’ the girl broke out, blushing. ‘But to be only protected—always protected: is that a life?’

‘Most women are only too thankful and I am bound to say I think you are *difficile*.’ Lady Davenant used a good many French words, in the old-fashioned manner and with a pronunciation not perfectly pure: when she did so she reminded Laura Wing of Mrs. Gore’s novels. ‘But you shall be better protected than even by me. *Nous verrons cela*. Only you must stop crying—this isn’t a crying country.’

‘No, one must have courage here. It takes courage to marry for such a reason.’

‘Any reason is good enough that keeps a woman from being an old maid. Besides, you will like him.’

‘He must like me first,’ said the girl, with a sad smile.

‘There’s the American again! It isn’t necessary. You are too proud—you expect too much.’

‘I’m proud for what I am—that’s very certain. But I don’t expect anything,’ Laura Wing declared. ‘That’s the only form my pride takes. Please give my love to Mrs. Berrington. I am so sorry—so sorry,’ she went on, to change the talk from the subject of her marrying. She wanted to marry but she wanted also not to want it and, above all, not to appear to. She lingered in the room, moving about a little; the place was always so pleasant to her that to go away—to return to her own barren home—had the effect of forfeiting a sort of privilege of sanctuary. The afternoon had faded but the lamps had been brought in, the smell of flowers was in the air and the old house of Plash seemed to recognise the hour that suited it best. The quiet old lady in the firelight, encompassed with the symbolic security of chintz and water-colour, gave her a sudden vision of how blessed it would be to jump all the middle dangers of life and have arrived at the end, safely, sensibly, with a cap and gloves and consideration and memories. ‘And, Lady Davenant, what does *she* think?’ she asked abruptly, stopping short and referring to Mrs. Berrington.

‘Think? Bless your soul, she doesn’t do that! If she did, the things she says would be unpardonable.’

‘The things she says?’

‘That’s what makes them so beautiful—that they are not spoiled by preparation. You could never think of them *for* her.’ The girl smiled at this description of the dearest friend of her interlocutress, but she wondered a little what Lady Davenant would say to visitors about *her* if she should accept a refuge under her roof. Her speech was after all a flattering

proof of confidence. 'She wishes it had been you—I happen to know that,' said the old woman.

'It had been me?'

'That Lionel had taken a fancy to.'

'I wouldn't have married him,' Laura rejoined, after a moment.

'Don't say that or you will make me think it won't be easy to help you. I shall depend upon you not to refuse anything so good.'

'I don't call him good. If he were good his wife would be better.'

'Very likely; and if you had married him *he* would be better, and that's more to the purpose. Lionel is as idiotic as a comic song, but you have cleverness for two.'

'And you have it for fifty, dear Lady Davenant. Never, never—I shall never marry a man I can't respect!' Laura Wing exclaimed.

She had come a little nearer her old friend and taken her hand; her companion held her a moment and with the other hand pushed aside one of the flaps of the waterproof. 'And what is it your clothing costs you?' asked Lady Davenant, looking at the dress underneath and not giving any heed to this declaration.

'I don't exactly know: it takes almost everything that is sent me from America. But that is dreadfully little—only a few pounds. I am a wonderful manager. Besides,' the girl added, 'Selina wants one to be dressed.'

'And doesn't she pay any of your bills?'

'Why, she gives me everything—food, shelter, carriages.'

'Does she never give you money?'

'I wouldn't take it,' said the girl. 'They need everything they have—their life is tremendously expensive.'

'That I'll warrant!' cried the old woman. 'It was a most beautiful property, but I don't know what has become of it now. *Ce n'est pas pour vous blesser*, but the hole you Americans *can* make——'

Laura interrupted immediately, holding up her head; Lady Davenant had dropped her hand and she had receded a step. 'Selina brought Lionel a very considerable fortune and every penny of it was paid.'

'Yes, I know it was; Mrs. Berrington told me it was most satisfactory. That's not always the case with the fortunes you young ladies are supposed to bring!' the old lady added, smiling.

The girl looked over her head a moment. 'Why do your men marry for money?'

'Why indeed, my dear? And before your troubles what used your father to give you for your personal expenses?'

'He gave us everything we asked—we had no particular allowance.'

'And I daresay you asked for everything?' said Lady Davenant.

'No doubt we were very dressy, as you say.'

'No wonder he went bankrupt—for he did, didn't he?'

'He had dreadful reverses but he only sacrificed himself—he protected others.'

‘Well, I know nothing about these things and I only ask *pour me renseigner*,’ Mrs. Berrington’s guest went on. ‘And after their reverses your father and mother lived I think only a short time?’

Laura Wing had covered herself again with her mantle; her eyes were now bent upon the ground and, standing there before her companion with her umbrella and her air of momentary submission and self-control, she might very well have been a young person in reduced circumstances applying for a place. ‘It was short enough but it seemed—some parts of it—terribly long and painful. My poor father—my dear father,’ the girl went on. But her voice trembled and she checked herself.

‘I feel as if I were cross-questioning you, which God forbid!’ said Lady Davenant. ‘But there is one thing I should really like to know. Did Lionel and his wife, when you were poor, come freely to your assistance?’

‘They sent us money repeatedly—it was *her* money of course. It was almost all we had.’

‘And if you have been poor and know what poverty is tell me this: has it made you afraid to marry a poor man?’

It seemed to Lady Davenant that in answer to this her young friend looked at her strangely; and then the old woman heard her say something that had not quite the heroic ring she expected. ‘I am afraid of so many things to-day that I don’t know where my fears end.’

‘I have no patience with the highstrung way you take things. But I have to know, you know.’

‘Oh, don’t try to know any more shames—any more horrors!’ the girl wailed with sudden passion, turning away.

Her companion got up, drew her round again and kissed her. ‘I think you would fidget me,’ she remarked as she released her. Then, as if this were too cheerless a leave-taking, she added in a gayer tone, as Laura had her hand on the door: ‘Mind what I tell you, my dear; let her go!’ It was to this that the girl’s lesson in philosophy reduced itself, she reflected, as she walked back to Mellows in the rain, which had now come on, through the darkening park.

II

The children were still at tea and poor Miss Steet sat between them, consoling herself with strong cups, crunching melancholy morsels of toast and dropping an absent gaze on her little companions as they exchanged small, loud remarks. She always sighed when Laura came in—it was her way of expressing appreciation of the visit—and she was the one person whom the girl frequently saw who seemed to her more unhappy than herself. But Laura envied her—she thought her position had more dignity than that of her employer’s dependent sister. Miss Steet had related her life to the children’s pretty young aunt and this personage knew that though it had had painful elements nothing so disagreeable had ever befallen her or was likely to befall her as the odious possibility of her sister’s making a scandal. She had two sisters (Laura knew all about them) and one of them was married to a clergyman in Staffordshire (a very ugly part) and had seven children and four hundred a year; while the other, the eldest, was enormously stout and filled (it was a good deal of a squeeze) a position as matron in an orphanage at Liverpool. Neither of them seemed destined to go into the English divorce-court, and such a circumstance on the part of one’s near relations struck Laura as in itself almost sufficient to constitute happiness. Miss Steet never lived in a state of nervous anxiety—everything about her was respectable. She made the girl almost angry sometimes, by her drooping, martyr-like air: Laura was near breaking out at her with, ‘Dear me, what have you got to complain of? Don’t you earn your living like an honest girl and are you obliged to see things going on about you that you hate?’

But she could not say things like that to her, because she had promised Selina, who made a great point of this, that she would never be too familiar with her. Selina was not without her ideas of decorum—very far from it indeed; only she erected them in such queer places. She was not familiar with her children's governess; she was not even familiar with the children themselves. That was why after all it was impossible to address much of a remonstrance to Miss Steet when she sat as if she were tied to the stake and the fagots were being lighted. If martyrs in this situation had tea and cold meat served them they would strikingly have resembled the provoking young woman in the schoolroom at Mellows. Laura could not have denied that it was natural she should have liked it better if Mrs. Berrington would *sometimes* just look in and give a sign that she was pleased with her system; but poor Miss Steet only knew by the servants or by Laura whether Mrs. Berrington were at home or not: she was for the most part not, and the governess had a way of silently intimating (it was the manner she put her head on one side when she looked at Scratch and Parson—of course *she* called them Geordie and Ferdy) that she was immensely handicapped and even that they were. Perhaps they were, though they certainly showed it little in their appearance and manner, and Laura was at least sure that if Selina had been perpetually dropping in Miss Steet would have taken that discomfort even more tragically. The sight of this young woman's either real or fancied wrongs did not diminish her conviction that she herself would have found courage to become a governess. She would have had to teach very young children, for she believed she was too ignorant for higher flights. But Selina would never have consented to that—she would have considered it a disgrace or even worse—a *pose*. Laura had proposed to her six months before that she should dispense with a paid governess and suffer *her* to take charge of the little boys: in that way she should not feel so completely dependent—she should be doing something in return. 'And pray what would happen when you came to dinner? Who would look after them then?' Mrs. Berrington had demanded, with a very shocked air. Laura had replied that perhaps it was not absolutely necessary that she should come to dinner—she could dine early, with the children; and that if her presence in the drawing-room should be required the children had their nurse—and what did they have their nurse for? Selina looked at her as if she was deplorably superficial and told her that they had their nurse to dress them and look after their clothes—did she wish the poor little ducks to go in rags? She had her own ideas of thoroughness and when Laura hinted that after all at that hour the children were in bed she declared that even when they were asleep she desired the governess to be at hand—that was the way a mother felt who really took an interest. Selina was wonderfully thorough; she said something about the evening hours in the quiet schoolroom being the proper time for the governess to 'get up' the children's lessons for the next day. Laura Wing was conscious of her own ignorance; nevertheless she presumed to believe that she could have taught Geordie and Ferdy the alphabet without anticipatory nocturnal researches. She wondered what her sister supposed Miss Steet taught them—whether she had a cheap theory that they were in Latin and algebra.

The governess's evening hours in the quiet schoolroom would have suited Laura well—so at least she believed; by touches of her own she would make the place even prettier than it was already, and in the winter nights, near the bright fire, she would get through a delightful course of reading. There was the question of a new piano (the old one was pretty bad—Miss Steet had a finger!) and perhaps she should have to ask Selina for that—but it would be all. The schoolroom at Mellows was not a charmless place and the girl often wished that she might have spent her own early years in so dear a scene. It was a sort of panelled parlour, in a wing, and looked out on the great cushiony lawns and a part of the terrace where the peacocks used most to spread their tails. There were quaint old maps on the wall, and 'collections'—birds and shells—under glass cases, and there was a wonderful pictured screen which old Mrs. Berrington had made when Lionel was young out of primitive woodcuts

illustrative of nursery-tales. The place was a setting for rosy childhood, and Laura believed her sister never knew how delightful Scratch and Parson looked there. Old Mrs. Berrington had known in the case of Lionel—it had all been arranged for him. That was the story told by ever so many other things in the house, which betrayed the full perception of a comfortable, liberal, deeply domestic effect, addressed to eternities of possession, characteristic thirty years before of the unquestioned and unquestioning old lady whose sofas and ‘corners’ (she had perhaps been the first person in England to have corners) demonstrated the most of her cleverness.

Laura Wing envied English children, the boys at least, and even her own chubby nephews, in spite of the cloud that hung over them; but she had already noted the incongruity that appeared to-day between Lionel Berrington at thirty-five and the influences that had surrounded his younger years. She did not dislike her brother-in-law, though she admired him scantily, and she pitied him; but she marvelled at the waste involved in some human institutions (the English country gentry for instance) when she perceived that it had taken so much to produce so little. The sweet old wainscoted parlour, the view of the garden that reminded her of scenes in Shakespeare’s comedies, all that was exquisite in the home of his forefathers—what visible reference was there to these fine things in poor Lionel’s stable-stamped composition? When she came in this evening and saw his small sons making competitive noises in their mugs (Miss Steet checked this impropriety on her entrance) she asked herself what *they* would have to show twenty years later for the frame that made them just then a picture. Would they be wonderfully ripe and noble, the perfection of human culture? The contrast was before her again, the sense of the same curious duplicity (in the literal meaning of the word) that she had felt at Plash—the way the genius of such an old house was all peace and decorum and the spirit that prevailed there, outside of the schoolroom, was contentious and impure. She had often been struck with it before—with that perfection of machinery which can still at certain times make English life go on of itself with a stately rhythm long after there is corruption within it.

She had half a purpose of asking Miss Steet to dine with her that evening downstairs, so absurd did it seem to her that two young women who had so much in common (enough at least for that) should sit feeding alone at opposite ends of the big empty house, melancholy on such a night. She would not have cared just now whether Selina did think such a course familiar: she indulged sometimes in a kind of angry humility, placing herself near to those who were laborious and sordid. But when she observed how much cold meat the governess had already consumed she felt that it would be a vain form to propose to her another repast. She sat down with her and presently, in the firelight, the two children had placed themselves in position for a story. They were dressed like the mariners of England and they smelt of the ablutions to which they had been condemned before tea and the odour of which was but partly overlaid by that of bread and butter. Scratch wanted an old story and Parson a new, and they exchanged from side to side a good many powerful arguments. While they were so engaged Miss Steet narrated at her visitor’s invitation the walk she had taken with them and revealed that she had been thinking for a long time of asking Mrs. Berrington—if she only had an opportunity—whether she should approve of her giving them a few elementary notions of botany. But the opportunity had not come—she had had the idea for a long time past. She was rather fond of the study herself; she had gone into it a little—she seemed to intimate that there had been times when she extracted a needed comfort from it. Laura suggested that botany might be a little dry for such young children in winter, from text-books—that the better way would be perhaps to wait till the spring and show them out of doors, in the garden, some of the peculiarities of plants. To this Miss Steet rejoined that her idea had been to teach some of the general facts slowly—it would take a long time—and then

they would be all ready for the spring. She spoke of the spring as if it would not arrive for a terribly long time. She had hoped to lay the question before Mrs. Berrington that week—but was it not already Thursday? Laura said, ‘Oh yes, you had better do anything with the children that will keep them profitably occupied;’ she came very near saying anything that would occupy the governess herself.

She had rather a dread of new stories—it took the little boys so long to get initiated and the first steps were so terribly bestrewn with questions. Receptive silence, broken only by an occasional rectification on the part of the listener, never descended until after the tale had been told a dozen times. The matter was settled for ‘Riquet with the Tuft,’ but on this occasion the girl’s heart was not much in the entertainment. The children stood on either side of her, leaning against her, and she had an arm round each; their little bodies were thick and strong and their voices had the quality of silver bells. Their mother had certainly gone too far; but there was nevertheless a limit to the tenderness one could feel for the neglected, compromised bairns. It was difficult to take a sentimental view of them—they would never take such a view of themselves. Geordie would grow up to be a master-hand at polo and care more for that pastime than for anything in life, and Ferdy perhaps would develop into ‘the best shot in England.’ Laura felt these possibilities stirring within them; they were in the things they said to her, in the things they said to each other. At any rate they would never reflect upon anything in the world. They contradicted each other on a question of ancestral history to which their attention apparently had been drawn by their nurse, whose people had been tenants for generations. Their grandfather had had the hounds for fifteen years—Ferdy maintained that he had always had them. Geordie ridiculed this idea, like a man of the world; he had had them till he went into volunteering—then he had got up a magnificent regiment, he had spent thousands of pounds on it. Ferdy was of the opinion that this was wasted money—he himself intended to have a real regiment, to be a colonel in the Guards. Geordie looked as if he thought that a superficial ambition and could see beyond it; his own most definite view was that he would have back the hounds. He didn’t see why papa didn’t have them—unless it was because he wouldn’t take the trouble.

‘I know—it’s because mamma is an American!’ Ferdy announced, with confidence.

‘And what has that to do with it?’ asked Laura.

‘Mamma spends so much money—there isn’t any more for anything!’

This startling speech elicited an alarmed protest from Miss Steet; she blushed and assured Laura that she couldn’t imagine where the child could have picked up such an extraordinary idea. ‘I’ll look into it—you may be sure I’ll look into it,’ she said; while Laura told Ferdy that he must never, never, never, under any circumstances, either utter or listen to a word that should be wanting in respect to his mother.

‘If any one should say anything against any of my people I would give him a good one!’ Geordie shouted, with his hands in his little blue pockets.

‘I’d hit him in the eye!’ cried Ferdy, with cheerful inconsequence.

‘Perhaps you don’t care to come to dinner at half-past seven,’ the girl said to Miss Steet; ‘but I should be very glad—I’m all alone.’

‘Thank you so much. All alone, really?’ murmured the governess.

‘Why don’t you get married? then you wouldn’t be alone,’ Geordie interposed, with ingenuity.

‘Children, you are really too dreadful this evening!’ Miss Steet exclaimed.

‘I shan’t get married—I want to have the hounds,’ proclaimed Geordie, who had apparently been much struck with his brother’s explanation.

‘I will come down afterwards, about half-past eight, if you will allow me,’ said Miss Steet, looking conscious and responsible.

‘Very well—perhaps we can have some music; we will try something together.’

‘Oh, music—we don’t go in for music!’ said Geordie, with clear superiority; and while he spoke Laura saw Miss Steet get up suddenly, looking even less alleviated than usual. The door of the room had been pushed open and Lionel Berrington stood there. He had his hat on and a cigar in his mouth and his face was red, which was its common condition. He took off his hat as he came into the room, but he did not stop smoking and he turned a little redder than before. There were several ways in which his sister-in-law often wished he had been very different, but she had never disliked him for a certain boyish shyness that was in him, which came out in his dealings with almost all women. The governess of his children made him uncomfortable and Laura had already noticed that he had the same effect upon Miss Steet. He was fond of his children, but he saw them hardly more frequently than their mother and they never knew whether he were at home or away. Indeed his goings and comings were so frequent that Laura herself scarcely knew: it was an accident that on this occasion his absence had been marked for her. Selina had had her reasons for wishing not to go up to town while her husband was still at Mellows, and she cherished the irritating belief that he stayed at home on purpose to watch her—to keep her from going away. It was her theory that she herself was perpetually at home—that few women were more domestic, more glued to the fireside and absorbed in the duties belonging to it; and unreasonable as she was she recognised the fact that for her to establish this theory she must make her husband sometimes see her at Mellows. It was not enough for her to maintain that he would see her if he were sometimes there himself. Therefore she disliked to be caught in the crude fact of absence—to go away under his nose; what she preferred was to take the next train after his own and return an hour or two before him. She managed this often with great ability, in spite of her not being able to be sure when he *would* return. Of late however she had ceased to take so much trouble, and Laura, by no desire of the girl’s own, was enough in the confidence of her impatiences and perversities to know that for her to have wished (four days before the moment I write of) to put him on a wrong scent—or to keep him at least off the right one—she must have had something more dreadful than usual in her head. This was why the girl had been so nervous and why the sense of an impending catastrophe, which had lately gathered strength in her mind, was at present almost intolerably pressing: she knew how little Selina could afford to be more dreadful than usual.

Lionel startled her by turning up in that unexpected way, though she could not have told herself when it would have been natural to expect him. This attitude, at Mellows, was left to the servants, most of them inscrutable and incommunicative and erect in a wisdom that was founded upon telegrams—you couldn’t speak to the butler but he pulled one out of his pocket. It was a house of telegrams; they crossed each other a dozen times an hour, coming and going, and Selina in particular lived in a cloud of them. Laura had but vague ideas as to what they were all about; once in a while, when they fell under her eyes, she either failed to understand them or judged them to be about horses. There were an immense number of horses, in one way and another, in Mrs. Berrington’s life. Then she had so many friends, who were always rushing about like herself and making appointments and putting them off and wanting to know if she were going to certain places or whether she would go if they did or whether she would come up to town and dine and ‘do a theatre.’ There were also a good many theatres in the existence of this busy lady. Laura remembered how fond their poor

father had been of telegraphing, but it was never about the theatre: at all events she tried to give her sister the benefit or the excuse of heredity. Selina had her own opinions, which were superior to this—she once remarked to Laura that it was idiotic for a woman to write—to telegraph was the only way not to get into trouble. If doing so sufficed to keep a lady out of it Mrs. Berrington's life should have flowed like the rivers of Eden.

III

Laura, as soon as her brother-in-law had been in the room a moment, had a particular fear; she had seen him twice noticeably under the influence of liquor; she had not liked it at all and now there were some of the same signs. She was afraid the children would discover them, or at any rate Miss Steet, and she felt the importance of not letting him stay in the room. She thought it almost a sign that he should have come there at all—he was so rare an apparition. He looked at her very hard, smiling as if to say, 'No, no, I'm not—not if you think it!' She perceived with relief in a moment that he was not very bad, and liquor disposed him apparently to tenderness, for he indulged in an interminable kissing of Geordie and Ferdy, during which Miss Steet turned away delicately, looking out of the window. The little boys asked him no questions to celebrate his return—they only announced that they were going to learn botany, to which he replied: 'Are you, really? Why, I never did,' and looked askance at the governess, blushing as if to express the hope that she would let him off from carrying that subject further. To Laura and to Miss Steet he was amiably explanatory, though his explanations were not quite coherent. He had come back an hour before—he was going to spend the night—he had driven over from Churton—he was thinking of taking the last train up to town. Was Laura dining at home? Was any one coming? He should enjoy a quiet dinner awfully.

'Certainly I'm alone,' said the girl. 'I suppose you know Selina is away.'

'Oh yes—I know where Selina is!' And Lionel Berrington looked round, smiling at every one present, including Scratch and Parson. He stopped while he continued to smile and Laura wondered what he was so much pleased at. She preferred not to ask—she was sure it was something that wouldn't give *her* pleasure; but after waiting a moment her brother-in-law went on: 'Selina's in Paris, my dear; that's where Selina is!'

'In Paris?' Laura repeated.

'Yes, in Paris, my dear—God bless her! Where else do you suppose? Geordie my boy, where should *you* think your mummy would naturally be?'

'Oh, I don't know,' said Geordie, who had no reply ready that would express affectingly the desolation of the nursery. 'If I were mummy I'd travel.'

'Well now that's your mummy's idea—she has gone to travel,' returned the father. 'Were you ever in Paris, Miss Steet?'

Miss Steet gave a nervous laugh and said No, but she had been to Boulogne; while to her added confusion Ferdy announced that he knew where Paris was—it was in America. 'No, it ain't—it's in Scotland!' cried Geordie; and Laura asked Lionel how he knew—whether his wife had written to him.

'Written to me? when did she ever write to me? No, I saw a fellow in town this morning who saw her there—at breakfast yesterday. He came over last night. That's how I know my wife's in Paris. You can't have better proof than that!'

'I suppose it's a very pleasant season there,' the governess murmured, as if from a sense of duty, in a distant, uncomfortable tone.

‘I daresay it’s very pleasant indeed—I daresay it’s awfully amusing!’ laughed Mr. Berrington. ‘Shouldn’t you like to run over with me for a few days, Laura—just to have a go at the theatres? I don’t see why we should always be moping at home. We’ll take Miss Steet and the children and give mummy a pleasant surprise. Now who do you suppose she was with, in Paris—who do you suppose she was seen with?’

Laura had turned pale, she looked at him hard, imploringly, in the eyes: there was a name she was terribly afraid he would mention. ‘Oh sir, in that case we had better go and get ready!’ Miss Steet quavered, betwixt a laugh and a groan, in a spasm of discretion; and before Laura knew it she had gathered Geordie and Ferdy together and swept them out of the room. The door closed behind her with a very quick softness and Lionel remained a moment staring at it.

‘I say, what does she mean?—ain’t that damned impertinent?’ he stammered. ‘What did she think I was going to say? Does she suppose I would say any harm before—before *her*? Dash it, does she suppose I would give away my wife to the servants?’ Then he added, ‘And I wouldn’t say any harm before you, Laura. You are too good and too nice and I like you too much!’

‘Won’t you come downstairs? won’t you have some tea?’ the girl asked, uneasily.

‘No, no, I want to stay here—I like this place,’ he replied, very gently and reasoningly. ‘It’s a deuced nice place—it’s an awfully jolly room. It used to be this way—always—when I was a little chap. I was a rough one, my dear; I wasn’t a pretty little lamb like that pair. I think it’s because you look after them—that’s what makes ‘em so sweet. The one in my time—what was her name? I think it was Bald or Bold—I rather think she found me a handful. I used to kick her shins—I was decidedly vicious. And do *you* see it’s kept so well, Laura?’ he went on, looking round him. ‘Pon my soul, it’s the prettiest room in the house. What does she want to go to Paris for when she has got such a charming house? Now can you answer me that, Laura?’

‘I suppose she has gone to get some clothes: her dressmaker lives in Paris, you know.’

‘Dressmaker? Clothes? Why, she has got whole rooms full of them. Hasn’t she got whole rooms full of them?’

‘Speaking of clothes I must go and change mine,’ said Laura. ‘I have been out in the rain—I have been to Plash—I’m decidedly damp.’

‘Oh, you have been to Plash? You have seen my mother? I hope she’s in very good health.’ But before the girl could reply to this he went on: ‘Now, I want you to guess who she’s in Paris with. Motcomb saw them together—at that place, what’s his name? close to the Madeleine.’ And as Laura was silent, not wishing at all to guess, he continued—‘It’s the ruin of any woman, you know; I can’t think what she has got in her head.’ Still Laura said nothing, and as he had hold of her arm, she having turned away, she led him this time out of the room. She had a horror of the name, the name that was in her mind and that was apparently on his lips, though his tone was so singular, so contemplative. ‘My dear girl, she’s with Lady Ringrose—what do you say to that?’ he exclaimed, as they passed along the corridor to the staircase.

‘With Lady Ringrose?’

‘They went over on Tuesday—they are knocking about there alone.’

‘I don’t know Lady Ringrose,’ Laura said, infinitely relieved that the name was not the one she had feared. Lionel leaned on her arm as they went downstairs.

‘I rather hope not—I promise you she has never put her foot in this house! If Selina expects to bring her here I should like half an hour’s notice; yes, half an hour would do. She might as well be seen with——’ And Lionel Berrington checked himself. ‘She has had at least fifty——’ And again he stopped short. ‘You must pull me up, you know, if I say anything you don’t like!’

‘I don’t understand you—let me alone, please!’ the girl broke out, disengaging herself with an effort from his arm. She hurried down the rest of the steps and left him there looking after her, and as she went she heard him give an irrelevant laugh.

IV

She determined not to go to dinner—she wished for that day not to meet him again. He would drink more—he would be worse—she didn’t know what he might say. Besides she was too angry—not with him but with Selina—and in addition to being angry she was sick. She knew who Lady Ringrose was; she knew so many things to-day that when she was younger—and only a little—she had not expected ever to know. Her eyes had been opened very wide in England and certainly they had been opened to Lady Ringrose. She had heard what she had done and perhaps a good deal more, and it was not very different from what she had heard of other women. She knew Selina had been to her house; she had an impression that her ladyship had been to Selina’s, in London, though she herself had not seen her there. But she had not known they were so intimate as that—that Selina would rush over to Paris with her. What they had gone to Paris for was not necessarily criminal; there were a hundred reasons, familiar to ladies who were fond of change, of movement, of the theatres and of new bonnets; but nevertheless it was the fact of this little excursion quite as much as the companion that excited Laura’s disgust.

She was not ready to say that the companion was any worse, though Lionel appeared to think so, than twenty other women who were her sister’s intimates and whom she herself had seen in London, in Grosvenor Place, and even under the motherly old beeches at Mellows. But she thought it unpleasant and base in Selina to go abroad that way, like a commercial traveller, capriciously, clandestinely, without giving notice, when she had left her to understand that she was simply spending three or four days in town. It was bad taste and bad form, it was *cabotin* and had the mark of Selina’s complete, irremediable frivolity—the worst accusation (Laura tried to cling to that opinion) that she laid herself open to. Of course frivolity that was never ashamed of itself was like a neglected cold—you could die of it morally as well as of anything else. Laura knew this and it was why she was inexpressibly vexed with her sister. She hoped she should get a letter from Selina the next morning (Mrs. Berrington would show at least that remnant of propriety) which would give her a chance to despatch her an answer that was already writing itself in her brain. It scarcely diminished Laura’s eagerness for such an opportunity that she had a vision of Selina’s showing her letter, laughing, across the table, at the place near the Madeleine, to Lady Ringrose (who would be painted—Selina herself, to do her justice, was not yet) while the French waiters, in white aprons, contemplated *ces dames*. It was new work for our young lady to judge of these shades—the gradations, the probabilities of license, and of the side of the line on which, or rather how far on the wrong side, Lady Ringrose was situated.

A quarter of an hour before dinner Lionel sent word to her room that she was to sit down without him—he had a headache and wouldn’t appear. This was an unexpected grace and it simplified the position for Laura; so that, smoothing her ruffles, she betook herself to the table. Before doing this however she went back to the schoolroom and told Miss Steet she must contribute her company. She took the governess (the little boys were in bed) downstairs with her and made her sit opposite, thinking she would be a safeguard if Lionel were to

change his mind. Miss Steet was more frightened than herself—she was a very shrinking bulwark. The dinner was dull and the conversation rare; the governess ate three olives and looked at the figures on the spoons. Laura had more than ever her sense of impending calamity; a draught of misfortune seemed to blow through the house; it chilled her feet under her chair. The letter she had in her head went out like a flame in the wind and her only thought now was to telegraph to Selina the first thing in the morning, in quite different words. She scarcely spoke to Miss Steet and there was very little the governess could say to her: she had already related her history so often. After dinner she carried her companion into the drawing-room, by the arm, and they sat down to the piano together. They played duets for an hour, mechanically, violently; Laura had no idea what the music was—she only knew that their playing was execrable. In spite of this—'That's a very nice thing, that last,' she heard a vague voice say, behind her, at the end; and she became aware that her brother-in-law had joined them again.

Miss Steet was pusillanimous—she retreated on the spot, though Lionel had already forgotten that he was angry at the scandalous way she had carried off the children from the schoolroom. Laura would have gone too if Lionel had not told her that he had something very particular to say to her. That made her want to go more, but she had to listen to him when he expressed the hope that she hadn't taken offence at anything he had said before. He didn't strike her as tipsy now; he had slept it off or got rid of it and she saw no traces of his headache. He was still conspicuously cheerful, as if he had got some good news and were very much encouraged. She knew the news he had got and she might have thought, in view of his manner, that it could not really have seemed to him so bad as he had pretended to think it. It was not the first time however that she had seen him pleased that he had a case against his wife, and she was to learn on this occasion how extreme a satisfaction he could take in his wrongs. She would not sit down again; she only lingered by the fire, pretending to warm her feet, and he walked to and fro in the long room, where the lamp-light to-night was limited, stepping on certain figures of the carpet as if his triumph were alloyed with hesitation.

'I never know how to talk to you—you are so beastly clever,' he said. 'I can't treat you like a little girl in a pinafore—and yet of course you are only a young lady. You're so deuced good—that makes it worse,' he went on, stopping in front of her with his hands in his pockets and the air he himself had of being a good-natured but dissipated boy; with his small stature, his smooth, fat, suffused face, his round, watery, light-coloured eyes and his hair growing in curious infantile rings. He had lost one of his front teeth and always wore a stiff white scarf, with a pin representing some symbol of the turf or the chase. 'I don't see why *she* couldn't have been a little more like you. If I could have had a shot at you first!'

'I don't care for any compliments at my sister's expense,' Laura said, with some majesty.

'Oh I say, Laura, don't put on so many frills, as Selina says. You know what your sister is as well as I do!' They stood looking at each other a moment and he appeared to see something in her face which led him to add—'You know, at any rate, how little we hit it off.'

'I know you don't love each other—it's too dreadful.'

'Love each other? she hates me as she'd hate a hump on her back. She'd do me any devilish turn she could. There isn't a feeling of loathing that she doesn't have for me! She'd like to stamp on me and hear me crack, like a black beetle, and she never opens her mouth but she insults me.' Lionel Berrington delivered himself of these assertions without violence, without passion or the sting of a new discovery; there was a familiar gaiety in his trivial little tone and he had the air of being so sure of what he said that he did not need to exaggerate in order to prove enough.

‘Oh, Lionel!’ the girl murmured, turning pale. ‘Is that the particular thing you wished to say to me?’

‘And you can’t say it’s my fault—you won’t pretend to do that, will you?’ he went on. ‘Ain’t I quiet, ain’t I kind, don’t I go steady? Haven’t I given her every blessed thing she has ever asked for?’

‘You haven’t given her an example!’ Laura replied, with spirit. ‘You don’t care for anything in the wide world but to amuse yourself, from the beginning of the year to the end. No more does she—and perhaps it’s even worse in a woman. You are both as selfish as you can live, with nothing in your head or your heart but your vulgar pleasure, incapable of a concession, incapable of a sacrifice!’ She at least spoke with passion; something that had been pent up in her soul broke out and it gave her relief, almost a momentary joy.

It made Lionel Berrington stare; he coloured, but after a moment he threw back his head with laughter. ‘Don’t you call me kind when I stand here and take all that? If I’m so keen for my pleasure what pleasure do *you* give me? Look at the way I take it, Laura. You ought to do me justice. Haven’t I sacrificed my home? and what more can a man do?’

‘I don’t think you care any more for your home than Selina does. And it’s so sacred and so beautiful, God forgive you! You are all blind and senseless and heartless and I don’t know what poison is in your veins. There is a curse on you and there will be a judgment!’ the girl went on, glowing like a young prophetess.

‘What do you want me to do? Do you want me to stay at home and read the Bible?’ her companion demanded with an effect of profanity, confronted with her deep seriousness.

‘It wouldn’t do you any harm, once in a while.’

‘There will be a judgment on *her*—that’s very sure, and I know where it will be delivered,’ said Lionel Berrington, indulging in a visible approach to a wink. ‘Have I done the half to her she has done to me? I won’t say the half but the hundredth part? Answer me truly, my dear!’

‘I don’t know what she has done to you,’ said Laura, impatiently.

‘That’s exactly what I want to tell you. But it’s difficult. I’ll bet you five pounds she’s doing it now!’

‘You are too unable to make yourself respected,’ the girl remarked, not shrinking now from the enjoyment of an advantage—that of feeling herself superior and taking her opportunity.

Her brother-in-law seemed to feel for the moment the prick of this observation. ‘What has such a piece of nasty boldness as that to do with respect? She’s the first that ever defied me!’ exclaimed the young man, whose aspect somehow scarcely confirmed this pretension. ‘You know all about her—don’t make believe you don’t,’ he continued in another tone. ‘You see everything—you’re one of the sharp ones. There’s no use beating about the bush, Laura—you’ve lived in this precious house and you’re not so green as that comes to. Besides, you’re so good yourself that you needn’t give a shriek if one is obliged to say what one means. Why didn’t you grow up a little sooner? Then, over there in New York, it would certainly have been you I would have made up to. *You* would have respected me—eh? now don’t say you wouldn’t.’ He rambled on, turning about the room again, partly like a person whose sequences were naturally slow but also a little as if, though he knew what he had in mind, there were still a scruple attached to it that he was trying to rub off.

‘I take it that isn’t what I must sit up to listen to, Lionel, is it?’ Laura said, wearily.

‘Why, you don’t want to go to bed at nine o’clock, do you? That’s all rot, of course. But I want you to help me.’

‘To help you—how?’

‘I’ll tell you—but you must give me my head. I don’t know what I said to you before dinner—I had had too many brandy and sodas. Perhaps I was too free; if I was I beg your pardon. I made the governess bolt—very proper in the superintendent of one’s children. Do you suppose they saw anything? I shouldn’t care for that. I did take half a dozen or so; I was thirsty and I was awfully gratified.’

‘You have little enough to gratify you.’

‘Now that’s just where you are wrong. I don’t know when I’ve fancied anything so much as what I told you.’

‘What you told me?’

‘About her being in Paris. I hope she’ll stay a month!’

‘I don’t understand you,’ Laura said.

‘Are you very sure, Laura? My dear, it suits my book! Now you know yourself he’s not the first.’

Laura was silent; his round eyes were fixed on her face and she saw something she had not seen before—a little shining point which on Lionel’s part might represent an idea, but which made his expression conscious as well as eager. ‘He?’ she presently asked. ‘Whom are you speaking of?’

‘Why, of Charley Crispin, G——’ And Lionel Berrington accompanied this name with a startling imprecation.

‘What has he to do——?’

‘He has everything to do. Isn’t he with her there?’

‘How should I know? You said Lady Ringrose.’

‘Lady Ringrose is a mere blind—and a devilish poor one at that. I’m sorry to have to say it to you, but he’s her lover. I mean Selina’s. And he ain’t the first.’

There was another short silence while they stood opposed, and then Laura asked—and the question was unexpected—‘Why do you call him Charley?’

‘Doesn’t he call me Lion, like all the rest?’ said her brother-in-law, staring.

‘You’re the most extraordinary people. I suppose you have a certain amount of proof before you say such things to me?’

‘Proof, I’ve oceans of proof! And not only about Crispin, but about Deepmere.’

‘And pray who is Deepmere?’

‘Did you never hear of Lord Deepmere? He has gone to India. That was before you came. I don’t say all this for my pleasure, Laura,’ Mr. Berrington added.

‘Don’t you, indeed?’ asked the girl with a singular laugh. ‘I thought you were so glad.’

‘I’m glad to know it but I’m not glad to tell it. When I say I’m glad to know it I mean I’m glad to be fixed at last. Oh, I’ve got the tip! It’s all open country now and I know just how to go. I’ve gone into it most extensively; there’s nothing you can’t find out to-day—if you go to the right place. I’ve—I’ve——’ He hesitated a moment, then went on: ‘Well, it’s no matter

what I've done. I know where I am and it's a great comfort. She's up a tree, if ever a woman was. Now we'll see who's a beetle and who's a toad!' Lionel Berrington concluded, gaily, with some incongruity of metaphor.

'It's not true—it's not true—it's not true,' Laura said, slowly.

'That's just what she'll say—though that's not the way she'll say it. Oh, if she could get off by your saying it for her!—for you, my dear, would be believed.'

'Get off—what do you mean?' the girl demanded, with a coldness she failed to feel, for she was tingling all over with shame and rage.

'Why, what do you suppose I'm talking about? I'm going to haul her up and to have it out.'

'You're going to make a scandal?'

'*Make* it? Bless my soul, it isn't me! And I should think it was made enough. I'm going to appeal to the laws of my country—that's what I'm going to do. She pretends I'm stopped, whatever she does. But that's all gammon—I ain't!'

'I understand—but you won't do anything so horrible,' said Laura, very gently.

'Horrible as you please, but less so than going on in this way; I haven't told you the fiftieth part—you will easily understand that I can't. They are not nice things to say to a girl like you—especially about Deepmere, if you didn't know it. But when they happen you've got to look at them, haven't you? That's the way I look at it.'

'It's not true—it's not true—it's not true,' Laura Wing repeated, in the same way, slowly shaking her head.

'Of course you stand up for your sister—but that's just what I wanted to say to you, that you ought to have some pity for *me* and some sense of justice. Haven't I always been nice to you? Have you ever had so much as a nasty word from me?'

This appeal touched the girl; she had eaten her brother-in-law's bread for months, she had had the use of all the luxuries with which he was surrounded, and to herself personally she had never known him anything but good-natured. She made no direct response however; she only said—'Be quiet, be quiet and leave her to me. I will answer for her.'

'Answer for her—what do you mean?'

'She shall be better—she shall be reasonable—there shall be no more talk of these horrors. Leave her to me—let me go away with her somewhere.'

'Go away with her? I wouldn't let you come within a mile of her, if you were *my* sister!'

'Oh, shame, shame!' cried Laura Wing, turning away from him.

She hurried to the door of the room, but he stopped her before she reached it. He got his back to it, he barred her way and she had to stand there and hear him. 'I haven't said what I wanted—for I told you that I wanted you to help me. I ain't cruel—I ain't insulting—you can't make out that against me; I'm sure you know in your heart that I've swallowed what would sicken most men. Therefore I will say that you ought to be fair. You're too clever not to be; *you* can't pretend to swallow——' He paused a moment and went on, and she saw it was his idea—an idea very simple and bold. He wanted her to side with him—to watch for him—to help him to get his divorce. He forbore to say that she owed him as much for the hospitality and protection she had in her poverty enjoyed, but she was sure that was in his heart. 'Of course she's your sister, but when one's sister's a perfect bad 'un there's no law to

force one to jump into the mud to save her. It *is* mud, my dear, and mud up to your neck. You had much better think of her children—you had much better stop in *my* boat.’

‘Do you ask me to help you with evidence against her?’ the girl murmured. She had stood there passive, waiting while he talked, covering her face with her hands, which she parted a little, looking at him.

He hesitated a moment. ‘I ask you not to deny what you have seen—what you feel to be true.’

‘Then of the abominations of which you say you have proof, you haven’t proof.’

‘Why haven’t I proof?’

‘If you want *me* to come forward!’

‘I shall go into court with a strong case. You may do what you like. But I give you notice and I expect you not to forget that I have given it. Don’t forget—because you’ll be asked—that I have told you to-night where she is and with whom she is and what measures I intend to take.’

‘Be asked—be asked?’ the girl repeated.

‘Why, of course you’ll be cross-examined.’

‘Oh, mother, mother!’ cried Laura Wing. Her hands were over her face again and as Lionel Berrington, opening the door, let her pass, she burst into tears. He looked after her, distressed, compunctious, half-ashamed, and he exclaimed to himself—‘The bloody brute, the bloody brute!’ But the words had reference to his wife.

V

‘And are you telling me the perfect truth when you say that Captain Crispin was not there?’

‘The perfect truth?’ Mrs. Berrington straightened herself to her height, threw back her head and measured her interlocutress up and down; it is to be surmised that this was one of the many ways in which she knew she looked very handsome indeed. Her interlocutress was her sister, and even in a discussion with a person long since initiated she was not incapable of feeling that her beauty was a new advantage. On this occasion she had at first the air of depending upon it mainly to produce an effect upon Laura; then, after an instant’s reflection, she determined to arrive at her result in another way. She exchanged her expression of scorn (of resentment at her veracity’s being impugned) for a look of gentle amusement; she smiled patiently, as if she remembered that of course Laura couldn’t understand of what an impertinence she had been guilty. There was a quickness of perception and lightness of hand which, to her sense, her American sister had never acquired: the girl’s earnest, almost barbarous probity blinded her to the importance of certain pleasant little forms. ‘My poor child, the things you do say! One doesn’t put a question about the perfect truth in a manner that implies that a person is telling a perfect lie. However, as it’s only you, I don’t mind satisfying your clumsy curiosity. I haven’t the least idea whether Captain Crispin was there or not. I know nothing of his movements and he doesn’t keep me informed—why should he, poor man?—of his whereabouts. He was not there for me—isn’t that all that need interest you? As far as I was concerned he might have been at the North Pole. I neither saw him nor heard of him. I didn’t see the end of his nose!’ Selina continued, still with her wiser, tolerant brightness, looking straight into her sister’s eyes. Her own were clear and lovely and she was but little less handsome than if she had been proud and freezing. Laura wondered at her more and more; stupefied suspense was now almost the girl’s constant state of mind.

Mrs. Berrington had come back from Paris the day before but had not proceeded to Mellows the same night, though there was more than one train she might have taken. Neither had she gone to the house in Grosvenor Place but had spent the night at an hotel. Her husband was absent again; he was supposed to be in Grosvenor Place, so that they had not yet met. Little as she was a woman to admit that she had been in the wrong she was known to have granted later that at this moment she had made a mistake in not going straight to her own house. It had given Lionel a degree of advantage, made it appear perhaps a little that she had a bad conscience and was afraid to face him. But she had had her reasons for putting up at an hotel, and she thought it unnecessary to express them very definitely. She came home by a morning train, the second day, and arrived before luncheon, of which meal she partook in the company of her sister and in that of Miss Steet and the children, sent for in honour of the occasion. After luncheon she let the governess go but kept Scratch and Parson—kept them on ever so long in the morning-room where she remained; longer than she had ever kept them before. Laura was conscious that she ought to have been pleased at this, but there was a perversity even in Selina's manner of doing right; for she wished immensely now to see her alone—she had something so serious to say to her. Selina hugged her children repeatedly, encouraging their sallies; she laughed extravagantly at the artlessness of their remarks, so that at table Miss Steet was quite abashed by her unusual high spirits. Laura was unable to question her about Captain Crispin and Lady Ringrose while Geordie and Ferdy were there: they would not understand, of course, but names were always reflected in their limpid little minds and they gave forth the image later—often in the most extraordinary connections. It was as if Selina knew what she was waiting for and were determined to make her wait. The girl wished her to go to her room, that she might follow her there. But Selina showed no disposition to retire, and one could never entertain the idea for her, on any occasion, that it would be suitable that she should change her dress. The dress she wore—whatever it was—was too becoming to her, and to the moment, for that. Laura noticed how the very folds of her garment told that she had been to Paris; she had spent only a week there but the mark of her *couturière* was all over her: it was simply to confer with this great artist that, from her own account, she had crossed the Channel. The signs of the conference were so conspicuous that it was as if she had said, 'Don't you see the proof that it was for nothing but *chiffons*?' She walked up and down the room with Geordie in her arms, in an access of maternal tenderness; he was much too big to nestle gracefully in her bosom, but that only made her seem younger, more flexible, fairer in her tall, strong slimness. Her distinguished figure bent itself hither and thither, but always in perfect freedom, as she romped with her children; and there was another moment, when she came slowly down the room, holding one of them in each hand and singing to them while they looked up at her beauty, charmed and listening and a little surprised at such new ways—a moment when she might have passed for some grave, antique statue of a young matron, or even for a picture of Saint Cecilia. This morning, more than ever, Laura was struck with her air of youth, the inextinguishable freshness that would have made any one exclaim at her being the mother of such bouncing little boys. Laura had always admired her, thought her the prettiest woman in London, the beauty with the finest points; and now these points were so vivid (especially her finished slenderness and the grace, the natural elegance of every turn—the fall of her shoulders had never looked so perfect) that the girl almost detested them: they appeared to her a kind of advertisement of danger and even of shame.

Miss Steet at last came back for the children, and as soon as she had taken them away Selina observed that she would go over to Plash—just as she was: she rang for her hat and jacket and for the carriage. Laura could see that she would not give her just yet the advantage of a retreat to her room. The hat and jacket were quickly brought, but after they were put on Selina kept her maid in the drawing-room, talking to her a long time, telling her elaborately

what she wished done with the things she had brought from Paris. Before the maid departed the carriage was announced, and the servant, leaving the door of the room open, hovered within earshot. Laura then, losing patience, turned out the maid and closed the door; she stood before her sister, who was prepared for her drive. Then she asked her abruptly, fiercely, but colouring with her question, whether Captain Crispin had been in Paris. We have heard Mrs. Berrington's answer, with which her strenuous sister was imperfectly satisfied; a fact the perception of which it doubtless was that led Selina to break out, with a greater show of indignation: 'I never heard of such extraordinary ideas for a girl to have, and such extraordinary things for a girl to talk about! My dear, you have acquired a freedom—you have emancipated yourself from conventionality—and I suppose I must congratulate you.' Laura only stood there, with her eyes fixed, without answering the sally, and Selina went on, with another change of tone: 'And pray if he *was* there, what is there so monstrous? Hasn't it happened that he is in London when I am there? Why is it then so awful that he should be in Paris?'

'Awful, awful, too awful,' murmured Laura, with intense gravity, still looking at her—looking all the more fixedly that she knew how little Selina liked it.

'My dear, you do indulge in a style of innuendo, for a respectable young woman!' Mrs. Berrington exclaimed, with an angry laugh. 'You have ideas that when I was a girl——' She paused, and her sister saw that she had not the assurance to finish her sentence on that particular note.

'Don't talk about my innuendoes and my ideas—you might remember those in which I have heard you indulge! Ideas? what ideas did I ever have before I came here?' Laura Wing asked, with a trembling voice. 'Don't pretend to be shocked, Selina; that's too cheap a defence. You have said things to me—if you choose to talk of freedom! What is the talk of your house and what does one hear if one lives with you? I don't care what I hear now (it's all odious and there's little choice and my sweet sensibility has gone God knows where!) and I'm very glad if you understand that I don't care what I say. If one talks about your affairs, my dear, one mustn't be too particular!' the girl continued, with a flash of passion.

Mrs. Berrington buried her face in her hands. 'Merciful powers, to be insulted, to be covered with outrage, by one's wretched little sister!' she moaned.

'I think you should be thankful there is one human being—however wretched—who cares enough for you to care about the truth in what concerns you,' Laura said. 'Selina, Selina—are you hideously deceiving us?'

'Us?' Selina repeated, with a singular laugh. 'Whom do you mean by us?'

Laura Wing hesitated; she had asked herself whether it would be best she should let her sister know the dreadful scene she had had with Lionel; but she had not, in her mind, settled that point. However, it was settled now in an instant. 'I don't mean your friends—those of them that I have seen. I don't think *they* care a straw—I have never seen such people. But last week Lionel spoke to me—he told me he *knew* it, as a certainty.'

'Lionel spoke to you?' said Mrs. Berrington, holding up her head with a stare. 'And what is it that he knows?'

'That Captain Crispin was in Paris and that you were with him. He believes you went there to meet him.'

'He said this to *you*?'

'Yes, and much more—I don't know why I should make a secret of it.'

‘The disgusting beast!’ Selina exclaimed slowly, solemnly. ‘He enjoys the right—the legal right—to pour forth his vileness upon *me*; but when he is so lost to every feeling as to begin to talk to you in such a way——!’ And Mrs. Berrington paused, in the extremity of her reprobation.

‘Oh, it was not his talk that shocked me—it was his believing it,’ the girl replied. ‘That, I confess, made an impression on me.’

‘Did it indeed? I’m infinitely obliged to you! You are a tender, loving little sister.’

‘Yes, I am, if it’s tender to have cried about you—all these days—till I’m blind and sick!’ Laura replied. ‘I hope you are prepared to meet him. His mind is quite made up to apply for a divorce.’

Laura’s voice almost failed her as she said this—it was the first time that in talking with Selina she had uttered that horrible word. She had heard it however, often enough on the lips of others; it had been bandied lightly enough in her presence under those somewhat austere ceilings of Mellows, of which the admired decorations and mouldings, in the taste of the middle of the last century, all in delicate plaster and reminding her of Wedgewood pottery, consisted of slim festoons, urns and trophies and knotted ribbons, so many symbols of domestic affection and irrevocable union. Selina herself had flashed it at her with light superiority, as if it were some precious jewel kept in reserve, which she could convert at any moment into specie, so that it would constitute a happy provision for her future. The idea—associated with her own point of view—was apparently too familiar to Mrs. Berrington to be the cause of her changing colour; it struck her indeed, as presented by Laura, in a ludicrous light, for her pretty eyes expanded a moment and she smiled pityingly. ‘Well, you are a poor dear innocent, after all. Lionel would be about as able to divorce me—even if I were the most abandoned of my sex—as he would be to write a leader in the *Times*.’

‘I know nothing about that,’ said Laura.

‘So I perceive—as I also perceive that you must have shut your eyes very tight. Should you like to know a few of the reasons—heaven forbid I should attempt to go over them all; there are millions!—why his hands are tied?’

‘Not in the least.’

‘Should you like to know that his own life is too base for words and that his impudence in talking about me would be sickening if it weren’t grotesque?’ Selina went on, with increasing emotion. ‘Should you like me to tell you to what he has stooped—to the very gutter—and the charming history of his relations with——’

‘No, I don’t want you to tell me anything of the sort,’ Laura interrupted. ‘Especially as you were just now so pained by the license of my own allusions.’

‘You listen to him then—but it suits your purpose not to listen to me!’

‘Oh, Selina, Selina!’ the girl almost shrieked, turning away.

‘Where have your eyes been, or your senses, or your powers of observation? You can be clever enough when it suits you!’ Mrs. Berrington continued, throwing off another ripple of derision. ‘And now perhaps, as the carriage is waiting, you will let me go about my duties.’

Laura turned again and stopped her, holding her arm as she passed toward the door. ‘Will you swear—will you swear by everything that is most sacred?’

‘Will I swear what?’ And now she thought Selina visibly blanched.

‘That you didn’t lay eyes on Captain Crispin in Paris.’

Mrs. Berrington hesitated, but only for an instant. 'You are really too odious, but as you are pinching me to death I will swear, to get away from you. I never laid eyes on him.'

The organs of vision which Mrs. Berrington was ready solemnly to declare that she had not misapplied were, as her sister looked into them, an abyss of indefinite prettiness. The girl had sounded them before without discovering a conscience at the bottom of them, and they had never helped any one to find out anything about their possessor except that she was one of the beauties of London. Even while Selina spoke Laura had a cold, horrible sense of not believing her, and at the same time a desire, colder still, to extract a reiteration of the pledge. Was it the asseveration of her innocence that she wished her to repeat, or only the attestation of her falsity? One way or the other it seemed to her that this would settle something, and she went on inexorably—'By our dear mother's memory—by our poor father's?'

'By my mother's, by my father's,' said Mrs. Berrington, 'and by that of any other member of the family you like!' Laura let her go; she had not been pinching her, as Selina described the pressure, but had clung to her with insistent hands. As she opened the door Selina said, in a changed voice: 'I suppose it's no use to ask you if you care to drive to Plash.'

'No, thank you, I don't care—I shall take a walk.'

'I suppose, from that, that your friend Lady Davenant has gone.'

'No, I think she is still there.'

'That's a bore!' Selina exclaimed, as she went off.

VI

Laura Wing hastened to her room to prepare herself for her walk; but when she reached it she simply fell on her knees, shuddering, beside her bed. She buried her face in the soft counterpane of wadded silk; she remained there a long time, with a kind of aversion to lifting it again to the day. It burned with horror and there was coolness in the smooth glaze of the silk. It seemed to her that she had been concerned in a hideous transaction, and her uppermost feeling was, strangely enough, that she was ashamed—not of her sister but of herself. She did not believe her—that was at the bottom of everything, and she had made her lie, she had brought out her perjury, she had associated it with the sacred images of the dead. She took no walk, she remained in her room, and quite late, towards six o'clock, she heard on the gravel, outside of her windows, the wheels of the carriage bringing back Mrs. Berrington. She had evidently been elsewhere as well as to Plash; no doubt she had been to the vicarage—she was capable even of that. She could pay 'duty-visits,' like that (she called at the vicarage about three times a year), and she could go and be nice to her mother-in-law with her fresh lips still fresher for the lie she had just told. For it was as definite as an aching nerve to Laura that she did not believe her, and if she did not believe her the words she had spoken were a lie. It was the lie, the lie to *her* and which she had dragged out of her that seemed to the girl the ugliest thing. If she had admitted her folly, if she had explained, attenuated, sophisticated, there would have been a difference in her favour; but now she was bad because she was hard. She had a surface of polished metal. And she could make plans and calculate, she could act and do things for a particular effect. She could go straight to old Mrs. Berrington and to the parson's wife and his many daughters (just as she had kept the children after luncheon, on purpose, so long) because that looked innocent and domestic and denoted a mind without a feather's weight upon it.

A servant came to the young lady's door to tell her that tea was ready; and on her asking who else was below (for she had heard the wheels of a second vehicle just after Selina's return), she learned that Lionel had come back. At this news she requested that some tea should be

brought to her room—she determined not to go to dinner. When the dinner-hour came she sent down word that she had a headache, that she was going to bed. She wondered whether Selina would come to her (she could forget disagreeable scenes amazingly); but her fervent hope that she would stay away was gratified. Indeed she would have another call upon her attention if her meeting with her husband was half as much of a concussion as was to have been expected. Laura had found herself listening hard, after knowing that her brother-in-law was in the house: she half expected to hear indications of violence—loud cries or the sound of a scuffle. It was a matter of course to her that some dreadful scene had not been slow to take place, something that discretion should keep her out of even if she had not been too sick. She did not go to bed—partly because she didn't know what might happen in the house. But she was restless also for herself: things had reached a point when it seemed to her that she must make up her mind. She left her candles unlighted—she sat up till the small hours, in the glow of the fire. What had been settled by her scene with Selina was that worse things were to come (looking into her fire, as the night went on, she had a rare prevision of the catastrophe that hung over the house), and she considered, or tried to consider, what it would be best for her, in anticipation, to do. The first thing was to take flight.

It may be related without delay that Laura Wing did not take flight and that though the circumstance detracts from the interest that should be felt in her character she did not even make up her mind. That was not so easy when action had to ensue. At the same time she had not the excuse of a conviction that by not acting—that is by not withdrawing from her brother-in-law's roof—she should be able to hold Selina up to her duty, to drag her back into the straight path. The hopes connected with that project were now a phase that she had left behind her; she had not to-day an illusion about her sister large enough to cover a sixpence. She had passed through the period of superstition, which had lasted the longest—the time when it seemed to her, as at first, a kind of profanity to doubt of Selina and judge her, the elder sister whose beauty and success she had ever been proud of and who carried herself, though with the most good-natured fraternisings, as one native to an upper air. She had called herself in moments of early penitence for irrepressible suspicion a little presumptuous prig: so strange did it seem to her at first, the impulse of criticism in regard to her bright protectress. But the revolution was over and she had a desolate, lonely freedom which struck her as not the most cynical thing in the world only because Selina's behaviour was more so. She supposed she should learn, though she was afraid of the knowledge, what had passed between that lady and her husband while her vigil ached itself away. But it appeared to her the next day, to her surprise, that nothing was changed in the situation save that Selina knew at present how much more she was suspected. As this had not a chastening effect upon Mrs. Berrington nothing had been gained by Laura's appeal to her. Whatever Lionel had said to his wife he said nothing to Laura: he left her at perfect liberty to forget the subject he had opened up to her so luminously. This was very characteristic of his good-nature; it had come over him that after all she wouldn't like it, and if the free use of the gray ponies could make up to her for the shock she might order them every day in the week and banish the unpleasant episode from her mind.

Laura ordered the gray ponies very often: she drove herself all over the country. She visited not only the neighbouring but the distant poor, and she never went out without stopping for one of the vicar's fresh daughters. Mellows was now half the time full of visitors and when it was not its master and mistress were staying with their friends either together or singly. Sometimes (almost always when she was asked) Laura Wing accompanied her sister and on two or three occasions she paid an independent visit. Selina had often told her that she wished her to have her own friends, so that the girl now felt a great desire to show her that she had them. She had arrived at no decision whatever; she had embraced in intention no particular

course. She drifted on, shutting her eyes, averting her head and, as it seemed to herself, hardening her heart. This admission will doubtless suggest to the reader that she was a weak, inconsequent, spasmodic young person, with a standard not really, or at any rate not continuously, high; and I have no desire that she shall appear anything but what she was. It must even be related of her that since she could not escape and live in lodgings and paint fans (there were reasons why this combination was impossible) she determined to try and be happy in the given circumstances—to float in shallow, turbid water. She gave up the attempt to understand the cynical *modus vivendi* at which her companions seemed to have arrived; she knew it was not final but it served them sufficiently for the time; and if it served them why should it not serve her, the dependent, impecunious, tolerated little sister, representative of the class whom it behoved above all to mind their own business? The time was coming round when they would all move up to town, and there, in the crowd, with the added movement, the strain would be less and indifference easier.

Whatever Lionel had said to his wife that evening she had found something to say to him: that Laura could see, though not so much from any change in the simple expression of his little red face and in the vain bustle of his existence as from the grand manner in which Selina now carried herself. She was ‘smarter’ than ever and her waist was smaller and her back straighter and the fall of her shoulders finer; her long eyes were more oddly charming and the extreme detachment of her elbows from her sides conduced still more to the exhibition of her beautiful arms. So she floated, with a serenity not disturbed by a general tardiness, through the interminable succession of her engagements. Her photographs were not to be purchased in the Burlington Arcade—she had kept out of that; but she looked more than ever as they would have represented her if they had been obtainable there. There were times when Laura thought her brother-in-law’s formless desistence too frivolous for nature: it even gave her a sense of deeper dangers. It was as if he had been digging away in the dark and they would all tumble into the hole. It happened to her to ask herself whether the things he had said to her the afternoon he fell upon her in the schoolroom had not all been a clumsy practical joke, a crude desire to scare, that of a schoolboy playing with a sheet in the dark; or else brandy and soda, which came to the same thing. However this might be she was obliged to recognise that the impression of brandy and soda had not again been given her. More striking still however was Selina’s capacity to recover from shocks and condone imputations; she kissed again—kissed Laura—without tears, and proposed problems connected with the rearrangement of trimmings and of the flowers at dinner, as candidly—as earnestly—as if there had never been an intenser question between them. Captain Crispin was not mentioned; much less of course, so far as Laura was concerned, was he seen. But Lady Ringrose appeared; she came down for two days, during an absence of Lionel’s. Laura, to her surprise, found her no such Jezebel but a clever little woman with a single eye-glass and short hair who had read Lecky and could give her useful hints about water-colours: a reconciliation that encouraged the girl, for this was the direction in which it now seemed to her best that she herself should grow.

VII

In Grosvenor Place, on Sunday afternoon, during the first weeks of the season, Mrs. Berrington was usually at home: this indeed was the only time when a visitor who had not made an appointment could hope to be admitted to her presence. Very few hours in the twenty-four did she spend in her own house. Gentlemen calling on these occasions rarely found her sister: Mrs. Berrington had the field to herself. It was understood between the pair that Laura should take this time for going to see her old women: it was in that manner that Selina qualified the girl’s independent social resources. The old women however were not a dozen in number; they consisted mainly of Lady Davenant and the elder Mrs. Berrington, who had a house in Portman Street. Lady Davenant lived at Queen’s Gate and also was

usually at home of a Sunday afternoon: her visitors were not all men, like Selina Berrington's, and Laura's maidenly bonnet was not a false note in her drawing-room. Selina liked her sister, naturally enough, to make herself useful, but of late, somehow, they had grown rarer, the occasions that depended in any degree upon her aid, and she had never been much appealed to—though it would have seemed natural she should be—on behalf of the weekly chorus of gentlemen. It came to be recognised on Selina's part that nature had dedicated her more to the relief of old women than to that of young men. Laura had a distinct sense of interfering with the free interchange of anecdote and pleasantry that went on at her sister's fireside: the anecdotes were mostly such an immense secret that they could not be told fairly if she were there, and she had their privacy on her conscience. There was an exception however; when Selina expected Americans she naturally asked her to stay at home: not apparently so much because their conversation would be good for her as because hers would be good for them.

One Sunday, about the middle of May, Laura Wing prepared herself to go and see Lady Davenant, who had made a long absence from town at Easter but would now have returned. The weather was charming, she had from the first established her right to tread the London streets alone (if she was a poor girl she could have the detachment as well as the helplessness of it) and she promised herself the pleasure of a walk along the park, where the new grass was bright. A moment before she quitted the house her sister sent for her to the drawing-room; the servant gave her a note scrawled in pencil: 'That man from New York is here—Mr. Wendover, who brought me the introduction the other day from the Schoolings. He's rather a dose—you must positively come down and talk to him. Take him out with you if you can.' The description was not alluring, but Selina had never made a request of her to which the girl had not instantly responded: it seemed to her she was there for that. She joined the circle in the drawing-room and found that it consisted of five persons, one of whom was Lady Ringrose. Lady Ringrose was at all times and in all places a fitful apparition; she had described herself to Laura during her visit at Mellows as 'a bird on the branch.' She had no fixed habit of receiving on Sunday, she was in and out as she liked, and she was one of the few specimens of her sex who, in Grosvenor Place, ever turned up, as she said, on the occasions to which I allude. Of the three gentlemen two were known to Laura; she could have told you at least that the big one with the red hair was in the Guards and the other in the Rifles; the latter looked like a rosy child and as if he ought to be sent up to play with Geordie and Ferdy: his social nickname indeed was the Baby. Selina's admirers were of all ages—they ranged from infants to octogenarians.

She introduced the third gentleman to her sister; a tall, fair, slender young man who suggested that he had made a mistake in the shade of his tight, perpendicular coat, ordering it of too heavenly a blue. This added however to the candour of his appearance, and if he was a dose, as Selina had described him, he could only operate beneficently. There were moments when Laura's heart rather yearned towards her countrymen, and now, though she was preoccupied and a little disappointed at having been detained, she tried to like Mr. Wendover, whom her sister had compared invidiously, as it seemed to her, with her other companions. It struck her that his surface at least was as glossy as theirs. The Baby, whom she remembered to have heard spoken of as a dangerous flirt, was in conversation with Lady Ringrose and the guardsman with Mrs. Berrington; so she did her best to entertain the American visitor, as to whom any one could easily see (she thought) that he had brought a letter of introduction—he wished so to maintain the credit of those who had given it to him. Laura scarcely knew these people, American friends of her sister who had spent a period of festivity in London and gone back across the sea before her own advent; but Mr. Wendover gave her all possible information about them. He lingered upon them, returned to them, corrected statements he

had made at first, discoursed upon them earnestly and exhaustively. He seemed to fear to leave them, lest he should find nothing again so good, and he indulged in a parallel that was almost elaborate between Miss Fanny and Miss Katie. Selina told her sister afterwards that she had overheard him—that he talked of them as if he had been a nursemaid; upon which Laura defended the young man even to extravagance. She reminded her sister that people in London were always saying Lady Mary and Lady Susan: why then shouldn't Americans use the Christian name, with the humbler prefix with which they had to content themselves? There had been a time when Mrs. Berrington had been happy enough to be Miss Lina, even though she was the elder sister; and the girl liked to think there were still old friends—friends of the family, at home, for whom, even should she live to sixty years of spinsterhood, she would never be anything but Miss Laura. This was as good as Donna Anna or Donna Elvira: English people could never call people as other people did, for fear of resembling the servants.

Mr. Wendover was very attentive, as well as communicative; however his letter might be regarded in Grosvenor Place he evidently took it very seriously himself; but his eyes wandered considerably, none the less, to the other side of the room, and Laura felt that though he had often seen persons like her before (not that he betrayed this too crudely) he had never seen any one like Lady Ringrose. His glance rested also on Mrs. Berrington, who, to do her justice, abstained from showing, by the way she returned it, that she wished her sister to get him out of the room. Her smile was particularly pretty on Sunday afternoons and he was welcome to enjoy it as a part of the decoration of the place. Whether or no the young man should prove interesting he was at any rate interested; indeed she afterwards learned that what Selina deprecated in him was the fact that he would eventually display a fatiguing intensity of observation. He would be one of the sort who noticed all kinds of little things—things she never saw or heard of—in the newspapers or in society, and would call upon her (a dreadful prospect) to explain or even to defend them. She had not come there to explain England to the Americans; the more particularly as her life had been a burden to her during the first years of her marriage through her having to explain America to the English. As for defending England to her countrymen she had much rather defend it *from* them: there were too many—too many for those who were already there. This was the class she wished to spare—she didn't care about the English. They could obtain an eye for an eye and a cutlet for a cutlet by going over there; which she had no desire to do—not for all the cutlets in Christendom!

When Mr. Wendover and Laura had at last cut loose from the Schoolings he let her know confidentially that he had come over really to see London; he had time, that year; he didn't know when he should have it again (if ever, as he said) and he had made up his mind that this was about the best use he could make of four months and a half. He had heard so much of it; it was talked of so much to-day; a man felt as if he ought to know something about it. Laura wished the others could hear this—that England was coming up, was making her way at last to a place among the topics of societies more universal. She thought Mr. Wendover after all remarkably like an Englishman, in spite of his saying that he believed she had resided in London quite a time. He talked a great deal about things being characteristic, and wanted to know, lowering his voice to make the inquiry, whether Lady Ringrose were not particularly so. He had heard of her very often, he said; and he observed that it was very interesting to see her: he could not have used a different tone if he had been speaking of the prime minister or the laureate. Laura was ignorant of what he had heard of Lady Ringrose; she doubted whether it could be the same as what she had heard from her brother-in-law: if this had been the case he never would have mentioned it. She foresaw that his friends in London would have a good deal to do in the way of telling him whether this or that were characteristic or not; he would go about in much the same way that English travellers did in America, fixing his attention

mainly on society (he let Laura know that this was especially what he wished to go into) and neglecting the antiquities and sights, quite as if he failed to believe in their importance. He would ask questions it was impossible to answer; as to whether for instance society were very different in the two countries. If you said yes you gave a wrong impression and if you said no you didn't give a right one: that was the kind of thing that Selina had suffered from. Laura found her new acquaintance, on the present occasion and later, more philosophically analytic of his impressions than those of her countrymen she had hitherto encountered in her new home: the latter, in regard to such impressions, usually exhibited either a profane levity or a tendency to mawkish idealism.

Mrs. Berrington called out at last to Laura that she must not stay if she had prepared herself to go out: whereupon the girl, having nodded and smiled good-bye at the other members of the circle, took a more formal leave of Mr. Wendover—expressed the hope, as an American girl does in such a case, that they should see him again. Selina asked him to come and dine three days later; which was as much as to say that relations might be suspended till then. Mr. Wendover took it so, and having accepted the invitation he departed at the same time as Laura. He passed out of the house with her and in the street she asked him which way he was going. He was too tender, but she liked him; he appeared not to deal in chaff and that was a change that relieved her—she had so often had to pay out that coin when she felt wretchedly poor. She hoped he would ask her leave to go with her the way she was going—and this not on particular but on general grounds. It would be American, it would remind her of old times; she should like him to be as American as that. There was no reason for her taking so quick an interest in his nature, inasmuch as she had not fallen under his spell; but there were moments when she felt a whimsical desire to be reminded of the way people felt and acted at home. Mr. Wendover did not disappoint her, and the bright chocolate-coloured vista of the Fifth Avenue seemed to surge before her as he said, 'May I have the pleasure of making my direction the same as yours?' and moved round, systematically, to take his place between her and the curbstone. She had never walked much with young men in America (she had been brought up in the new school, the school of attendant maids and the avoidance of certain streets) and she had very often done so in England, in the country; yet, as at the top of Grosvenor Place she crossed over to the park, proposing they should take that way, the breath of her native land was in her nostrils. It was certainly only an American who could have the tension of Mr. Wendover; his solemnity almost made her laugh, just as her eyes grew dull when people 'slanged' each other hilariously in her sister's house; but at the same time he gave her a feeling of high respectability. It would be respectable still if she were to go on with him indefinitely—if she never were to come home at all. He asked her after a while, as they went, whether he had violated the custom of the English in offering her his company; whether in that country a gentleman might walk with a young lady—the first time he saw her—not because their roads lay together but for the sake of the walk.

'Why should it matter to me whether it is the custom of the English? I am not English,' said Laura Wing. Then her companion explained that he only wanted a general guidance—that with her (she was so kind) he had not the sense of having taken a liberty. The point was simply—and rather comprehensively and strenuously he began to set forth the point. Laura interrupted him; she said she didn't care about it and he almost irritated her by telling her she was kind. She was, but she was not pleased at its being recognised so soon; and he was still too importunate when he asked her whether she continued to go by American usage, didn't find that if one lived there one had to conform in a great many ways to the English. She was weary of the perpetual comparison, for she not only heard it from others—she heard it a great deal from herself. She held that there were certain differences you felt, if you belonged to one

or the other nation, and that was the end of it: there was no use trying to express them. Those you *could* express were not real or not important ones and were not worth talking about. Mr. Wendover asked her if she liked English society and if it were superior to American; also if the tone were very high in London. She thought his questions ‘academic’—the term she used to see applied in the *Times* to certain speeches in Parliament. Bending his long leanness over her (she had never seen a man whose material presence was so insubstantial, so unoppressive) and walking almost sidewise, to give her a proper attention, he struck her as innocent, as incapable of guessing that she had had a certain observation of life. They were talking about totally different things: English society, as he asked her judgment upon it and she had happened to see it, was an affair that he didn’t suspect. If she were to give him that judgment it would be more than he doubtless bargained for; but she would do it not to make him open his eyes—only to relieve herself. She had thought of that before in regard to two or three persons she had met—of the satisfaction of breaking out with some of her feelings. It would make little difference whether the person understood her or not; the one who should do so best would be far from understanding everything. ‘I want to get out of it, please—out of the set I live in, the one I have tumbled into through my sister, the people you saw just now. There are thousands of people in London who are different from that and ever so much nicer; but I don’t see them, I don’t know how to get at them; and after all, poor dear man, what power have you to help me?’ That was in the last analysis the gist of what she had to say.

Mr. Wendover asked her about Selina in the tone of a person who thought Mrs. Berrington a very important phenomenon, and that by itself was irritating to Laura Wing. Important—gracious goodness, no! She might have to live with her, to hold her tongue about her; but at least she was not bound to exaggerate her significance. The young man forbore decorously to make use of the expression, but she could see that he supposed Selina to be a professional beauty and she guessed that as this product had not yet been domesticated in the western world the desire to behold it, after having read so much about it, had been one of the motives of Mr. Wendover’s pilgrimage. Mrs. Schooling, who must have been a goose, had told him that Mrs. Berrington, though transplanted, was the finest flower of a rich, ripe society and as clever and virtuous as she was beautiful. Meanwhile Laura knew what Selina thought of Fanny Schooling and her incurable provinciality. ‘Now was that a good example of London talk—what I heard (I only heard a little of it, but the conversation was more general before you came in) in your sister’s drawing-room? I don’t mean literary, intellectual talk—I suppose there are special places to hear that; I mean—I mean——’ Mr. Wendover went on with a deliberation which gave his companion an opportunity to interrupt him. They had arrived at Lady Davenant’s door and she cut his meaning short. A fancy had taken her, on the spot, and the fact that it was whimsical seemed only to recommend it.

‘If you want to hear London talk there will be some very good going on in here,’ she said. ‘If you would like to come in with me——?’

‘Oh, you are very kind—I should be delighted,’ replied Mr. Wendover, endeavouring to emulate her own more rapid processes. They stepped into the porch and the young man, anticipating his companion, lifted the knocker and gave a postman’s rap. She laughed at him for this and he looked bewildered; the idea of taking him in with her had become agreeably exhilarating. Their acquaintance, in that moment, took a long jump. She explained to him who Lady Davenant was and that if he was in search of the characteristic it would be a pity he shouldn’t know her; and then she added, before he could put the question:

‘And what I am doing is *not* in the least usual. No, it is not the custom for young ladies here to take strange gentlemen off to call on their friends the first time they see them.’

‘So that Lady Davenant will think it rather extraordinary?’ Mr. Wendover eagerly inquired; not as if that idea frightened him, but so that his observation on this point should also be well founded. He had entered into Laura’s proposal with complete serenity.

‘Oh, most extraordinary!’ said Laura, as they went in. The old lady however concealed such surprise as she may have felt, and greeted Mr. Wendover as if he were any one of fifty familiars. She took him altogether for granted and asked him no questions about his arrival, his departure, his hotel or his business in England. He noticed, as he afterwards confided to Laura, her omission of these forms; but he was not wounded by it—he only made a mark against it as an illustration of the difference between English and American manners: in New York people always asked the arriving stranger the first thing about the steamer and the hotel. Mr. Wendover appeared greatly impressed with Lady Davenant’s antiquity, though he confessed to his companion on a subsequent occasion that he thought her a little flippant, a little frivolous even for her years. ‘Oh yes,’ said the girl, on that occasion, ‘I have no doubt that you considered she talked too much, for one so old. In America old ladies sit silent and listen to the young.’ Mr. Wendover stared a little and replied to this that with her—with Laura Wing—it was impossible to tell which side she was on, the American or the English: sometimes she seemed to take one, sometimes the other. At any rate, he added, smiling, with regard to the other great division it was easy to see—she was on the side of the old. ‘Of course I am,’ she said; ‘when one *is* old!’ And then he inquired, according to his wont, if she were thought so in England; to which she answered that it was England that had made her so.

Lady Davenant’s bright drawing-room was filled with mementoes and especially with a collection of portraits of distinguished people, mainly fine old prints with signatures, an array of precious autographs. ‘Oh, it’s a cemetery,’ she said, when the young man asked her some question about one of the pictures; ‘they are my contemporaries, they are all dead and those things are the tombstones, with the inscriptions. I’m the grave-digger, I look after the place and try to keep it a little tidy. I have dug my own little hole,’ she went on, to Laura, ‘and when you are sent for you must come and put me in.’ This evocation of mortality led Mr. Wendover to ask her if she had known Charles Lamb; at which she stared for an instant, replying: ‘Dear me, no—one didn’t meet him.’

‘Oh, I meant to say Lord Byron,’ said Mr. Wendover.

‘Bless me, yes; I was in love with him. But he didn’t notice me, fortunately—we were so many. He was very nice-looking but he was very vulgar.’ Lady Davenant talked to Laura as if Mr. Wendover had not been there; or rather as if his interests and knowledge were identical with hers. Before they went away the young man asked her if she had known Garrick and she replied: ‘Oh, dear, no, we didn’t have them in our houses, in those days.’

‘He must have been dead long before you were born!’ Laura exclaimed.

‘I daresay; but one used to hear of him.’

‘I think I meant Edmund Kean,’ said Mr. Wendover.

‘You make little mistakes of a century or two,’ Laura Wing remarked, laughing. She felt now as if she had known Mr. Wendover a long time.

‘Oh, he was very clever,’ said Lady Davenant.

‘Very magnetic, I suppose,’ Mr. Wendover went on.

‘What’s that? I believe he used to get tipsy.’

‘Perhaps you don’t use that expression in England?’ Laura’s companion inquired.

‘Oh, I daresay we do, if it’s American; we talk American now. You seem very good-natured people, but such a jargon as you *do* speak!’

‘I like *your* way, Lady Davenant,’ said Mr. Wendover, benevolently, smiling.

‘You might do worse,’ cried the old woman; and then she added: ‘Please go out!’ They were taking leave of her but she kept Laura’s hand and, for the young man, nodded with decision at the open door. ‘Now, wouldn’t *he* do?’ she asked, after Mr. Wendover had passed into the hall.

‘Do for what?’

‘For a husband, of course.’

‘For a husband—for whom?’

‘Why—for me,’ said Lady Davenant.

‘I don’t know—I think he might tire you.’

‘Oh—if he’s tiresome!’ the old lady continued, smiling at the girl.

‘I think he is very good,’ said Laura.

‘Well then, he’ll do.’

‘Ah, perhaps *you* won’t!’ Laura exclaimed, smiling back at her and turning away.

VIII

She was of a serious turn by nature and unlike many serious people she made no particular study of the art of being gay. Had her circumstances been different she might have done so, but she lived in a merry house (heaven save the mark! as she used to say) and therefore was not driven to amuse herself for conscience sake. The diversions she sought were of a serious cast and she liked those best which showed most the note of difference from Selina’s interests and Lionel’s. She felt that she was most divergent when she attempted to cultivate her mind, and it was a branch of such cultivation to visit the curiosities, the antiquities, the monuments of London. She was fond of the Abbey and the British Museum—she had extended her researches as far as the Tower. She read the works of Mr. John Timbs and made notes of the old corners of history that had not yet been abolished—the houses in which great men had lived and died. She planned a general tour of inspection of the ancient churches of the City and a pilgrimage to the queer places commemorated by Dickens. It must be added that though her intentions were great her adventures had as yet been small. She had wanted for opportunity and independence; people had other things to do than to go with her, so that it was not till she had been some time in the country and till a good while after she had begun to go out alone that she entered upon the privilege of visiting public institutions by herself. There were some aspects of London that frightened her, but there were certain spots, such as the Poets’ Corner in the Abbey or the room of the Elgin marbles, where she liked better to be alone than not to have the right companion. At the time Mr. Wendover presented himself in Grosvenor Place she had begun to put in, as they said, a museum or something of that sort whenever she had a chance. Besides her idea that such places were sources of knowledge (it is to be feared that the poor girl’s notions of knowledge were at once conventional and crude) they were also occasions for detachment, an escape from worrying thoughts. She forgot Selina and she ‘qualified’ herself a little—though for what she hardly knew.

The day Mr. Wendover dined in Grosvenor Place they talked about St. Paul’s, which he expressed a desire to see, wishing to get some idea of the great past, as he said, in England as well as of the present. Laura mentioned that she had spent half an hour the summer before in

the big black temple on Ludgate Hill; whereupon he asked her if he might entertain the hope that—if it were not disagreeable to her to go again—she would serve as his guide there. She had taken him to see Lady Davenant, who was so remarkable and worth a long journey, and now he should like to pay her back—to show *her* something. The difficulty would be that there was probably nothing she had not seen; but if she could think of anything he was completely at her service. They sat together at dinner and she told him she would think of something before the repast was over. A little while later she let him know that a charming place had occurred to her—a place to which she was afraid to go alone and where she should be grateful for a protector: she would tell him more about it afterwards. It was then settled between them that on a certain afternoon of the same week they would go to St. Paul's together, extending their ramble as much further as they had time. Laura lowered her voice for this discussion, as if the range of allusion had had a kind of impropriety. She was now still more of the mind that Mr. Wendover was a good young man—he had such worthy eyes. His principal defect was that he treated all subjects as if they were equally important; but that was perhaps better than treating them with equal levity. If one took an interest in him one might not despair of teaching him to discriminate.

Laura said nothing at first to her sister about her appointment with him: the feelings with which she regarded Selina were not such as to make it easy for her to talk over matters of conduct, as it were, with this votary of pleasure at any price, or at any rate to report her arrangements to her as one would do to a person of fine judgment. All the same, as she had a horror of positively hiding anything (Selina herself did that enough for two) it was her purpose to mention at luncheon on the day of the event that she had agreed to accompany Mr. Wendover to St. Paul's. It so happened however that Mrs. Berrington was not at home at this repast; Laura partook of it in the company of Miss Steet and her young charges. It very often happened now that the sisters failed to meet in the morning, for Selina remained very late in her room and there had been a considerable intermission of the girl's earlier custom of visiting her there. It was Selina's habit to send forth from this fragrant sanctuary little hieroglyphic notes in which she expressed her wishes or gave her directions for the day. On the morning I speak of her maid put into Laura's hand one of these communications, which contained the words: 'Please be sure and replace me with the children at lunch—I meant to give them that hour to-day. But I have a frantic appeal from Lady Watermouth; she is worse and beseeches me to come to her, so I rush for the 12.30 train.' These lines required no answer and Laura had no questions to ask about Lady Watermouth. She knew she was tiresomely ill, in exile, condemned to forego the diversions of the season and calling out to her friends, in a house she had taken for three months at Weybridge (for a certain particular air) where Selina had already been to see her. Selina's devotion to her appeared commendable—she had her so much on her mind. Laura had observed in her sister in relation to other persons and objects these sudden intensities of charity, and she had said to herself, watching them—'Is it because she is bad?—does she want to make up for it somehow and to buy herself off from the penalties?'

Mr. Wendover called for his *cicerone* and they agreed to go in a romantic, Bohemian manner (the young man was very docile and appreciative about this), walking the short distance to the Victoria station and taking the mysterious underground railway. In the carriage she anticipated the inquiry that she figured to herself he presently would make and said, laughing: 'No, no, this is very exceptional; if we were both English—and both what we are, otherwise—we wouldn't do this.'

'And if only one of us were English?'

'It would depend upon which one.'

‘Well, say me.’

‘Oh, in that case I certainly—on so short an acquaintance—would not go sight-seeing with you.’

‘Well, I am glad I’m American,’ said Mr. Wendover, sitting opposite to her.

‘Yes, you may thank your fate. It’s much simpler,’ Laura added.

‘Oh, you spoil it!’ the young man exclaimed—a speech of which she took no notice but which made her think him brighter, as they used to say at home. He was brighter still after they had descended from the train at the Temple station (they had meant to go on to Blackfriars, but they jumped out on seeing the sign of the Temple, fired with the thought of visiting that institution too) and got admission to the old garden of the Benchers, which lies beside the foggy, crowded river, and looked at the tombs of the crusaders in the low Romanesque church, with the cross-legged figures sleeping so close to the eternal uproar, and lingered in the flagged, homely courts of brick, with their much-lettered door-posts, their dull old windows and atmosphere of consultation—lingered to talk of Johnson and Goldsmith and to remark how London opened one’s eyes to Dickens; and he was brightest of all when they stood in the high, bare cathedral, which suggested a dirty whiteness, saying it was fine but wondering why it was not finer and letting a glance as cold as the dusty, colourless glass fall upon epitaphs that seemed to make most of the defunct bores even in death. Mr. Wendover was decorous but he was increasingly gay, and these qualities appeared in him in spite of the fact that St. Paul’s was rather a disappointment. Then they felt the advantage of having the other place—the one Laura had had in mind at dinner—to fall back upon: that perhaps would prove a compensation. They entered a hansom now (they had to come to that, though they had walked also from the Temple to St. Paul’s) and drove to Lincoln’s Inn Fields, Laura making the reflection as they went that it was really a charm to roam about London under valid protection—such a mixture of freedom and safety—and that perhaps she had been unjust, ungenerous to her sister. A good-natured, positively charitable doubt came into her mind—a doubt that Selina might have the benefit of. What she liked in her present undertaking was the element of the *imprévu* that it contained, and perhaps it was simply the same happy sense of getting the laws of London—once in a way—off her back that had led Selina to go over to Paris to ramble about with Captain Crispin. Possibly they had done nothing worse than go together to the Invalides and Notre Dame; and if any one were to meet *her* driving that way, so far from home, with Mr. Wendover—Laura, mentally, did not finish her sentence, overtaken as she was by the reflection that she had fallen again into her old assumption (she had been in and out of it a hundred times), that Mrs. Berrington *had* met Captain Crispin—the idea she so passionately repudiated. She at least would never deny that she had spent the afternoon with Mr. Wendover: she would simply say that he was an American and had brought a letter of introduction.

The cab stopped at the Soane Museum, which Laura Wing had always wanted to see, a compatriot having once told her that it was one of the most curious things in London and one of the least known. While Mr. Wendover was discharging the vehicle she looked over the important old-fashioned square (which led her to say to herself that London was endlessly big and one would never know all the places that made it up) and saw a great bank of cloud hanging above it—a definite portent of a summer storm. ‘We are going to have thunder; you had better keep the cab,’ she said; upon which her companion told the man to wait, so that they should not afterwards, in the wet, have to walk for another conveyance. The heterogeneous objects collected by the late Sir John Soane are arranged in a fine old dwelling-house, and the place gives one the impression of a sort of Saturday afternoon of one’s youth—a long, rummaging visit, under indulgent care, to some eccentric and rather

alarming old travelled person. Our young friends wandered from room to room and thought everything queer and some few objects interesting; Mr. Wendover said it would be a very good place to find a thing you couldn't find anywhere else—it illustrated the prudent virtue of keeping. They took note of the sarcophagi and pagodas, the artless old maps and medals.

They admired the fine Hogarths; there were uncanny, unexpected objects that Laura edged away from, that she would have preferred not to be in the room with. They had been there half an hour—it had grown much darker—when they heard a tremendous peal of thunder and became aware that the storm had broken. They watched it a while from the upper windows—a violent June shower, with quick sheets of lightning and a rainfall that danced on the pavements. They took it sociably, they lingered at the window, inhaling the odour of the fresh wet that splashed over the sultry town. They would have to wait till it had passed, and they resigned themselves serenely to this idea, repeating very often that it would pass very soon. One of the keepers told them that there were other rooms to see—that there were very interesting things in the basement. They made their way down—it grew much darker and they heard a great deal of thunder—and entered a part of the house which presented itself to Laura as a series of dim, irregular vaults—passages and little narrow avenues—encumbered with strange vague things, obscured for the time but some of which had a wicked, startling look, so that she wondered how the keepers could stay there. 'It's very fearful—it looks like a cave of idols!' she said to her companion; and then she added—'Just look there—is that a person or a thing?' As she spoke they drew nearer to the object of her reference—a figure in the middle of a small vista of curiosities, a figure which answered her question by uttering a short shriek as they approached. The immediate cause of this cry was apparently a vivid flash of lightning, which penetrated into the room and illuminated both Laura's face and that of the mysterious person. Our young lady recognised her sister, as Mrs. Berrington had evidently recognised her. 'Why, Selina!' broke from her lips before she had time to check the words. At the same moment the figure turned quickly away, and then Laura saw that it was accompanied by another, that of a tall gentleman with a light beard which shone in the dusk. The two persons retreated together—dodged out of sight, as it were, disappearing in the gloom or in the labyrinth of the objects exhibited. The whole encounter was but the business of an instant.

'Was it Mrs. Berrington?' Mr. Wendover asked with interest while Laura stood staring.

'Oh no, I only thought it was at first,' she managed to reply, very quickly. She had recognised the gentleman—he had the fine fair beard of Captain Crispin—and her heart seemed to her to jump up and down. She was glad her companion could not see her face, and yet she wanted to get out, to rush up the stairs, where he would see it again, to escape from the place. She wished not to be there with *them*—she was overwhelmed with a sudden horror. 'She has lied—she has lied again—she has lied!'—that was the rhythm to which her thought began to dance. She took a few steps one way and then another: she was afraid of running against the dreadful pair again. She remarked to her companion that it was time they should go off, and then when he showed her the way back to the staircase she pleaded that she had not half seen the things. She pretended suddenly to a deep interest in them, and lingered there roaming and prying about. She was flurried still more by the thought that he would have seen her flurry, and she wondered whether he believed the woman who had shrieked and rushed away was *not* Selina. If she was not Selina why had she shrieked? and if she was Selina what would Mr. Wendover think of her behaviour, and of her own, and of the strange accident of their meeting? What must she herself think of that? so astonishing it was that in the immensity of London so infinitesimally small a chance should have got itself enacted. What a queer place to come to—for people like them! They would get away as soon as possible, of that she could be sure; and she would wait a little to give them time.

Mr. Wendover made no further remark—that was a relief; though his silence itself seemed to show that he was mystified. They went upstairs again and on reaching the door found to their surprise that their cab had disappeared—a circumstance the more singular as the man had not been paid. The rain was still coming down, though with less violence, and the square had been cleared of vehicles by the sudden storm. The doorkeeper, perceiving the dismay of our friends, explained that the cab had been taken up by another lady and another gentleman who had gone out a few minutes before; and when they inquired how he had been induced to depart without the money they owed him the reply was that there evidently had been a discussion (he hadn't heard it, but the lady seemed in a fearful hurry) and the gentleman had told him that they would make it all up to him and give him a lot more into the bargain. The doorkeeper hazarded the candid surmise that the cabby would make ten shillings by the job. But there were plenty more cabs; there would be one up in a minute and the rain moreover was going to stop. 'Well, that *is* sharp practice!' said Mr. Wendover. He made no further allusion to the identity of the lady.

IX

The rain did stop while they stood there, and a brace of hansoms was not slow to appear. Laura told her companion that he must put her into one—she could go home alone: she had taken up enough of his time. He deprecated this course very respectfully; urged that he had it on his conscience to deliver her at her own door; but she sprang into the cab and closed the apron with a movement that was a sharp prohibition. She wanted to get away from him—it would be too awkward, the long, pottering drive back. Her hansom started off while Mr. Wendover, smiling sadly, lifted his hat. It was not very comfortable, even without him; especially as before she had gone a quarter of a mile she felt that her action had been too marked—she wished she had let him come. His puzzled, innocent air of wondering what was the matter annoyed her; and she was in the absurd situation of being angry at a desistance which she would have been still angrier if he had been guiltless of. It would have comforted her (because it would seem to share her burden) and yet it would have covered her with shame if he had guessed that what she saw was wrong. It would not occur to him that there was a scandal so near her, because he thought with no great promptitude of such things; and yet, since there was—but since there was after all Laura scarcely knew what attitude would sit upon him most gracefully. As to what he might be prepared to suspect by having heard what Selina's reputation was in London, of that Laura was unable to judge, not knowing what was said, because of course it was not said to *her*. Lionel would undertake to give her the benefit of this any moment she would allow him, but how in the world could *he* know either, for how could things be said to him? Then, in the rattle of the hansom, passing through streets for which the girl had no eyes, 'She has lied, she has lied, she has lied!' kept repeating itself. Why had she written and signed that wanton falsehood about her going down to Lady Watermouth? How could she have gone to Lady Watermouth's when she was making so very different and so extraordinary a use of the hours she had announced her intention of spending there? What had been the need of that misrepresentation and why did she lie before she was driven to it?

It was because she was false altogether and deception came out of her with her breath; she was so depraved that it was easier to her to fabricate than to let it alone. Laura would not have asked her to give an account of her day, but she would ask her now. She shuddered at one moment, as she found herself saying—even in silence—such things of her sister, and the next she sat staring out of the front of the cab at the stiff problem presented by Selina's turning up with the partner of her guilt at the Soane Museum, of all places in the world. The girl shifted this fact about in various ways, to account for it—not unconscious as she did so that it was a pretty exercise of ingenuity for a nice girl. Plainly, it was a rare accident: if it had been their

plan to spend the day together the Soane Museum had not been in the original programme. They had been near it, they had been on foot and they had rushed in to take refuge from the rain. But how did they come to be near it and above all to be on foot? How could Selina do anything so reckless from her own point of view as to walk about the town—even an out-of-the-way part of it—with her suspected lover? Laura Wing felt the want of proper knowledge to explain such anomalies. It was too little clear to her where ladies went and how they proceeded when they consorted with gentlemen in regard to their meetings with whom they had to lie. She knew nothing of where Captain Crispin lived; very possibly—for she vaguely remembered having heard Selina say of him that he was very poor—he had chambers in that part of the town, and they were either going to them or coming from them. If Selina had neglected to take her way in a four-wheeler with the glasses up it was through some chance that would not seem natural till it was explained, like that of their having darted into a public institution. Then no doubt it would hang together with the rest only too well. The explanation most exact would probably be that the pair had snatched a walk together (in the course of a day of many edifying episodes) for the ‘lark’ of it, and for the sake of the walk had taken the risk, which in that part of London, so detached from all gentility, had appeared to them small. The last thing Selina could have expected was to meet her sister in such a strange corner—her sister with a young man of her own!

She was dining out that night with both Selina and Lionel—a conjunction that was rather rare. She was by no means always invited with them, and Selina constantly went without her husband. Appearances, however, sometimes got a sop thrown them; three or four times a month Lionel and she entered the brougham together like people who still had forms, who still said ‘my dear.’ This was to be one of those occasions, and Mrs. Berrington’s young unmarried sister was included in the invitation. When Laura reached home she learned, on inquiry, that Selina had not yet come in, and she went straight to her own room. If her sister had been there she would have gone to hers instead—she would have cried out to her as soon as she had closed the door: ‘Oh, stop, stop—in God’s name, stop before you go any further, before exposure and ruin and shame come down and bury us!’ That was what was in the air—the vulgarest disgrace, and the girl, harder now than ever about her sister, was conscious of a more passionate desire to save herself. But Selina’s absence made the difference that during the next hour a certain chill fell upon this impulse from other feelings: she found suddenly that she was late and she began to dress. They were to go together after dinner to a couple of balls; a diversion which struck her as ghastly for people who carried such horrors in their breasts. Ghastly was the idea of the drive of husband, wife and sister in pursuit of pleasure, with falsity and detection and hate between them. Selina’s maid came to her door to tell her that she was in the carriage—an extraordinary piece of punctuality, which made her wonder, as Selina was always dreadfully late for everything. Laura went down as quickly as she could, passed through the open door, where the servants were grouped in the foolish majesty of their superfluous attendance, and through the file of dingy gazers who had paused at the sight of the carpet across the pavement and the waiting carriage, in which Selina sat in pure white splendour. Mrs. Berrington had a tiara on her head and a proud patience in her face, as if her sister were really a sore trial. As soon as the girl had taken her place she said to the footman: ‘Is Mr. Berrington there?’—to which the man replied: ‘No ma’am, not yet.’ It was not new to Laura that if there was any one later as a general thing than Selina it was Selina’s husband. ‘Then he must take a hansom. Go on.’ The footman mounted and they rolled away.

There were several different things that had been present to Laura’s mind during the last couple of hours as destined to mark—one or the other—this present encounter with her sister; but the words Selina spoke the moment the brougham began to move were of course exactly

those she had not foreseen. She had considered that she might take this tone or that tone or even no tone at all; she was quite prepared for her presenting a face of blankness to any form of interrogation and saying, 'What on earth are you talking about?' It was in short conceivable to her that Selina would deny absolutely that she had been in the museum, that they had stood face to face and that she had fled in confusion. She was capable of explaining the incident by an idiotic error on Laura's part, by her having seized on another person, by her seeing Captain Crispin in every bush; though doubtless she would be taxed (of course she would say *that* was the woman's own affair) to supply a reason for the embarrassment of the other lady. But she was not prepared for Selina's breaking out with: 'Will you be so good as to inform me if you are engaged to be married to Mr. Wendover?'

'Engaged to him? I have seen him but three times.'

'And is that what you usually do with gentlemen you have seen three times?'

'Are you talking about my having gone with him to see some sights? I see nothing wrong in that. To begin with you see what he is. One might go with him anywhere. Then he brought us an introduction—we have to do something for him. Moreover you threw him upon me the moment he came—you asked me to take charge of him.'

'I didn't ask you to be indecent! If Lionel were to know it he wouldn't tolerate it, so long as you live with us.'

Laura was silent a moment. 'I shall not live with you long.' The sisters, side by side, with their heads turned, looked at each other, a deep crimson leaping into Laura's face. 'I wouldn't have believed it—that you are so bad,' she said. 'You are horrible!' She saw that Selina had not taken up the idea of denying—she judged that would be hopeless: the recognition on either side had been too sharp. She looked radiantly handsome, especially with the strange new expression that Laura's last word brought into her eyes. This expression seemed to the girl to show her more of Selina morally than she had ever yet seen—something of the full extent and the miserable limit.

'It's different for a married woman, especially when she's married to a cad. It's in a girl that such things are odious—scouring London with strange men. I am not bound to explain to you—there would be too many things to say. I have my reasons—I have my conscience. It was the oddest of all things, our meeting in that place—I know that as well as you,' Selina went on, with her wonderful affected clearness; 'but it was not your finding me that was out of the way; it was my finding you—with your remarkable escort! That was incredible. I pretended not to recognise you, so that the gentleman who was with me shouldn't see you, shouldn't know you. He questioned me and I repudiated you. You may thank me for saving you! You had better wear a veil next time—one never knows what may happen. I met an acquaintance at Lady Watermouth's and he came up to town with me. He happened to talk about old prints; I told him how I have collected them and we spoke of the bother one has about the frames. He insisted on my going with him to that place—from Waterloo—to see such an excellent model.'

Laura had turned her face to the window of the carriage again; they were spinning along Park Lane, passing in the quick flash of other vehicles an endless succession of ladies with 'dressed' heads, of gentlemen in white neckties. 'Why, I thought your frames were all so pretty!' Laura murmured. Then she added: 'I suppose it was your eagerness to save your companion the shock of seeing me—in my dishonour—that led you to steal our cab.'

'Your cab?'

'Your delicacy was expensive for you!'

‘You don’t mean you were knocking about in *cabs* with him!’ Selina cried.

‘Of course I know that you don’t really think a word of what you say about me,’ Laura went on; ‘though I don’t know that that makes your saying it a bit less unspeakably base.’

The brougham pulled up in Park Lane and Mrs. Berrington bent herself to have a view through the front glass. ‘We are there, but there are two other carriages,’ she remarked, for all answer. ‘Ah, there are the Collingwoods.’

‘Where are you going—where are you going—where are you going?’ Laura broke out.

The carriage moved on, to set them down, and while the footman was getting off the box Selina said: ‘I don’t pretend to be better than other women, but you do!’ And being on the side of the house she quickly stepped out and carried her crowned brilliancy through the long-lingering daylight and into the open portals.

X

What do you intend to do? You will grant that I have a right to ask you that.’

‘To do? I shall do as I have always done—not so badly, as it seems to me.’

This colloquy took place in Mrs. Berrington’s room, in the early morning hours, after Selina’s return from the entertainment to which reference was last made. Her sister came home before her—she found herself incapable of ‘going on’ when Selina quitted the house in Park Lane at which they had dined. Mrs. Berrington had the night still before her, and she stepped into her carriage with her usual air of graceful resignation to a brilliant lot. She had taken the precaution, however, to provide herself with a defence, against a little sister bristling with righteousness, in the person of Mrs. Collingwood, to whom she offered a lift, as they were bent upon the same business and Mr. Collingwood had a use of his own for his brougham. The Collingwoods were a happy pair who could discuss such a divergence before their friends candidly, amicably, with a great many ‘My loves’ and ‘Not for the worlds.’ Lionel Berrington disappeared after dinner, without holding any communication with his wife, and Laura expected to find that he had taken the carriage, to repay her in kind for her having driven off from Grosvenor Place without him. But it was not new to the girl that he really spared his wife more than she spared him; not so much perhaps because he wouldn’t do the ‘nastiest’ thing as because he couldn’t. Selina could always be nastier. There was ever a whimsicality in her actions: if two or three hours before it had been her fancy to keep a third person out of the carriage she had now her reasons for bringing such a person in. Laura knew that she would not only pretend, but would really believe, that her vindication of her conduct on their way to dinner had been powerful and that she had won a brilliant victory. What need, therefore, to thresh out further a subject that she had chopped into atoms? Laura Wing, however, had needs of her own, and her remaining in the carriage when the footman next opened the door was intimately connected with them.

‘I don’t care to go in,’ she said to her sister. ‘If you will allow me to be driven home and send back the carriage for you, that’s what I shall like best.’

Selina stared and Laura knew what she would have said if she could have spoken her thought. ‘Oh, you are furious that I haven’t given you a chance to fly at me again, and you must take it out in sulks!’ These were the ideas—ideas of ‘fury’ and sulks—into which Selina could translate feelings that sprang from the pure depths of one’s conscience. Mrs. Collingwood protested—she said it was a shame that Laura shouldn’t go in and enjoy herself when she looked so lovely. ‘Doesn’t she look lovely?’ She appealed to Mrs. Berrington. ‘Bless us, what’s the use of being pretty? Now, if she had *my* face!’

‘I think she looks rather cross,’ said Selina, getting out with her friend and leaving her sister to her own inventions. Laura had a vision, as the carriage drove away again, of what her situation would have been, or her peace of mind, if Selina and Lionel had been good, attached people like the Collingwoods, and at the same time of the singularity of a good woman’s being ready to accept favours from a person as to whose behaviour she had the lights that must have come to the lady in question in regard to Selina. She accepted favours herself and she only wanted to be good: that was oppressively true; but if she had not been Selina’s sister she would never drive in her carriage. That conviction was strong in the girl as this vehicle conveyed her to Grosvenor Place; but it was not in its nature consoling. The prevision of disgrace was now so vivid to her that it seemed to her that if it had not already overtaken them she had only to thank the loose, mysterious, rather ignoble tolerance of people like Mrs. Collingwood. There were plenty of that species, even among the good; perhaps indeed exposure and dishonour would begin only when the bad had got hold of the facts. Would the bad be most horrified and do most to spread the scandal? There were, in any event, plenty of them too.

Laura sat up for her sister that night, with that nice question to help her to torment herself—whether if she was hard and merciless in judging Selina it would be with the bad too that she would associate herself. Was she all wrong after all—was she cruel by being too rigid? Was Mrs. Collingwood’s attitude the right one and ought she only to propose to herself to ‘allow’ more and more, and to allow ever, and to smooth things down by gentleness, by sympathy, by not looking at them too hard? It was not the first time that the just measure of things seemed to slip from her hands as she became conscious of possible, or rather of very actual, differences of standard and usage. On this occasion Geordie and Ferdy asserted themselves, by the mere force of lying asleep upstairs in their little cribs, as on the whole the proper measure. Laura went into the nursery to look at them when she came home—it was her habit almost any night—and yearned over them as mothers and maids do alike over the pillow of rosy childhood. They were an antidote to all casuistry; for Selina to forget *them*—that was the beginning and the end of shame. She came back to the library, where she should best hear the sound of her sister’s return; the hours passed as she sat there, without bringing round this event. Carriages came and went all night; the soft shock of swift hoofs was on the wooden roadway long after the summer dawn grew fair—till it was merged in the rumble of the awakening day. Lionel had not come in when she returned, and he continued absent, to Laura’s satisfaction; for if she wanted not to miss Selina she had no desire at present to have to tell her brother-in-law why she was sitting up. She prayed Selina might arrive first: then she would have more time to think of something that harassed her particularly—the question of whether she ought to tell Lionel that she had seen her in a far-away corner of the town with Captain Crispin. Almost impossible as she found it now to feel any tenderness for her, she yet detested the idea of bearing witness against her: notwithstanding which it appeared to her that she could make up her mind to do this if there were a chance of its preventing the last scandal—a catastrophe to which she saw her sister rushing straight. That Selina was capable at a given moment of going off with her lover, and capable of it precisely because it was the greatest ineptitude as well as the greatest wickedness—there was a voice of prophecy, of warning, to this effect in the silent, empty house. If repeating to Lionel what she had seen would contribute to prevent anything, or to stave off the danger, was it not her duty to denounce his wife, flesh and blood of her own as she was, to his further reprobation? This point was not intolerably difficult to determine, as she sat there waiting, only because even what was righteous in that reprobation could not present itself to her as fruitful or efficient. What could Lionel frustrate, after all, and what intelligent or authoritative step was he capable of taking? Mixed with all that now haunted her was her consciousness of what his own absence at such an hour represented in the way of the unedifying. He might be at some

sporting club or he might be anywhere else; at any rate he was not where he ought to be at three o'clock in the morning. Such the husband such the wife, she said to herself; and she felt that Selina would have a kind of advantage, which she grudged her, if she should come in and say: 'And where is *he*, please—where is he, the exalted being on whose behalf you have undertaken to preach so much better than he himself practises?'

But still Selina failed to come in—even to take that advantage; yet in proportion as her waiting was useless did the girl find it impossible to go to bed. A new fear had seized her, the fear that she would never come back at all—that they were already in the presence of the dreaded catastrophe. This made her so nervous that she paced about the lower rooms, listening to every sound, roaming till she was tired. She knew it was absurd, the image of Selina taking flight in a ball-dress; but she said to herself that she might very well have sent other clothes away, in advance, somewhere (Laura had her own ripe views about the maid); and at any rate, for herself, that was the fate she had to expect, if not that night then some other one soon, and it was all the same: to sit counting the hours till a hope was given up and a hideous certainty remained. She had fallen into such a state of apprehension that when at last she heard a carriage stop at the door she was almost happy, in spite of her prevision of how disgusted her sister would be to find her. They met in the hall—Laura went out as she heard the opening of the door, Selina stopped short, seeing her, but said nothing—on account apparently of the presence of the sleepy footman. Then she moved straight to the stairs, where she paused again, asking the footman if Mr. Berrington had come in.

'Not yet, ma'am,' the footman answered.

'Ah!' said Mrs. Berrington, dramatically, and ascended the stairs.

'I have sat up on purpose—I want particularly to speak to you,' Laura remarked, following her.

'Ah!' Selina repeated, more superior still. She went fast, almost as if she wished to get to her room before her sister could overtake her. But the girl was close behind her, she passed into the room with her. Laura closed the door; then she told her that she had found it impossible to go to bed without asking her what she intended to do.

'Your behaviour is too monstrous!' Selina flashed out. 'What on earth do you wish to make the servants suppose?'

'Oh, the servants—in *this* house; as if one could put any idea into their heads that is not there already!' Laura thought. But she said nothing of this—she only repeated her question: aware that she was exasperating to her sister but also aware that she could not be anything else. Mrs. Berrington, whose maid, having outlived surprises, had gone to rest, began to divest herself of some of her ornaments, and it was not till after a moment, during which she stood before the glass, that she made that answer about doing as she had always done. To this Laura rejoined that she ought to put herself in her place enough to feel how important it was to *her* to know what was likely to happen, so that she might take time by the forelock and think of her own situation. If anything should happen she would infinitely rather be out of it—be as far away as possible. Therefore she must take her measures.

It was in the mirror that they looked at each other—in the strange, candle-lighted duplication of the scene that their eyes met. Selina drew the diamonds out of her hair, and in this occupation, for a minute, she was silent. Presently she asked: 'What are you talking about—what do you allude to as happening?'

'Why, it seems to me that there is nothing left for you but to go away with him. If there is a prospect of that insanity——' But here Laura stopped; something so unexpected was taking

place in Selina's countenance—the movement that precedes a sudden gush of tears. Mrs. Berrington dashed down the glittering pins she had detached from her tresses, and the next moment she had flung herself into an armchair and was weeping profusely, extravagantly.

Laura forbore to go to her; she made no motion to soothe or reassure her, she only stood and watched her tears and wondered what they signified. Somehow even the slight refreshment she felt at having affected her in that particular and, as it had lately come to seem, improbable way did not suggest to her that they were precious symptoms. Since she had come to disbelieve her word so completely there was nothing precious about Selina any more. But she continued for some moments to cry passionately, and while this lasted Laura remained silent. At last from the midst of her sobs Selina broke out, 'Go away, go away—leave me alone!'

'Of course I infuriate you,' said the girl; 'but how can I see you rush to your ruin—to that of all of us—without holding on to you and dragging you back?'

'Oh, you don't understand anything about anything!' Selina wailed, with her beautiful hair tumbling all over her.

'I certainly don't understand how you can give such a tremendous handle to Lionel.'

At the mention of her husband's name Selina always gave a bound, and she sprang up now, shaking back her dense braids. 'I give him no handle and you don't know what you are talking about! I know what I am doing and what becomes me, and I don't care if I do. He is welcome to all the handles in the world, for all that he can do with them!'

'In the name of common pity think of your children!' said Laura.

'Have I ever thought of anything else? Have you sat up all night to have the pleasure of accusing me of cruelty? Are there sweeter or more delightful children in the world, and isn't that a little my merit, pray?' Selina went on, sweeping away her tears. 'Who has made them what they are, pray?—is it their lovely father? Perhaps you'll say it's you! Certainly you have been nice to them, but you must remember that you only came here the other day. Isn't it only for them that I am trying to keep myself alive?'

This formula struck Laura Wing as grotesque, so that she replied with a laugh which betrayed too much her impression, 'Die for them—that would be better!'

Her sister, at this, looked at her with an extraordinary cold gravity. 'Don't interfere between me and my children. And for God's sake cease to harry me!'

Laura turned away: she said to herself that, given that intensity of silliness, of course the worst would come. She felt sick and helpless, and, practically, she had got the certitude she both wanted and dreaded. 'I don't know what has become of your mind,' she murmured; and she went to the door. But before she reached it Selina had flung herself upon her in one of her strange but, as she felt, really not encouraging revulsions. Her arms were about her, she clung to her, she covered Laura with the tears that had again begun to flow. She besought her to save her, to stay with her, to help her against herself, against *him*, against Lionel, against everything—to forgive her also all the horrid things she had said to her. Mrs. Berrington melted, liquefied, and the room was deluged with her repentance, her desolation, her confession, her promises and the articles of apparel which were detached from her by the high tide of her agitation. Laura remained with her for an hour, and before they separated the culpable woman had taken a tremendous vow—kneeling before her sister with her head in her lap—never again, as long as she lived, to consent to see Captain Crispin or to address a word to him, spoken or written. The girl went terribly tired to bed.

A month afterwards she lunched with Lady Davenant, whom she had not seen since the day she took Mr. Wendover to call upon her. The old woman had found herself obliged to entertain a small company, and as she disliked set parties she sent Laura a request for sympathy and assistance. She had disencumbered herself, at the end of so many years, of the burden of hospitality; but every now and then she invited people, in order to prove that she was not too old. Laura suspected her of choosing stupid ones on purpose to prove it better—to show that she could submit not only to the extraordinary but, what was much more difficult, to the usual. But when they had been properly fed she encouraged them to disperse; on this occasion as the party broke up Laura was the only person she asked to stay. She wished to know in the first place why she had not been to see her for so long, and in the second how that young man had behaved—the one she had brought that Sunday. Lady Davenant didn't remember his name, though he had been so good-natured, as she said, since then, as to leave a card. If he had behaved well that was a very good reason for the girl's neglect and Laura need give no other. Laura herself would not have behaved well if at such a time she had been running after old women. There was nothing, in general, that the girl liked less than being spoken of, off-hand, as a marriageable article—being planned and arranged for in this particular. It made too light of her independence, and though in general such inventions passed for benevolence they had always seemed to her to contain at bottom an impertinence—as if people could be moved about like a game of chequers. There was a liberty in the way Lady Davenant's imagination disposed of her (with such an *insouciance* of her own preferences), but she forgave that, because after all this old friend was not obliged to think of her at all.

'I knew that you were almost always out of town now, on Sundays—and so have we been,' Laura said. 'And then I have been a great deal with my sister—more than before.'

'More than before what?'

'Well, a kind of estrangement we had, about a certain matter.'

'And now you have made it all up?'

'Well, we have been able to talk of it (we couldn't before—without painful scenes), and that has cleared the air. We have gone about together a good deal,' Laura went on. 'She has wanted me constantly with her.'

'That's very nice. And where has she taken you?' asked the old lady.

'Oh, it's I who have taken her, rather.' And Laura hesitated.

'Where do you mean?—to say her prayers?'

'Well, to some concerts—and to the National Gallery.'

Lady Davenant laughed, disrespectfully, at this, and the girl watched her with a mournful face. 'My dear child, you are too delightful! You are trying to reform her? by Beethoven and Bach, by Rubens and Titian?'

'She is very intelligent, about music and pictures—she has excellent ideas,' said Laura.

'And you have been trying to draw them out? that is very commendable.'

'I think you are laughing at me, but I don't care,' the girl declared, smiling faintly.

'Because you have a consciousness of success?—in what do they call it?—the attempt to raise her tone? You have been trying to wind her up, and you *have* raised her tone?'

'Oh, Lady Davenant, I don't know and I don't understand!' Laura broke out. 'I don't understand anything any more—I have given up trying.'

‘That’s what I recommended you to do last winter. Don’t you remember that day at Plash?’

‘You told me to let her go,’ said Laura.

‘And evidently you haven’t taken my advice.’

‘How can I—how can I?’

‘Of course, how can you? And meanwhile if she doesn’t go it’s so much gained. But even if she should, won’t that nice young man remain?’ Lady Davenant inquired. ‘I hope very much Selina hasn’t taken you altogether away from him.’

Laura was silent a moment; then she returned: ‘What nice young man would ever look at me, if anything bad should happen?’

‘I would never look at *him* if he should let that prevent him!’ the old woman cried. ‘It isn’t for your sister he loves you, I suppose; is it?’

‘He doesn’t love me at all.’

‘Ah, then he does?’ Lady Davenant demanded, with some eagerness, laying her hand on the girl’s arm. Laura sat near her on her sofa and looked at her, for all answer to this, with an expression of which the sadness appeared to strike the old woman freshly. ‘Doesn’t he come to the house—doesn’t he say anything?’ she continued, with a voice of kindness.

‘He comes to the house—very often.’

‘And don’t you like him?’

‘Yes, very much—more than I did at first.’

‘Well, as you liked him at first well enough to bring him straight to see me, I suppose that means that now you are immensely pleased with him.’

‘He’s a gentleman,’ said Laura.

‘So he seems to me. But why then doesn’t he speak out?’

‘Perhaps that’s the very reason! Seriously,’ the girl added, ‘I don’t know what he comes to the house for.’

‘Is he in love with your sister?’

‘I sometimes think so.’

‘And does she encourage him?’

‘She detests him.’

‘Oh, then, I like him! I shall immediately write to him to come and see me: I shall appoint an hour and give him a piece of my mind.’

‘If I believed that, I should kill myself,’ said Laura.

‘You may believe what you like; but I wish you didn’t show your feelings so in your eyes. They might be those of a poor widow with fifteen children. When I was young I managed to be happy, whatever occurred; and I am sure I looked so.’

‘Oh yes, Lady Davenant—for you it was different. You were safe, in so many ways,’ Laura said. ‘And you were surrounded with consideration.’

‘I don’t know; some of us were very wild, and exceedingly ill thought of, and I didn’t cry about it. However, there are natures and natures. If you will come and stay with me to-morrow I will take you in.’

‘You know how kind I think you, but I have promised Selina not to leave her.’

‘Well, then, if she keeps you she must at least go straight!’ cried the old woman, with some asperity. Laura made no answer to this and Lady Davenant asked, after a moment: ‘And what is Lionel doing?’

‘I don’t know—he is very quiet.’

‘Doesn’t it please him—his wife’s improvement?’ The girl got up; apparently she was made uncomfortable by the ironical effect, if not by the ironical intention, of this question. Her old friend was kind but she was penetrating; her very next words pierced further. ‘Of course if you are really protecting her I can’t count upon you’: a remark not adapted to enliven Laura, who would have liked immensely to transfer herself to Queen’s Gate and had her very private ideas as to the efficacy of her protection. Lady Davenant kissed her and then suddenly said—

‘His address?’

‘The young man’s whom you brought here. But it’s no matter,’ the old woman added; ‘the butler will have entered it—from his card.’

‘Lady Davenant, you won’t do anything so loathsome!’ the girl cried, seizing her hand.

‘Why is it loathsome, if he comes so often? It’s rubbish, his caring for Selina—a married woman—when you are there.’

‘Why is it rubbish—when so many other people do?’

‘Oh, well, he is different—I could see that; or if he isn’t he ought to be!’

‘He likes to observe—he came here to take notes,’ said the girl. ‘And he thinks Selina a very interesting London specimen.’

‘In spite of her dislike of him?’

‘Oh, he doesn’t know that!’ Laura exclaimed.

‘Why not? he isn’t a fool.’

‘Oh, I have made it seem——’ But here Laura stopped; her colour had risen.

Lady Davenant stared an instant. ‘Made it seem that she inclines to him? Mercy, to do that how fond of him you must be!’ An observation which had the effect of driving the girl straight out of the house.

XI

On one of the last days of June Mrs. Berrington showed her sister a note she had received from ‘your dear friend,’ as she called him, Mr. Wendover. This was the manner in which she usually designated him, but she had naturally, in the present phase of her relations with Laura, never indulged in any renewal of the eminently perverse insinuations by means of which she had attempted, after the incident at the Soane Museum, to throw dust in her eyes. Mr. Wendover proposed to Mrs. Berrington that she and her sister should honour with their presence a box he had obtained for the opera three nights later—an occasion of high curiosity, the first appearance of a young American singer of whom considerable things were expected. Laura left it to Selina to decide whether they should accept this invitation, and Selina proved to be of two or three differing minds. First she said it wouldn’t be convenient to her to go, and she wrote to the young man to this effect. Then, on second thoughts, she considered she might very well go, and telegraphed an acceptance. Later she saw reason to regret her acceptance and communicated this circumstance to her sister, who remarked that it

was still not too late to change. Selina left her in ignorance till the next day as to whether she had retracted; then she told her that she had let the matter stand—they would go. To this Laura replied that she was glad—for Mr. Wendover. ‘And for yourself,’ Selina said, leaving the girl to wonder why every one (this universality was represented by Mrs. Lionel Berrington and Lady Davenant) had taken up the idea that she entertained a passion for her compatriot. She was clearly conscious that this was not the case; though she was glad her esteem for him had not yet suffered the disturbance of her seeing reason to believe that Lady Davenant had already meddled, according to her terrible threat. Laura was surprised to learn afterwards that Selina had, in London parlance, ‘thrown over’ a dinner in order to make the evening at the opera fit in. The dinner would have made her too late, and she didn’t care about it: she wanted to hear the whole opera.

The sisters dined together alone, without any question of Lionel, and on alighting at Covent Garden found Mr. Wendover awaiting them in the portico. His box proved commodious and comfortable, and Selina was gracious to him: she thanked him for his consideration in not stuffing it full of people. He assured her that he expected but one other inmate—a gentleman of a shrinking disposition, who would take up no room. The gentleman came in after the first act; he was introduced to the ladies as Mr. Booker, of Baltimore. He knew a great deal about the young lady they had come to listen to, and he was not so shrinking but that he attempted to impart a portion of his knowledge even while she was singing. Before the second act was over Laura perceived Lady Ringrose in a box on the other side of the house, accompanied by a lady unknown to her. There was apparently another person in the box, behind the two ladies, whom they turned round from time to time to talk with. Laura made no observation about Lady Ringrose to her sister, and she noticed that Selina never resorted to the glass to look at her. That Mrs. Berrington had not failed to see her, however, was proved by the fact that at the end of the second act (the opera was Meyerbeer’s *Huguenots*) she suddenly said, turning to Mr. Wendover: ‘I hope you won’t mind very much if I go for a short time to sit with a friend on the other side of the house.’ She smiled with all her sweetness as she announced this intention, and had the benefit of the fact that an apologetic expression is highly becoming to a pretty woman. But she abstained from looking at her sister, and the latter, after a wondering glance at her, looked at Mr. Wendover. She saw that he was disappointed—even slightly wounded: he had taken some trouble to get his box and it had been no small pleasure to him to see it graced by the presence of a celebrated beauty. Now his situation collapsed if the celebrated beauty were going to transfer her light to another quarter. Laura was unable to imagine what had come into her sister’s head—to make her so inconsiderate, so rude. Selina tried to perform her act of defection in a soothing, conciliating way, so far as appealing eyebeams went; but she gave no particular reason for her escapade, withheld the name of the friends in question and betrayed no consciousness that it was not usual for ladies to roam about the lobbies. Laura asked her no question, but she said to her, after an hesitation: ‘You won’t be long, surely. You know you oughtn’t to leave me here.’ Selina took no notice of this—excused herself in no way to the girl. Mr. Wendover only exclaimed, smiling in reference to Laura’s last remark: ‘Oh, so far as leaving you here goes—!’ In spite of his great defect (and it was his only one, that she could see) of having only an ascending scale of seriousness, she judged him interestedly enough to feel a real pleasure in noticing that though he was annoyed at Selina’s going away and not saying that she would come back soon, he conducted himself as a gentleman should, submitted respectfully, gallantly, to her wish. He suggested that her friends might perhaps, instead, be induced to come to his box, but when she had objected, ‘Oh, you see, there are too many,’ he put her shawl on her shoulders, opened the box, offered her his arm. While this was going on Laura saw Lady Ringrose studying them with her glass. Selina refused Mr. Wendover’s arm; she said, ‘Oh no, you stay with *her*—I daresay *he’ll* take me:’ and she gazed inspiringly at Mr.

Booker. Selina never mentioned a name when the pronoun would do. Mr. Booker of course sprang to the service required and led her away, with an injunction from his friend to bring her back promptly. As they went off Laura heard Selina say to her companion—and she knew Mr. Wendover could also hear it—'Nothing would have induced me to leave her alone with *you!*' She thought this a very extraordinary speech—she thought it even vulgar; especially considering that she had never seen the young man till half an hour before and since then had not exchanged twenty words with him. It came to their ears so distinctly that Laura was moved to notice it by exclaiming, with a laugh: 'Poor Mr. Booker, what does she suppose I would do to him?'

'Oh, it's for you she's afraid,' said Mr. Wendover.

Laura went on, after a moment: 'She oughtn't to have left me alone with you, either.'

'Oh yes, she ought—after all!' the young man returned.

The girl had uttered these words from no desire to say something flirtatious, but because they simply expressed a part of the judgment she passed, mentally, on Selina's behaviour. She had a sense of wrong—of being made light of; for Mrs. Berrington certainly knew that honourable women didn't (for the appearance of the thing) arrange to leave their unmarried sister sitting alone, publicly, at the playhouse, with a couple of young men—the couple that there would be as soon as Mr. Booker should come back. It displeased her that the people in the opposite box, the people Selina had joined, should see her exhibited in this light. She drew the curtain of the box a little, she moved a little more behind it, and she heard her companion utter a vague appealing, protecting sigh, which seemed to express his sense (her own corresponded with it) that the glory of the occasion had somehow suddenly departed. At the end of some minutes she perceived among Lady Ringrose and her companions a movement which appeared to denote that Selina had come in. The two ladies in front turned round—something went on at the back of the box. 'She's there,' Laura said, indicating the place; but Mrs. Berrington did not show herself—she remained masked by the others. Neither was Mr. Booker visible; he had not, seemingly, been persuaded to remain, and indeed Laura could see that there would not have been room for him. Mr. Wendover observed, ruefully, that as Mrs. Berrington evidently could see nothing at all from where she had gone she had exchanged a very good place for a very bad one. 'I can't imagine—I can't imagine——' said the girl; but she paused, losing herself in reflections and wonderments, in conjectures that soon became anxieties. Suspicion of Selina was now so rooted in her heart that it could make her unhappy even when it pointed nowhere, and by the end of half an hour she felt how little her fears had really been lulled since that scene of dishevelment and contrition in the early dawn.

The opera resumed its course, but Mr. Booker did not come back. The American singer trilled and warbled, executed remarkable flights, and there was much applause, every symptom of success; but Laura became more and more unaware of the music—she had no eyes but for Lady Ringrose and her friend. She watched them earnestly—she tried to sound with her glass the curtained dimness behind them. Their attention was all for the stage and they gave no present sign of having any fellow-listeners. These others had either gone away or were leaving them very much to themselves. Laura was unable to guess any particular motive on her sister's part, but the conviction grew within her that she had not put such an affront on Mr. Wendover simply in order to have a little chat with Lady Ringrose. There was something else, there was some one else, in the affair; and when once the girl's idea had become as definite as that it took but little longer to associate itself with the image of Captain Crispin. This image made her draw back further behind her curtain, because it brought the blood to her face; and if she coloured for shame she coloured also for anger. Captain Crispin was

there, in the opposite box; those horrible women concealed him (she forgot how harmless and well-read Lady Ringrose had appeared to her that time at Mellows); they had lent themselves to this abominable proceeding. Selina was nestling there in safety with him, by their favour, and she had had the baseness to lay an honest girl, the most loyal, the most unselfish of sisters, under contribution to the same end. Laura crimsoned with the sense that she had been, unsuspectingly, part of a scheme, that she was being used as the two women opposite were used, but that she had been outraged into the bargain, inasmuch as she was not, like them, a conscious accomplice and not a person to be given away in that manner before hundreds of people. It came back to her how bad Selina had been the day of the business in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and how in spite of intervening comedies the woman who had then found such words of injury would be sure to break out in a new spot with a new weapon. Accordingly, while the pure music filled the place and the rich picture of the stage glowed beneath it, Laura found herself face to face with the strange inference that the evil of Selina's nature made her wish—since she had given herself to it—to bring her sister to her own colour by putting an appearance of 'fastness' upon her. The girl said to herself that she would have succeeded, in the cynical view of London; and to her troubled spirit the immense theatre had a myriad eyes, eyes that she knew, eyes that would know her, that would see her sitting there with a strange young man. She had recognised many faces already and her imagination quickly multiplied them. However, after she had burned a while with this particular revolt she ceased to think of herself and of what, as regarded herself, Selina had intended: all her thought went to the mere calculation of Mrs. Berrington's return. As she did not return, and still did not, Laura felt a sharp constriction of the heart. She knew not what she feared—she knew not what she supposed. She was so nervous (as she had been the night she waited, till morning, for her sister to re-enter the house in Grosvenor Place) that when Mr. Wendover occasionally made a remark to her she failed to understand him, was unable to answer him. Fortunately he made very few; he was preoccupied—either wondering also what Selina was 'up to' or, more probably, simply absorbed in the music. What she *had* comprehended, however, was that when at three different moments she had said, restlessly, 'Why doesn't Mr. Booker come back?' he replied, 'Oh, there's plenty of time—we are very comfortable.' These words she was conscious of; she particularly noted them and they interwove themselves with her restlessness. She also noted, in her tension, that after her third inquiry Mr. Wendover said something about looking up his friend, if she didn't mind being left alone a moment. He quitted the box and during this interval Laura tried more than ever to see with her glass what had become of her sister. But it was as if the ladies opposite had arranged themselves, had arranged their curtains, on purpose to frustrate such an attempt: it was impossible to her even to assure herself of what she had begun to suspect, that Selina was now not with them. If she was not with them where in the world had she gone? As the moments elapsed, before Mr. Wendover's return, she went to the door of the box and stood watching the lobby, for the chance that he would bring back the absentee. Presently she saw him coming alone, and something in the expression of his face made her step out into the lobby to meet him. He was smiling, but he looked embarrassed and strange, especially when he saw her standing there as if she wished to leave the place.

'I hope you don't want to go,' he said, holding the door for her to pass back into the box.

'Where are they—where are they?' she demanded, remaining in the corridor.

'I saw our friend—he has found a place in the stalls, near the door by which you go into them—just here under us.'

'And does he like that better?'

Mr. Wendover's smile became perfunctory as he looked down at her. 'Mrs. Berrington has made such an amusing request of him.'

'An amusing request?'

'She made him promise not to come back.'

'Made him promise——?' Laura stared.

'She asked him—as a particular favour to her—not to join us again. And he said he wouldn't.'

'Ah, the monster!' Laura exclaimed, blushing crimson.

'Do you mean poor Mr. Booker?' Mr. Wendover asked. 'Of course he had to assure her that the wish of so lovely a lady was law. But he doesn't understand!' laughed the young man.

'No more do I. And where is the lovely lady?' said Laura, trying to recover herself.

'He hasn't the least idea.'

'Isn't she with Lady Ringrose?'

'If you like I will go and see.'

Laura hesitated, looking down the curved lobby, where there was nothing to see but the little numbered doors of the boxes. They were alone in the lamplit bareness; the *finale* of the act was ringing and booming behind them. In a moment she said: 'I'm afraid I must trouble you to put me into a cab.'

'Ah, you won't see the rest? *Do* stay—what difference does it make?' And her companion still held open the door of the box. Her eyes met his, in which it seemed to her that as well as in his voice there was conscious sympathy, entreaty, vindication, tenderness. Then she gazed into the vulgar corridor again; something said to her that if she should return she would be taking the most important step of her life. She considered this, and while she did so a great burst of applause filled the place as the curtain fell. 'See what we are losing! And the last act is so fine,' said Mr. Wendover. She returned to her seat and he closed the door of the box behind them.

Then, in this little upholstered receptacle which was so public and yet so private, Laura Wing passed through the strangest moments she had known. An indication of their strangeness is that when she presently perceived that while she was in the lobby Lady Ringrose and her companion had quite disappeared, she observed the circumstance without an exclamation, holding herself silent. Their box was empty, but Laura looked at it without in the least feeling this to be a sign that Selina would now come round. She would never come round again, nor would she have gone home from the opera. That was by this time absolutely definite to the girl, who had first been hot and now was cold with the sense of what Selina's injunction to poor Mr. Booker exactly meant. It was worthy of her, for it was simply a vicious little kick as she took her flight. Grosvenor Place would not shelter her that night and would never shelter her more: that was the reason she tried to spatter her sister with the mud into which she herself had jumped. She would not have dared to treat her in such a fashion if they had had a prospect of meeting again. The strangest part of this remarkable juncture was that what ministered most to our young lady's suppressed emotion was not the tremendous reflection that this time Selina had really 'bolted' and that on the morrow all London would know it: all that had taken the glare of certainty (and a very hideous hue it was), whereas the chill that had fallen upon the girl now was that of a mystery which waited to be cleared up. Her heart was full of suspense—suspense of which she returned the pressure, trying to twist it into

expectation. There was a certain chance in life that sat there beside her, but it would go for ever if it should not move nearer that night; and she listened, she watched, for it to move. I need not inform the reader that this chance presented itself in the person of Mr. Wendover, who more than any one she knew had it in his hand to transmute her detestable position. Tomorrow he would know, and would think sufficiently little of a young person of *that* breed: therefore it could only be a question of his speaking on the spot. That was what she had come back into the box for—to give him his opportunity. It was open to her to think he had asked for it—adding everything together.

The poor girl added, added, deep in her heart, while she said nothing. The music was not there now, to keep them silent; yet he remained quiet, even as she did, and that for some minutes was a part of her addition. She felt as if she were running a race with failure and shame; she would get in first if she should get in before the degradation of the morrow. But this was not very far off, and every minute brought it nearer. It would be there in fact, virtually, that night, if Mr. Wendover should begin to realise the brutality of Selina's not turning up at all. The comfort had been, hitherto, that he didn't realise brutalities. There were certain violins that emitted tentative sounds in the orchestra; they shortened the time and made her uneasier—fixed her idea that he could lift her out of her mire if he would. It didn't appear to prove that he would, his also observing Lady Ringrose's empty box without making an encouraging comment upon it. Laura waited for him to remark that her sister obviously would turn up now; but no such words fell from his lips. He must either like Selina's being away or judge it damningly, and in either case why didn't he speak? If he had nothing to say, why *had* he said, why had he done, what did he mean——? But the girl's inward challenge to him lost itself in a mist of faintness; she was screwing herself up to a purpose of her own, and it hurt almost to anguish, and the whole place, around her, was a blur and swim, through which she heard the tuning of fiddles. Before she knew it she had said to him, 'Why have you come so often?'

'So often? To see you, do you mean?'

'To see *me*—it was for that? Why have you come?' she went on. He was evidently surprised, and his surprise gave her a point of anger, a desire almost that her words should hurt him, lash him. She spoke low, but she heard herself, and she thought that if what she said sounded to *him* in the same way——! 'You have come very often—too often, too often!'

He coloured, he looked frightened, he was, clearly, extremely startled. 'Why, you have been so kind, so delightful,' he stammered.

'Yes, of course, and so have you! Did you come for Selina? She is married, you know, and devoted to her husband.' A single minute had sufficed to show the girl that her companion was quite unprepared for her question, that he was distinctly not in love with her and was face to face with a situation entirely new. The effect of this perception was to make her say wilder things.

'Why, what is more natural, when one likes people, than to come often? Perhaps I have bored you—with our American way,' said Mr. Wendover.

'And is it because you like me that you have kept me here?' Laura asked. She got up, leaning against the side of the box; she had pulled the curtain far forward and was out of sight of the house.

He rose, but more slowly; he had got over his first confusion. He smiled at her, but his smile was dreadful. 'Can you have any doubt as to what I have come for? It's a pleasure to me that you have liked me well enough to ask.'

For an instant she thought he was coming nearer to her, but he didn't: he stood there twirling his gloves. Then an unspeakable shame and horror—horror of herself, of him, of everything—came over her, and she sank into a chair at the back of the box, with averted eyes, trying to get further into her corner. 'Leave me, leave me, go away!' she said, in the lowest tone that he could hear. The whole house seemed to her to be listening to her, pressing into the box.

'Leave you alone—in this place—when I love you? I can't do that—indeed I can't.'

'You don't love me—and you torture me by staying!' Laura went on, in a convulsed voice. 'For God's sake go away and don't speak to me, don't let me see you or hear of you again!'

Mr. Wendover still stood there, exceedingly agitated, as well he might be, by this inconceivable scene. Unaccustomed feelings possessed him and they moved him in different directions. Her command that he should take himself off was passionate, yet he attempted to resist, to speak. How would she get home—would she see him to-morrow—would she let him wait for her outside? To this Laura only replied: 'Oh dear, oh dear, if you would only go!' and at the same instant she sprang up, gathering her cloak around her as if to escape from him, to rush away herself. He checked this movement, however, clapping on his hat and holding the door. One moment more he looked at her—her own eyes were closed; then he exclaimed, pitifully, 'Oh Miss Wing, oh Miss Wing!' and stepped out of the box.

When he had gone she collapsed into one of the chairs again and sat there with her face buried in a fold of her mantle. For many minutes she was perfectly still—she was ashamed even to move. The one thing that could have justified her, blown away the dishonour of her monstrous overture, would have been, on his side, the quick response of unmistakable passion. It had not come, and she had nothing left but to loathe herself. She did so, violently, for a long time, in the dark corner of the box, and she felt that he loathed her too. 'I love you!'—how pitifully the poor little make-believe words had quavered out and how much disgust they must have represented! 'Poor man—poor man!' Laura Wing suddenly found herself murmuring: compassion filled her mind at the sense of the way she had used him. At the same moment a flare of music broke out: the last act of the opera had begun and she had sprung up and quitted the box.

The passages were empty and she made her way without trouble. She descended to the vestibule; there was no one to stare at her and her only fear was that Mr. Wendover would be there. But he was not, apparently, and she saw that she should be able to go away quickly. Selina would have taken the carriage—she could be sure of that; or if she hadn't it wouldn't have come back yet; besides, she couldn't possibly wait there so long as while it was called. She was in the act of asking one of the attendants, in the portico, to get her a cab, when some one hurried up to her from behind, overtaking her—a gentleman in whom, turning round, she recognised Mr. Booker. He looked almost as bewildered as Mr. Wendover, and his appearance disconcerted her almost as much as that of his friend would have done. 'Oh, are you going away, alone? What must you think of me?' this young man exclaimed; and he began to tell her something about her sister and to ask her at the same time if he might not go with her—help her in some way. He made no inquiry about Mr. Wendover, and she afterwards judged that that distracted gentleman had sought him out and sent him to her assistance; also that he himself was at that moment watching them from behind some column. He would have been hateful if he had shown himself; yet (in this later meditation) there was a voice in her heart which commended his delicacy. He effaced himself to look after her—he provided for her departure by proxy.

‘A cab, a cab—that’s all I want!’ she said to Mr. Booker; and she almost pushed him out of the place with the wave of the hand with which she indicated her need. He rushed off to call one, and a minute afterwards the messenger whom she had already despatched rattled up in a hansom. She quickly got into it, and as she rolled away she saw Mr. Booker returning in all haste with another. She gave a passionate moan—this common confusion seemed to add a grotesqueness to her predicament.

XII

The next day, at five o’clock, she drove to Queen’s Gate, turning to Lady Davenant in her distress in order to turn somewhere. Her old friend was at home and by extreme good fortune alone; looking up from her book, in her place by the window, she gave the girl as she came in a sharp glance over her glasses. This glance was acquisitive; she said nothing, but laying down her book stretched out her two gloved hands. Laura took them and she drew her down toward her, so that the girl sunk on her knees and in a moment hid her face, sobbing, in the old woman’s lap. There was nothing said for some time: Lady Davenant only pressed her tenderly—stroked her with her hands. ‘Is it very bad?’ she asked at last. Then Laura got up, saying as she took a seat, ‘Have you heard of it and do people know it?’

‘I haven’t heard anything. Is it very bad?’ Lady Davenant repeated.

‘We don’t know where Selina is—and her maid’s gone.’

Lady Davenant looked at her visitor a moment. ‘Lord, what an ass!’ she then ejaculated, putting the paper-knife into her book to keep her place. ‘And whom has she persuaded to take her—Charles Crispin?’ she added.

‘We suppose—we suppose——’ said Laura.

‘And he’s another,’ interrupted the old woman. ‘And who supposes—Geordie and Ferdy?’

‘I don’t know; it’s all black darkness!’

‘My dear, it’s a blessing, and now you can live in peace.’

‘In peace!’ cried Laura; ‘with my wretched sister leading such a life?’

‘Oh, my dear, I daresay it will be very comfortable; I am sorry to say anything in favour of such doings, but it very often is. Don’t worry; you take her too hard. Has she gone abroad?’ the old lady continued. ‘I daresay she has gone to some pretty, amusing place.’

‘I don’t know anything about it. I only know she is gone. I was with her last evening and she left me without a word.’

‘Well, that was better. I hate ‘em when they make parting scenes: it’s too mawkish!’

‘Lionel has people watching them,’ said the girl; ‘agents, detectives, I don’t know what. He has had them for a long time; I didn’t know it.’

‘Do you mean you would have told her if you had? What is the use of detectives now? Isn’t he rid of her?’

‘Oh, I don’t know, he’s as bad as she; he talks too horribly—he wants every one to know it,’ Laura groaned.

‘And has he told his mother?’

‘I suppose so: he rushed off to see her at noon. She’ll be overwhelmed.’

‘Overwhelmed? Not a bit of it!’ cried Lady Davenant, almost gaily. ‘When did anything in the world overwhelm her and what do you take her for? She’ll only make some delightful odd

speech. As for people knowing it,' she added, 'they'll know it whether he wants them or not. My poor child, how long do you expect to make believe?'

'Lionel expects some news to-night,' Laura said. 'As soon as I know where she is I shall start.'

'Start for where?'

'To go to her—to do something.'

'Something preposterous, my dear. Do you expect to bring her back?'

'He won't take her in,' said Laura, with her dried, dismal eyes. 'He wants his divorce—it's too hideous!'

'Well, as she wants hers what is simpler?'

'Yes, she wants hers. Lionel swears by all the gods she can't get it.'

'Bless me, won't one do?' Lady Davenant asked. 'We shall have some pretty reading.'

'It's awful, awful, awful!' murmured Laura.

'Yes, they oughtn't to be allowed to publish them. I wonder if we couldn't stop that. At any rate he had better be quiet: tell him to come and see me.'

'You won't influence him; he's dreadful against her. Such a house as it is to-day!'

'Well, my dear, naturally.'

'Yes, but it's terrible for me: it's all more sickening than I can bear.'

'My dear child, come and stay with me,' said the old woman, gently.

'Oh, I can't desert her; I can't abandon her!'

'Desert—abandon? What a way to put it! Hasn't she abandoned you?'

'She has no heart—she's too base!' said the girl. Her face was white and the tears now began to rise to her eyes again.

Lady Davenant got up and came and sat on the sofa beside her: she put her arms round her and the two women embraced. 'Your room is all ready,' the old lady remarked. And then she said, 'When did she leave you? When did you see her last?'

'Oh, in the strangest, maddest, crudest way, the way most insulting to me. We went to the opera together and she left me there with a gentleman. We know nothing about her since.'

'With a gentleman?'

'With Mr. Wendover—that American, and something too dreadful happened.'

'Dear me, did he kiss you?' asked Lady Davenant.

Laura got up quickly, turning away. 'Good-bye, I'm going, I'm going!' And in reply to an irritated, protesting exclamation from her companion she went on, 'Anywhere—anywhere to get away!'

'To get away from your American?'

'I asked him to marry me!' The girl turned round with her tragic face.

'He oughtn't to have left that to you.'

‘I knew this horror was coming and it took possession of me, there in the box, from one moment to the other—the idea of making sure of some other life, some protection, some respectability. First I thought he liked me, he had behaved as if he did. And I like him, he is a very good man. So I asked him, I couldn’t help it, it was too hideous—I offered myself!’ Laura spoke as if she were telling that she had stabbed him, standing there with dilated eyes.

Lady Davenant got up again and went to her; drawing off her glove she felt her cheek with the back of her hand. ‘You are ill, you are in a fever. I’m sure that whatever you said it was very charming.’

‘Yes, I am ill,’ said Laura.

‘Upon my honour you shan’t go home, you shall go straight to bed. And what did he say to you?’

‘Oh, it was too miserable!’ cried the girl, pressing her face again into her companion’s kerchief. ‘I was all, all mistaken; he had never thought!’

‘Why the deuce then did he run about that way after you? He was a brute to say it!’

‘He didn’t say it and he never ran about. He behaved like a perfect gentleman.’

‘I’ve no patience—I wish I had seen him that time!’ Lady Davenant declared.

‘Yes, that would have been nice! You’ll never see him; if he *is* a gentleman he’ll rush away.’

‘Bless me, what a rushing away!’ murmured the old woman. Then passing her arm round Laura she added, ‘You’ll please to come upstairs with me.’

Half an hour later she had some conversation with her butler which led to his consulting a little register into which it was his law to transcribe with great neatness, from their cards, the addresses of new visitors. This volume, kept in the drawer of the hall table, revealed the fact that Mr. Wendover was staying in George Street, Hanover Square. ‘Get into a cab immediately and tell him to come and see me this evening,’ Lady Davenant said. ‘Make him understand that it interests him very nearly, so that no matter what his engagements may be he must give them up. Go quickly and you’ll just find him: he’ll be sure to be at home to dress for dinner.’ She had calculated justly, for a few minutes before ten o’clock the door of her drawing-room was thrown open and Mr. Wendover was announced.

‘Sit there,’ said the old lady; ‘no, not that one, nearer to me. We must talk low. My dear sir, I won’t bite you!’

‘Oh, this is very comfortable,’ Mr. Wendover replied vaguely, smiling through his visible anxiety. It was no more than natural that he should wonder what Laura Wing’s peremptory friend wanted of him at that hour of the night; but nothing could exceed the gallantry of his attempt to conceal the symptoms of alarm.

‘You ought to have come before, you know,’ Lady Davenant went on. ‘I have wanted to see you more than once.’

‘I have been dining out—I hurried away. This was the first possible moment, I assure you.’

‘I too was dining out and I stopped at home on purpose to see you. But I didn’t mean to-night, for you have done very well. I was quite intending to send for you—the other day. But something put it out of my head. Besides, I knew she wouldn’t like it.’

‘Why, Lady Davenant, I made a point of calling, ever so long ago—after that day!’ the young man exclaimed, not reassured, or at any rate not enlightened.

‘I daresay you did—but you mustn’t justify yourself; that’s just what I don’t want; it isn’t what I sent for you for. I have something very particular to say to you, but it’s very difficult. Voyons un peu!’

The old woman reflected a little, with her eyes on his face, which had grown more grave as she went on; its expression intimated that he failed as yet to understand her and that he at least was not exactly trifling. Lady Davenant’s musings apparently helped her little, if she was looking for an artful approach; for they ended in her saying abruptly, ‘I wonder if you know what a capital girl she is.’

‘Do you mean—do you mean——?’ stammered Mr. Wendover, pausing as if he had given her no right not to allow him to conceive alternatives.

‘Yes, I do mean. She’s upstairs, in bed.’

‘Upstairs in bed!’ The young man stared.

‘Don’t be afraid—I’m not going to send for her!’ laughed his hostess; ‘her being here, after all, has nothing to do with it, except that she *did* come—yes, certainly, she did come. But my keeping her—that was my doing. My maid has gone to Grosvenor Place to get her things and let them know that she will stay here for the present. Now am I clear?’

‘Not in the least,’ said Mr. Wendover, almost sternly.

Lady Davenant, however, was not of a composition to suspect him of sternness or to care very much if she did, and she went on, with her quick discursiveness: ‘Well, we must be patient; we shall work it out together. I was afraid you would go away, that’s why I lost no time. Above all I want you to understand that she has not the least idea that I have sent for you, and you must promise me never, never, never to let her know. She would be monstrous angry. It is quite my own idea—I have taken the responsibility. I know very little about you of course, but she has spoken to me well of you. Besides, I am very clever about people, and I liked you that day, though you seemed to think I was a hundred and eighty.’

‘You do me great honour,’ Mr. Wendover rejoined.

‘I’m glad you’re pleased! You must be if I tell you that I like you now even better. I see what you are, except for the question of fortune. It doesn’t perhaps matter much, but have you any money? I mean have you a fine income?’

‘No, indeed I haven’t!’ And the young man laughed in his bewilderment. ‘I have very little money indeed.’

‘Well, I daresay you have as much as I. Besides, that would be a proof she is not mercenary.’

‘You haven’t in the least made it plain whom you are talking about,’ said Mr. Wendover. ‘I have no right to assume anything.’

‘Are you afraid of betraying her? I am more devoted to her even than I want you to be. She has told me what happened between you last night—what she said to you at the opera. That’s what I want to talk to you about.’

‘She was very strange,’ the young man remarked.

‘I am not so sure that she was strange. However, you are welcome to think it, for goodness knows she says so herself. She is overwhelmed with horror at her own words; she is absolutely distracted and prostrate.’

Mr. Wendover was silent a moment. ‘I assured her that I admire her—beyond every one. I was most kind to her.’

‘Did you say it in that tone? You should have thrown yourself at her feet! From the moment you didn’t—surely you understand women well enough to know.’

‘You must remember where we were—in a public place, with very little room for throwing!’ Mr. Wendover exclaimed.

‘Ah, so far from blaming you she says your behaviour was perfect. It’s only I who want to have it out with you,’ Lady Davenant pursued. ‘She’s so clever, so charming, so good and so unhappy.’

‘When I said just now she was strange, I meant only in the way she turned against me.’

‘She turned against you?’

‘She told me she hoped she should never see me again.’

‘And you, should you like to see her?’

‘Not now—not now!’ Mr. Wendover exclaimed, eagerly.

‘I don’t mean now, I’m not such a fool as that. I mean some day or other, when she has stopped accusing herself, if she ever does.’

‘Ah, Lady Davenant, you must leave that to me,’ the young man returned, after a moment’s hesitation.

‘Don’t be afraid to tell me I’m meddling with what doesn’t concern me,’ said his hostess. ‘Of course I know I’m meddling; I sent for you here to meddle. Who wouldn’t, for that creature? She makes one melt.’

‘I’m exceedingly sorry for her. I don’t know what she thinks she said.’

‘Well, that she asked you why you came so often to Grosvenor Place. I don’t see anything so awful in that, if you did go.’

‘Yes, I went very often. I liked to go.’

‘Now, that’s exactly where I wish to prevent a misconception,’ said Lady Davenant. ‘If you liked to go you had a reason for liking, and Laura Wing was the reason, wasn’t she?’

‘I thought her charming, and I think her so now more than ever.’

‘Then you are a dear good man. Vous faisiez votre cour, in short.’

Mr. Wendover made no immediate response: the two sat looking at each other. ‘It isn’t easy for me to talk of these things,’ he said at last; ‘but if you mean that I wished to ask her to be my wife I am bound to tell you that I had no such intention.’

‘Ah, then I’m at sea. You thought her charming and you went to see her every day. What then did you wish?’

‘I didn’t go every day. Moreover I think you have a very different idea in this country of what constitutes—well, what constitutes making love. A man commits himself much sooner.’

‘Oh, I don’t know what *your* odd ways may be!’ Lady Davenant exclaimed, with a shade of irritation.

‘Yes, but I was justified in supposing that those ladies did: they at least are American.’

“‘They,’ my dear sir! For heaven’s sake don’t mix up that nasty Selina with it!’

‘Why not, if I admired her too? I do extremely, and I thought the house most interesting.’

‘Mercy on us, if that’s your idea of a nice house! But I don’t know—I have always kept out of it,’ Lady Davenant added, checking herself. Then she went on, ‘If you are so fond of Mrs. Berrington I am sorry to inform you that she is absolutely good-for-nothing.’

‘Good-for-nothing?’

‘Nothing to speak of! I have been thinking whether I would tell you, and I have decided to do so because I take it that your learning it for yourself would be a matter of but a very short time. Selina has bolted, as they say.’

‘Bolted?’ Mr. Wendover repeated.

‘I don’t know what you call it in America.’

‘In America we don’t do it.’

‘Ah, well, if they stay, as they do usually abroad, that’s better. I suppose you didn’t think her capable of behaving herself, did you?’

‘Do you mean she has left her husband—with some one else?’

‘Neither more nor less; with a fellow named Crispin. It appears it all came off last evening, and she had her own reasons for doing it in the most offensive way—publicly, clumsily, with the vulgarest bravado. Laura has told me what took place, and you must permit me to express my surprise at your not having divined the miserable business.’

‘I saw something was wrong, but I didn’t understand. I’m afraid I’m not very quick at these things.’

‘Your state is the more gracious; but certainly you are not quick if you could call there so often and not see through Selina.’

‘Mr. Crispin, whoever he is, was never there,’ said the young man.

‘Oh, she was a clever hussy!’ his companion rejoined.

‘I knew she was fond of amusement, but that’s what I liked to see. I wanted to see a house of that sort.’

‘Fond of amusement is a very pretty phrase!’ said Lady Davenant, laughing at the simplicity with which her visitor accounted for his assiduity. ‘And did Laura Wing seem to you in her place in a house of that sort?’

‘Why, it was natural she should be with her sister, and she always struck me as very gay.’

‘That was your enlivening effect! And did she strike you as very gay last night, with this scandal hanging over her?’

‘She didn’t talk much,’ said Mr. Wendover.

‘She knew it was coming—she felt it, she saw it, and that’s what makes her sick now, that at *such* a time she should have challenged you, when she felt herself about to be associated (in people’s minds, of course) with such a vile business. In people’s minds and in yours—when you should know what had happened.’

‘Ah, Miss Wing isn’t associated——’ said Mr. Wendover. He spoke slowly, but he rose to his feet with a nervous movement that was not lost upon his companion: she noted it indeed with a certain inward sense of triumph. She was very deep, but she had never been so deep as when she made up her mind to mention the scandal of the house of Berrington to her visitor and intimated to him that Laura Wing regarded herself as near enough to it to receive from it

a personal stain. 'I'm extremely sorry to hear of Mrs. Berrington's misconduct,' he continued gravely, standing before her. 'And I am no less obliged to you for your interest.'

'Don't mention it,' she said, getting up too and smiling. 'I mean my interest. As for the other matter, it will all come out. Lionel will haul her up.'

'Dear me, how dreadful!'

'Yes, dreadful enough. But don't betray me.'

'Betray you?' he repeated, as if his thoughts had gone astray a moment.

'I mean to the girl. Think of her shame!'

'Her shame?' Mr. Wendover said, in the same way.

'It seemed to her, with what was becoming so clear to her, that an honest man might save her from it, might give her his name and his faith and help her to traverse the bad place. She exaggerates the badness of it, the stigma of her relationship. Good heavens, at that rate where would some of us be? But those are her ideas, they are absolutely sincere, and they had possession of her at the opera. She had a sense of being lost and was in a real agony to be rescued. She saw before her a kind gentleman who had seemed—who had certainly seemed——' And Lady Davenant, with her fine old face lighted by her bright sagacity and her eyes on Mr. Wendover's, paused, lingering on this word. 'Of course she must have been in a state of nerves.'

'I am very sorry for her,' said Mr. Wendover, with his gravity that committed him to nothing.

'So am I! And of course if you were not in love with her you weren't, were you?'

'I must bid you good-bye, I am leaving London.' That was the only answer Lady Davenant got to her inquiry.

'Good-bye then. She is the nicest girl I know. But once more, mind you don't let her suspect!'

'How can I let her suspect anything when I shall never see her again?'

'Oh, don't say that,' said Lady Davenant, very gently.

'She drove me away from her with a kind of ferocity.'

'Oh, gammon!' cried the old woman.

'I'm going home,' he said, looking at her with his hand on the door.

'Well, it's the best place for you. And for her too!' she added as he went out. She was not sure that the last words reached him.

XIII

Laura Wing was sharply ill for three days, but on the fourth she made up her mind she was better, though this was not the opinion of Lady Davenant, who would not hear of her getting up. The remedy she urged was lying still and yet lying still; but this specific the girl found well-nigh intolerable—it was a form of relief that only ministered to fever. She assured her friend that it killed her to do nothing: to which her friend replied by asking her what she had a fancy to do. Laura had her idea and held it tight, but there was no use in producing it before Lady Davenant, who would have knocked it to pieces. On the afternoon of the first day Lionel Berrington came, and though his intention was honest he brought no healing. Hearing she was ill he wanted to look after her—he wanted to take her back to Grosvenor Place and make her comfortable: he spoke as if he had every convenience for producing that condition,

though he confessed there was a little bar to it in his own case. This impediment was the ‘cheeky’ aspect of Miss Steet, who went sniffing about as if she knew a lot, if she should only condescend to tell it. He saw more of the children now; ‘I’m going to have ‘em in every day, poor little devils,’ he said; and he spoke as if the discipline of suffering had already begun for him and a kind of holy change had taken place in his life. Nothing had been said yet in the house, of course, as Laura knew, about Selina’s disappearance, in the way of treating it as irregular; but the servants pretended so hard not to be aware of anything in particular that they were like pickpockets looking with unnatural interest the other way after they have cribbed a fellow’s watch. To a certainty, in a day or two, the governess would give him warning: she would come and tell him she couldn’t stay in such a place, and he would tell her, in return, that she was a little donkey for not knowing that the place was much more respectable now than it had ever been.

This information Selina’s husband imparted to Lady Davenant, to whom he discoursed with infinite candour and humour, taking a highly philosophical view of his position and declaring that it suited him down to the ground. His wife couldn’t have pleased him better if she had done it on purpose; he knew where she had been every hour since she quitted Laura at the opera—he knew where she was at that moment and he was expecting to find another telegram on his return to Grosvenor Place. So if it suited *her* it was all right, wasn’t it? and the whole thing would go as straight as a shot. Lady Davenant took him up to see Laura, though she viewed their meeting with extreme disfavour, the girl being in no state for talking. In general Laura had little enough mind for it, but she insisted on seeing Lionel: she declared that if this were not allowed her she would go after him, ill as she was—she would dress herself and drive to his house. She dressed herself now, after a fashion; she got upon a sofa to receive him. Lady Davenant left him alone with her for twenty minutes, at the end of which she returned to take him away. This interview was not fortifying to the girl, whose idea—the idea of which I have said that she was tenacious—was to go after her sister, to take possession of her, cling to her and bring her back. Lionel, of course, wouldn’t hear of taking her back, nor would Selina presumably hear of coming; but this made no difference in Laura’s heroic plan. She would work it, she would compass it, she would go down on her knees, she would find the eloquence of angels, she would achieve miracles. At any rate it made her frantic not to try, especially as even in fruitless action she should escape from herself—an object of which her horror was not yet extinguished.

As she lay there through inexorably conscious hours the picture of that hideous moment in the box alternated with the vision of her sister’s guilty flight. She wanted to fly, herself—to go off and keep going for ever. Lionel was fussily kind to her and he didn’t abuse Selina—he didn’t tell her again how that lady’s behaviour suited his book. He simply resisted, with a little exasperating, dogged grin, her pitiful appeal for knowledge of her sister’s whereabouts. He knew what she wanted it for and he wouldn’t help her in any such game. If she would promise, solemnly, to be quiet, he would tell her when she got better, but he wouldn’t lend her a hand to make a fool of herself. Her work was cut out for her—she was to stay and mind the children: if she was so keen to do her duty she needn’t go further than that for it. He talked a great deal about the children and figured himself as pressing the little deserted darlings to his bosom. He was not a comedian, and she could see that he really believed he was going to be better and purer now. Laura said she was sure Selina would make an attempt to get them—or at least one of them; and he replied, grimly, ‘Yes, my dear, she had better try!’ The girl was so angry with him, in her hot, tossing weakness, for refusing to tell her even whether the desperate pair had crossed the Channel, that she was guilty of the immorality of regretting that the difference in badness between husband and wife was so distinct (for it was distinct, she could see that) as he made his dry little remark about Selina’s

trying. He told her he had already seen his solicitor, the clever Mr. Smallshaw, and she said she didn't care.

On the fourth day of her absence from Grosvenor Place she got up, at an hour when she was alone (in the afternoon, rather late), and prepared herself to go out. Lady Davenant had admitted in the morning that she was better, and fortunately she had not the complication of being subject to a medical opinion, having absolutely refused to see a doctor. Her old friend had been obliged to go out—she had scarcely quitted her before—and Laura had requested the hovering, rustling lady's-maid to leave her alone: she assured her she was doing beautifully. Laura had no plan except to leave London that night; she had a moral certainty that Selina had gone to the Continent. She had always done so whenever she had a chance, and what chance had ever been larger than the present? The Continent was fearfully vague, but she would deal sharply with Lionel—she would show him she had a right to knowledge. He would certainly be in town; he would be in a complacent bustle with his lawyers. She had told him that she didn't believe he had yet gone to them, but in her heart she believed it perfectly. If he didn't satisfy her she would go to Lady Ringrose, odious as it would be to her to ask a favour of this depraved creature: unless indeed Lady Ringrose had joined the little party to France, as on the occasion of Selina's last journey thither. On her way downstairs she met one of the footmen, of whom she made the request that he would call her a cab as quickly as possible—she was obliged to go out for half an hour. He expressed the respectful hope that she was better and she replied that she was perfectly well—he would please tell her ladyship when she came in. To this the footman rejoined that her ladyship *had* come in—she had returned five minutes before and had gone to her room. 'Miss Frothingham told her you were asleep, Miss,' said the man, 'and her ladyship said it was a blessing and you were not to be disturbed.'

'Very good, I will see her,' Laura remarked, with dissimulation: 'only please let me have my cab.'

The footman went downstairs and she stood there listening; presently she heard the house-door close—he had gone out on his errand. Then she descended very softly—she prayed he might not be long. The door of the drawing-room stood open as she passed it, and she paused before it, thinking she heard sounds in the lower hall. They appeared to subside and then she found herself faint—she was terribly impatient for her cab. Partly to sit down till it came (there was a seat on the landing, but another servant might come up or down and see her), and partly to look, at the front window, whether it were not coming, she went for a moment into the drawing-room. She stood at the window, but the footman was slow; then she sank upon a chair—she felt very weak. Just after she had done so she became aware of steps on the stairs and she got up quickly, supposing that her messenger had returned, though she had not heard wheels. What she saw was not the footman she had sent out, but the expansive person of the butler, followed apparently by a visitor. This functionary ushered the visitor in with the remark that he would call her ladyship, and before she knew it she was face to face with Mr. Wendover. At the same moment she heard a cab drive up, while Mr. Wendover instantly closed the door.

'Don't turn me away; do see me—do see me!' he said. 'I asked for Lady Davenant—they told me she was at home. But it was you I wanted, and I wanted her to help me. I was going away—but I couldn't. You look very ill—do listen to me! You don't understand—I will explain everything. Ah, how ill you look!' the young man cried, as the climax of this sudden, soft, distressed appeal. Laura, for all answer, tried to push past him, but the result of this movement was that she found herself enclosed in his arms. He stopped her, but she disengaged herself, she got her hand upon the door. He was leaning against it, so she couldn't

open it, and as she stood there panting she shut her eyes, so as not to see him. 'If you would let me tell you what I think—I would do anything in the world for you!' he went on.

'Let me go—you persecute me!' the girl cried, pulling at the handle.

'You don't do me justice—you are too cruel!' Mr. Wendover persisted.

'Let me go—let me go!' she only repeated, with her high, quavering, distracted note; and as he moved a little she got the door open. But he followed her out: would she see him that night? Where was she going? might he not go with her? would she see him to-morrow?

'Never, never, never!' she flung at him as she hurried away. The butler was on the stairs, descending from above; so he checked himself, letting her go. Laura passed out of the house and flew into her cab with extraordinary speed, for Mr. Wendover heard the wheels bear her away while the servant was saying to him in measured accents that her ladyship would come down immediately.

Lionel was at home, in Grosvenor Place: she burst into the library and found him playing papa. Geordie and Ferdy were sporting around him, the presence of Miss Steet had been dispensed with, and he was holding his younger son by the stomach, horizontally, between his legs, while the child made little sprawling movements which were apparently intended to represent the act of swimming. Geordie stood impatient on the brink of the imaginary stream, protesting that it was his turn now, and as soon as he saw his aunt he rushed at her with the request that she would take him up in the same fashion. She was struck with the superficiality of their childhood; they appeared to have no sense that she had been away and no care that she had been ill. But Lionel made up for this; he greeted her with affectionate jollity, said it was a good job she had come back, and remarked to the children that they would have great larks now that auntie was home again. Ferdy asked if she had been with mummy, but didn't wait for an answer, and she observed that they put no question about their mother and made no further allusion to her while they remained in the room. She wondered whether their father had enjoined upon them not to mention her, and reflected that even if he had such a command would not have been efficacious. It added to the ugliness of Selina's flight that even her children didn't miss her, and to the dreariness, somehow, to Laura's sense, of the whole situation that one could neither spend tears on the mother and wife, because she was not worth it, nor sentimentalise about the little boys, because they didn't inspire it. 'Well, you do look seedy—I'm bound to say that!' Lionel exclaimed; and he recommended strongly a glass of port, while Ferdy, not seizing this reference, suggested that daddy should take her by the waistband and teach her to 'strike out.' He represented himself in the act of drowning, but Laura interrupted this entertainment, when the servant answered the bell (Lionel having rung for the port), by requesting that the children should be conveyed to Miss Steet. 'Tell her she must never go away again,' Lionel said to Geordie, as the butler took him by the hand; but the only touching consequence of this injunction was that the child piped back to his father, over his shoulder, 'Well, you mustn't either, you know!'

'You must tell me or I'll kill myself—I give you my word!' Laura said to her brother-in-law, with unnecessary violence, as soon as they had left the room.

'I say, I say,' he rejoined, 'you *are* a wilful one! What do you want to threaten me for? Don't you know me well enough to know that ain't the way? That's the tone Selina used to take. Surely you don't want to begin and imitate her!' She only sat there, looking at him, while he leaned against the chimney-piece smoking a short cigar. There was a silence, during which she felt the heat of a certain irrational anger at the thought that a little ignorant, red-faced jockey should have the luck to be in the right as against her flesh and blood. She considered him helplessly, with something in her eyes that had never been there before—something that,

apparently, after a moment, made an impression on him. Afterwards, however, she saw very well that it was not her threat that had moved him, and even at the moment she had a sense, from the way he looked back at her, that this was in no manner the first time a baffled woman had told him that she would kill herself. He had always accepted his kinship with her, but even in her trouble it was part of her consciousness that he now lumped her with a mixed group of female figures, a little wavering and dim, who were associated in his memory with 'scenes,' with importunities and bothers. It is apt to be the disadvantage of women, on occasions of measuring their strength with men, that they may perceive that the man has a larger experience and that they themselves are a part of it. It is doubtless as a provision against such emergencies that nature has opened to them operations of the mind that are independent of experience. Laura felt the dishonour of her race the more that her brother-in-law seemed so gay and bright about it: he had an air of positive prosperity, as if his misfortune had turned into that. It came to her that he really liked the idea of the public *éclaircissement*—the fresh occupation, the bustle and importance and celebrity of it. That was sufficiently incredible, but as she was on the wrong side it was also humiliating. Besides, higher spirits always suggest finer wisdom, and such an attribute on Lionel's part was most humiliating of all. 'I haven't the least objection at present to telling you what you want to know. I shall have made my little arrangements very soon and you will be subpœnaed.'

'Subpœnaed?' the girl repeated, mechanically.

'You will be called as a witness on my side.'

'On your side.'

'Of course you're on my side, ain't you?'

'Can they force me to come?' asked Laura, in answer to this.

'No, they can't force you, if you leave the country.'

'That's exactly what I want to do.'

'That will be idiotic,' said Lionel, 'and very bad for your sister. If you don't help me you ought at least to help her.'

She sat a moment with her eyes on the ground. 'Where is she—where is she?' she then asked.

'They are at Brussels, at the Hôtel de Flandres. They appear to like it very much.'

'Are you telling me the truth?'

'Lord, my dear child, *I* don't lie!' Lionel exclaimed. 'You'll make a jolly mistake if you go to her,' he added. 'If you have seen her with him how can you speak for her?'

'I won't see her with him.'

'That's all very well, but he'll take care of that. Of course if you're ready for perjury——!'

Lionel exclaimed.

'I'm ready for anything.'

'Well, I've been kind to you, my dear,' he continued, smoking, with his chin in the air.

'Certainly you have been kind to me.'

'If you want to defend her you had better keep away from her,' said Lionel. 'Besides for yourself, it won't be the best thing in the world—to be known to have been in it.'

'I don't care about myself,' the girl returned, musingly.

‘Don’t you care about the children, that you are so ready to throw them over? For you would, my dear, you know. If you go to Brussels you never come back here—you never cross this threshold—you never touch them again!’

Laura appeared to listen to this last declaration, but she made no reply to it; she only exclaimed after a moment, with a certain impatience, ‘Oh, the children will do anyway!’ Then she added passionately, ‘You *won’t*, Lionel; in mercy’s name tell me that you won’t!’

‘I won’t what?’

‘Do the awful thing you say.’

‘Divorce her? The devil I won’t!’

‘Then why do you speak of the children—if you have no pity for them?’

Lionel stared an instant. ‘I thought you said yourself that they would do anyway!’

Laura bent her head, resting it on the back of her hand, on the leathern arm of the sofa. So she remained, while Lionel stood smoking; but at last, to leave the room, she got up with an effort that was a physical pain. He came to her, to detain her, with a little good intention that had no felicity for her, trying to take her hand persuasively. ‘Dear old girl, don’t try and behave just as *she* did! If you’ll stay quietly here I won’t call you, I give you my honour I won’t; there! You want to see the doctor—that’s the fellow you want to see. And what good will it do you, even if you bring her home in pink paper? Do you candidly suppose I’ll ever look at her—except across the court-room?’

‘I must, I must, I must!’ Laura cried, jerking herself away from him and reaching the door.

‘Well then, good-bye,’ he said, in the sternest tone she had ever heard him use.

She made no answer, she only escaped. She locked herself in her room; she remained there an hour. At the end of this time she came out and went to the door of the schoolroom, where she asked Miss Steet to be so good as to come and speak to her. The governess followed her to her apartment and there Laura took her partly into her confidence. There were things she wanted to do before going, and she was too weak to act without assistance. She didn’t want it from the servants, if only Miss Steet would learn from them whether Mr. Berrington were dining at home. Laura told her that her sister was ill and she was hurrying to join her abroad. It had to be mentioned, that way, that Mrs. Berrington had left the country, though of course there was no spoken recognition between the two women of the reasons for which she had done so. There was only a tacit hypocritical assumption that she was on a visit to friends and that there had been nothing queer about her departure. Laura knew that Miss Steet knew the truth, and the governess knew that she knew it. This young woman lent a hand, very confusedly, to the girl’s preparations; she ventured not to be sympathetic, as that would point too much to badness, but she succeeded perfectly in being dismal. She suggested that Laura was ill herself, but Laura replied that this was no matter when her sister was so much worse. She elicited the fact that Mr. Berrington was dining out—the butler believed with his mother—but she was of no use when it came to finding in the ‘Bradshaw’ which she brought up from the hall the hour of the night-boat to Ostend. Laura found it herself; it was conveniently late, and it was a gain to her that she was very near the Victoria station, where she would take the train for Dover. The governess wanted to go to the station with her, but the girl would not listen to this—she would only allow her to see that she had a cab. Laura let her help her still further; she sent her down to talk to Lady Davenant’s maid when that personage arrived in Grosvenor Place to inquire, from her mistress, what in the world had become of poor Miss Wing. The maid intimated, Miss Steet said on her return, that her ladyship would have come herself, only she was too angry. She was very bad indeed. It was

an indication of this that she had sent back her young friend's dressing-case and her clothes. Laura also borrowed money from the governess—she had too little in her pocket. The latter brightened up as the preparations advanced; she had never before been concerned in a flurried night-episode, with an unavowed clandestine side; the very imprudence of it (for a sick girl alone) was romantic, and before Laura had gone down to the cab she began to say that foreign life must be fascinating and to make wistful reflections. She saw that the coast was clear, in the nursery—that the children were asleep, for their aunt to come in. She kissed Ferdy while her companion pressed her lips upon Geordie, and Geordie while Laura hung for a moment over Ferdy. At the door of the cab she tried to make her take more money, and our heroine had an odd sense that if the vehicle had not rolled away she would have thrust into her hand a keepsake for Captain Crispin.

A quarter of an hour later Laura sat in the corner of a railway-carriage, muffled in her cloak (the July evening was fresh, as it so often is in London—fresh enough to add to her sombre thoughts the suggestion of the wind in the Channel), waiting in a vain torment of nervousness for the train to set itself in motion. Her nervousness itself had led her to come too early to the station, and it seemed to her that she had already waited long. A lady and a gentleman had taken their place in the carriage (it was not yet the moment for the outward crowd of tourists) and had left their appurtenances there while they strolled up and down the platform. The long English twilight was still in the air, but there was dusk under the grimy arch of the station and Laura flattered herself that the off-corner of the carriage she had chosen was in shadow. This, however, apparently did not prevent her from being recognised by a gentleman who stopped at the door, looking in, with the movement of a person who was going from carriage to carriage. As soon as he saw her he stepped quickly in, and the next moment Mr. Wendover was seated on the edge of the place beside her, leaning toward her, speaking to her low, with clasped hands. She fell back in her seat, closing her eyes again. He barred the way out of the compartment.

'I have followed you here—I saw Miss Steet—I want to implore you not to go! Don't, don't! I know what you're doing. Don't go, I beseech you. I saw Lady Davenant, I wanted to ask her to help me, I could bear it no longer. I have thought of you, night and day, these four days. Lady Davenant has told me things, and I entreat you not to go!'

Laura opened her eyes (there was something in his voice, in his pressing nearness), and looked at him a moment: it was the first time she had done so since the first of those detestable moments in the box at Covent Garden. She had never spoken to him of Selina in any but an honourable sense. Now she said, 'I'm going to my sister.'

'I know it, and I wish unspeakably you would give it up—it isn't good—it's a great mistake. Stay here and let me talk to you.'

The girl raised herself, she stood up in the carriage. Mr. Wendover did the same; Laura saw that the lady and gentleman outside were now standing near the door. 'What have you to say? It's my own business!' she returned, between her teeth. 'Go out, go out, go out!'

'Do you suppose I would speak if I didn't care—do you suppose I would care if I didn't love you?' the young man murmured, close to her face.

'What is there to care about? Because people will know it and talk? If it's bad it's the right thing for me! If I don't go to her where else shall I go?'

'Come to me, dearest, dearest!' Mr. Wendover went on. 'You are ill, you are mad! I love you—I assure you I do!'

She pushed him away with her hands. 'If you follow me I will jump off the boat!'

‘Take your places, take your places!’ cried the guard, on the platform. Mr. Wendover had to slip out, the lady and gentleman were coming in. Laura huddled herself into her corner again and presently the train drew away.

Mr. Wendover did not get into another compartment; he went back that evening to Queen’s Gate. He knew how interested his old friend there, as he now considered her, would be to hear what Laura had undertaken (though, as he learned, on entering her drawing-room again, she had already heard of it from her maid), and he felt the necessity to tell her once more how her words of four days before had fructified in his heart, what a strange, ineffaceable impression she had made upon him: to tell her in short and to repeat it over and over, that he had taken the most extraordinary fancy——! Lady Davenant was tremendously vexed at the girl’s perversity, but she counselled him patience, a long, persistent patience. A week later she heard from Laura Wing, from Antwerp, that she was sailing to America from that port—a letter containing no mention whatever of Selina or of the reception she had found at Brussels. To America Mr. Wendover followed his young compatriot (that at least she had no right to forbid), and there, for the moment, he has had a chance to practise the humble virtue recommended by Lady Davenant. He knows she has no money and that she is staying with some distant relatives in Virginia; a situation that he—perhaps too superficially—figures as unspeakably dreary. He knows further that Lady Davenant has sent her fifty pounds, and he himself has ideas of transmitting funds, not directly to Virginia but by the roundabout road of Queen’s Gate. Now, however, that Lionel Berrington’s deplorable suit is coming on he reflects with some satisfaction that the Court of Probate and Divorce is far from the banks of the Rappahannock. ‘Berrington *versus* Berrington and Others’ is coming on—but these are matters of the present hour.

The Patagonia

I

The houses were dark in the August night and the perspective of Beacon Street, with its double chain of lamps, was a foreshortened desert. The club on the hill alone, from its semi-cylindrical front, projected a glow upon the dusky vagueness of the Common, and as I passed it I heard in the hot stillness the click of a pair of billiard balls. As 'every one' was out of town perhaps the servants, in the extravagance of their leisure, were profaning the tables. The heat was insufferable and I thought with joy of the morrow, of the deck of the steamer, the freshening breeze, the sense of getting out to sea. I was even glad of what I had learned in the afternoon at the office of the company—that at the eleventh hour an old ship with a lower standard of speed had been put on in place of the vessel in which I had taken my passage. America was roasting, England might very well be stuffy, and a slow passage (which at that season of the year would probably also be a fine one) was a guarantee of ten or twelve days of fresh air.

I strolled down the hill without meeting a creature, though I could see through the palings of the Common that that recreative expanse was peopled with dim forms. I remembered Mrs. Nettlepoint's house—she lived in those days (they are not so distant, but there have been changes) on the water-side, a little way beyond the spot at which the Public Garden terminates; and I reflected that like myself she would be spending the night in Boston if it were true that, as had been mentioned to me a few days before at Mount Desert, she was to embark on the morrow for Liverpool. I presently saw this appearance confirmed by a light above her door and in two or three of her windows, and I determined to ask for her, having nothing to do till bedtime. I had come out simply to pass an hour, leaving my hotel to the blaze of its gas and the perspiration of its porters; but it occurred to me that my old friend might very well not know of the substitution of the *Patagonia* for the *Scandinavia*, so that it would be an act of consideration to prepare her mind. Besides, I could offer to help her, to look after her in the morning: lone women are grateful for support in taking ship for far countries.

As I stood on her doorstep I remembered that as she had a son she might not after all be so lone; yet at the same time it was present to me that Jasper Nettlepoint was not quite a young man to lean upon, having (as I at least supposed) a life of his own and tastes and habits which had long since drawn him away from the maternal side. If he did happen just now to be at home my solicitude would of course seem officious; for in his many wanderings—I believed he had roamed all over the globe—he would certainly have learned how to manage. None the less I was very glad to show Mrs. Nettlepoint I thought of her. With my long absence I had lost sight of her; but I had liked her of old; she had been a close friend of my sisters; and I had in regard to her that sense which is pleasant to those who, in general, have grown strange or detached—the feeling that she at least knew all about me. I could trust her at any time to tell people what a respectable person I was. Perhaps I was conscious of how little I deserved this indulgence when it came over me that for years I had not communicated with her. The measure of this neglect was given by my vagueness of mind about her son. However, I really belonged nowadays to a different generation: I was more the old lady's contemporary than Jasper's.

Mrs. Nettlepoint was at home: I found her in her back drawing-room, where the wide windows opened upon the water. The room was dusky—it was too hot for lamps—and she

sat slowly moving her fan and looking out on the little arm of the sea which is so pretty at night, reflecting the lights of Cambridgeport and Charlestown. I supposed she was musing upon the loved ones she was to leave behind, her married daughters, her grandchildren; but she struck a note more specifically Bostonian as she said to me, pointing with her fan to the Back Bay—'I shall see nothing more charming than that over there, you know!' She made me very welcome, but her son had told her about the *Patagonia*, for which she was sorry, as this would mean a longer voyage. She was a poor creature on shipboard and mainly confined to her cabin, even in weather extravagantly termed fine—as if any weather could be fine at sea.

'Ah, then your son's going with you?' I asked.

'Here he comes, he will tell you for himself much better than I am able to do.'

Jasper Nettlepoint came into the room at that moment, dressed in white flannel and carrying a large fan.

'Well, my dear, have you decided?' his mother continued, with some irony in her tone. 'He hasn't yet made up his mind, and we sail at ten o'clock!'

'What does it matter, when my things are put up?' said the young man. 'There is no crowd at this moment; there will be cabins to spare. I'm waiting for a telegram—that will settle it. I just walked up to the club to see if it was come—they'll send it there because they think the house is closed. Not yet, but I shall go back in twenty minutes.'

'Mercy, how you rush about in this temperature!' his mother exclaimed, while I reflected that it was perhaps *his* billiard-balls I had heard ten minutes before. I was sure he was fond of billiards.

'Rush? not in the least. I take it uncommonly easy.'

'Ah, I'm bound to say you do,' Mrs. Nettlepoint exclaimed, inconsequently. I divined that there was a certain tension between the pair and a want of consideration on the young man's part, arising perhaps from selfishness. His mother was nervous, in suspense, wanting to be at rest as to whether she should have his company on the voyage or be obliged to make it alone. But as he stood there smiling and slowly moving his fan he struck me somehow as a person on whom this fact would not sit very heavily. He was of the type of those whom other people worry about, not of those who worry about other people. Tall and strong, he had a handsome face, with a round head and close-curling hair; the whites of his eyes and the enamel of his teeth, under his brown moustache, gleamed vaguely in the lights of the Back Bay. I made out that he was sunburnt, as if he lived much in the open air, and that he looked intelligent but also slightly brutal, though not in a morose way. His brutality, if he had any, was bright and finished. I had to tell him who I was, but even then I saw that he failed to place me and that my explanations gave me in his mind no great identity or at any rate no great importance. I foresaw that he would in intercourse make me feel sometimes very young and sometimes very old. He mentioned, as if to show his mother that he might safely be left to his own devices, that he had once started from London to Bombay at three-quarters of an hour's notice.

'Yes, and it must have been pleasant for the people you were with!'

'Oh, the people I was with——!' he rejoined; and his tone appeared to signify that such people would always have to come off as they could. He asked if there were no cold drinks in the house, no lemonade, no iced syrups; in such weather something of that sort ought always to be kept going. When his mother remarked that surely at the club they *were* going he went on, 'Oh, yes, I had various things there; but you know I have walked down the hill since. One

should have something at either end. May I ring and see?' He rang while Mrs. Nettlepoint observed that with the people they had in the house—an establishment reduced naturally at such a moment to its simplest expression (they were burning-up candle-ends and there were no luxuries) she would not answer for the service. The matter ended in the old lady's going out of the room in quest of syrup with the female domestic who had appeared in response to the bell and in whom Jasper's appeal aroused no visible intelligence.

She remained away some time and I talked with her son, who was sociable but desultory and kept moving about the room, always with his fan, as if he were impatient. Sometimes he seated himself for an instant on the window-sill, and then I saw that he was in fact very good-looking; a fine brown, clean young athlete. He never told me on what special contingency his decision depended; he only alluded familiarly to an expected telegram, and I perceived that he was probably not addicted to copious explanations. His mother's absence was an indication that when it was a question of gratifying him she had grown used to spare no pains, and I fancied her rummaging in some close storeroom, among old preserve-pots, while the dull maid-servant held the candle awry. I know not whether this same vision was in his own eyes; at all events it did not prevent him from saying suddenly, as he looked at his watch, that I must excuse him, as he had to go back to the club. He would return in half an hour—or in less. He walked away and I sat there alone, conscious, in the dark, dismantled, simplified room, in the deep silence that rests on American towns during the hot season (there was now and then a far cry or a splash in the water, and at intervals the tinkle of the bells of the horse-cars on the long bridge, slow in the suffocating night), of the strange influence, half sweet, half sad, that abides in houses uninhabited or about to become so—in places muffled and bereaved, where the unheeded sofas and patient belittered tables seem to know (like the disconcerted dogs) that it is the eve of a journey.

After a while I heard the sound of voices, of steps, the rustle of dresses, and I looked round, supposing these things to be the sign of the return of Mrs. Nettlepoint and her handmaiden, bearing the refreshment prepared for her son. What I saw however was two other female forms, visitors just admitted apparently, who were ushered into the room. They were not announced—the servant turned her back on them and rambled off to our hostess. They came forward in a wavering, tentative, unintroduced way—partly, I could see, because the place was dark and partly because their visit was in its nature experimental, a stretch of confidence. One of the ladies was stout and the other was slim, and I perceived in a moment that one was talkative and the other silent. I made out further that one was elderly and the other young and that the fact that they were so unlike did not prevent their being mother and daughter. Mrs. Nettlepoint reappeared in a very few minutes, but the interval had sufficed to establish a communication (really copious for the occasion) between the strangers and the unknown gentleman whom they found in possession, hat and stick in hand. This was not my doing (for what had I to go upon?) and still less was it the doing of the person whom I supposed and whom I indeed quickly and definitely learned to be the daughter. She spoke but once—when her companion informed me that she was going out to Europe the next day to be married. Then she said, 'Oh, mother!' protestingly, in a tone which struck me in the darkness as doubly strange, exciting my curiosity to see her face.

It had taken her mother but a moment to come to that and to other things besides, after I had explained that I myself was waiting for Mrs. Nettlepoint, who would doubtless soon come back.

'Well, she won't know me—I guess she hasn't ever heard much about me,' the good lady said; 'but I have come from Mrs. Allen and I guess that will make it all right. I presume you know Mrs. Allen?'

I was unacquainted with this influential personage, but I assented vaguely to the proposition. Mrs. Allen's emissary was good-humoured and familiar, but rather appealing than insistent (she remarked that if her friend *had* found time to come in the afternoon—she had so much to do, being just up for the day, that she couldn't be sure—it would be all right); and somehow even before she mentioned Merrimac Avenue (they had come all the way from there) my imagination had associated her with that indefinite social limbo known to the properly-constituted Boston mind as the South End—a nebulous region which condenses here and there into a pretty face, in which the daughters are an 'improvement' on the mothers and are sometimes acquainted with gentlemen resident in more distinguished districts of the New England capital—gentlemen whose wives and sisters in turn are not acquainted with them.

When at last Mrs. Nettlepoint came in, accompanied by candles and by a tray laden with glasses of coloured fluid which emitted a cool tinkling, I was in a position to officiate as master of the ceremonies, to introduce Mrs. Mavis and Miss Grace Mavis, to represent that Mrs. Allen had recommended them—nay, had urged them—to come that way, informally, and had been prevented only by the pressure of occupations so characteristic of her (especially when she was up from Mattapoisett just for a few hours' shopping) from herself calling in the course of the day to explain who they were and what was the favour they had to ask of Mrs. Nettlepoint. Good-natured women understand each other even when divided by the line of topographical fashion, and our hostess had quickly mastered the main facts: Mrs. Allen's visit in the morning in Merrimac Avenue to talk of Mrs. Amber's great idea, the classes at the public schools in vacation (she was interested with an equal charity to that of Mrs. Mavis—even in such weather!—in those of the South End) for games and exercises and music, to keep the poor unoccupied children out of the streets; then the revelation that it had suddenly been settled almost from one hour to the other that Grace should sail for Liverpool, Mr. Porterfield at last being ready. He was taking a little holiday; his mother was with him, they had come over from Paris to see some of the celebrated old buildings in England, and he had telegraphed to say that if Grace would start right off they would just finish it up and be married. It often happened that when things had dragged on that way for years they were all huddled up at the end. Of course in such a case she, Mrs. Mavis, had had to fly round. Her daughter's passage was taken, but it seemed too dreadful that she should make her journey all alone, the first time she had ever been at sea, without any companion or escort. *She* couldn't go—Mr. Mavis was too sick: she hadn't even been able to get him off to the seaside.

'Well, Mrs. Nettlepoint is going in that ship,' Mrs. Allen had said; and she had represented that nothing was simpler than to put the girl in her charge. When Mrs. Mavis had replied that that was all very well but that she didn't know the lady, Mrs. Allen had declared that that didn't make a speck of difference, for Mrs. Nettlepoint was kind enough for anything. It was easy enough to know her, if that was all the trouble. All Mrs. Mavis would have to do would be to go up to her the next morning when she took her daughter to the ship (she would see her there on the deck with her party) and tell her what she wanted. Mrs. Nettlepoint had daughters herself and she would easily understand. Very likely she would even look after Grace a little on the other side, in such a queer situation, going out alone to the gentleman she was engaged to; she would just help her to turn round before she was married. Mr. Porterfield seemed to think they wouldn't wait long, once she was there: they would have it right over at the American consul's. Mrs. Allen had said it would perhaps be better still to go and see Mrs. Nettlepoint beforehand, that day, to tell her what they wanted: then they wouldn't seem to spring it on her just as she was leaving. She herself (Mrs. Allen) would call and say a word for them if she could save ten minutes before catching her train. If she hadn't come it was because she hadn't saved her ten minutes; but she had made them feel that they must come all the same. Mrs. Mavis liked that better, because on the ship in the morning there would be

such a confusion. She didn't think her daughter would be any trouble—conscientiously she didn't. It was just to have some one to speak to her and not sally forth like a servant-girl going to a situation.

'I see, I am to act as a sort of bridesmaid and to give her away,' said Mrs. Nettlepoint. She was in fact kind enough for anything and she showed on this occasion that it was easy enough to know her. There is nothing more tiresome than complications at sea, but she accepted without a protest the burden of the young lady's dependence and allowed her, as Mrs. Mavis said, to hook herself on. She evidently had the habit of patience, and her reception of her visitors' story reminded me afresh (I was reminded of it whenever I returned to my native land) that my dear compatriots are the people in the world who most freely take mutual accommodation for granted. They have always had to help themselves, and by a magnanimous extension they confound helping each other with that. In no country are there fewer forms and more reciprocities.

It was doubtless not singular that the ladies from Merrimac Avenue should not feel that they were importunate: what was striking was that Mrs. Nettlepoint did not appear to suspect it. However, she would in any case have thought it inhuman to show that—though I could see that under the surface she was amused at everything the lady from the South End took for granted. I know not whether the attitude of the younger visitor added or not to the merit of her good-nature. Mr. Porterfield's intended took no part in her mother's appeal, scarcely spoke, sat looking at the Back Bay and the lights on the long bridge. She declined the lemonade and the other mixtures which, at Mrs. Nettlepoint's request, I offered her, while her mother partook freely of everything and I reflected (for I as freely consumed the reviving liquid) that Mr. Jasper had better hurry back if he wished to profit by the refreshment prepared for him.

Was the effect of the young woman's reserve ungracious, or was it only natural that in her particular situation she should not have a flow of compliment at her command? I noticed that Mrs. Nettlepoint looked at her often, and certainly though she was undemonstrative Miss Mavis was interesting. The candle-light enabled me to see that if she was not in the very first flower of her youth she was still a handsome girl. Her eyes and hair were dark, her face was pale and she held up her head as if, with its thick braids, it were an appurtenance she was not ashamed of. If her mother was excellent and common she was not common (not flagrantly so) and perhaps not excellent. At all events she would not be, in appearance at least, a dreary appendage, and (in the case of a person 'hooking on') that was always something gained. Is it because something of a romantic or pathetic interest usually attaches to a good creature who has been the victim of a 'long engagement' that this young lady made an impression on me from the first—favoured as I had been so quickly with this glimpse of her history? Certainly she made no positive appeal; she only held her tongue and smiled, and her smile corrected whatever suggestion might have forced itself upon me that the spirit was dead—the spirit of that promise of which she found herself doomed to carry out the letter.

What corrected it less, I must add, was an odd recollection which gathered vividness as I listened to it—a mental association which the name of Mr. Porterfield had evoked. Surely I had a personal impression, over-smearred and confused, of the gentleman who was waiting at Liverpool, or who would be, for Mrs. Nettlepoint's *protégée*. I had met him, known him, some time, somewhere, somehow, in Europe. Was he not studying something—very hard—somewhere, probably in Paris, ten years before, and did he not make extraordinarily neat drawings, linear and architectural? Didn't he go to a *table d'hôte*, at two francs twenty-five, in the Rue Bonaparte, which I then frequented, and didn't he wear spectacles and a Scotch plaid arranged in a manner which seemed to say, 'I have trustworthy information that that is

the way they do it in the Highlands'? Was he not exemplary and very poor, so that I supposed he had no overcoat and his tartan was what he slept under at night? Was he not working very hard still, and wouldn't he be in the natural course, not yet satisfied that he knew enough to launch out? He would be a man of long preparations—Miss Mavis's white face seemed to speak to one of that. It appeared to me that if I had been in love with her I should not have needed to lay such a train to marry her. Architecture was his line and he was a pupil of the *École des Beaux Arts*. This reminiscence grew so much more vivid with me that at the end of ten minutes I had a curious sense of knowing—by implication—a good deal about the young lady.

Even after it was settled that Mrs. Nettlepoint would do everything for her that she could her mother sat a little, sipping her syrup and telling how 'low' Mr. Mavis had been. At this period the girl's silence struck me as still more conscious, partly perhaps because she deprecated her mother's loquacity (she was enough of an 'improvement' to measure that) and partly because she was too full of pain at the idea of leaving her infirm, her perhaps dying father. I divined that they were poor and that she would take out a very small purse for her trousseau. Moreover for Mr. Porterfield to make up the sum his own case would have had to change. If he had enriched himself by the successful practice of his profession I had not encountered the buildings he had reared—his reputation had not come to my ears.

Mrs. Nettlepoint notified her new friends that she was a very inactive person at sea: she was prepared to suffer to the full with Miss Mavis, but she was not prepared to walk with her, to struggle with her, to accompany her to the table. To this the girl replied that she would trouble her little, she was sure: she had a belief that she should prove a wretched sailor and spend the voyage on her back. Her mother scoffed at this picture, prophesying perfect weather and a lovely time, and I said that if I might be trusted, as a tame old bachelor fairly sea-seasoned, I should be delighted to give the new member of our party an arm or any other countenance whenever she should require it. Both the ladies thanked me for this (taking my description only too literally), and the elder one declared that we were evidently going to be such a sociable group that it was too bad to have to stay at home. She inquired of Mrs. Nettlepoint if there were any one else—if she were to be accompanied by some of her family; and when our hostess mentioned her son—there was a chance of his embarking but (wasn't it absurd?) he had not decided yet, she rejoined with extraordinary candour—'Oh dear, I do hope he'll go: that would be so pleasant for Grace.'

Somehow the words made me think of poor Mr. Porterfield's tartan, especially as Jasper Nettlepoint strolled in again at that moment. His mother instantly challenged him: it was ten o'clock; had he by chance made up his great mind? Apparently he failed to hear her, being in the first place surprised at the strange ladies and then struck with the fact that one of them was not strange. The young man, after a slight hesitation, greeted Miss Mavis with a handshake and an 'Oh, good evening, how do you do?' He did not utter her name, and I could see that he had forgotten it; but she immediately pronounced his, availing herself of an American girl's discretion to introduce him to her mother.

'Well, you might have told me you knew him all this time!' Mrs. Mavis exclaimed. Then smiling at Mrs. Nettlepoint she added, 'It would have saved me a worry, an acquaintance already begun.'

'Ah, my son's acquaintances——!' Mrs. Nettlepoint murmured.

'Yes, and my daughter's too!' cried Mrs. Mavis, jovially. 'Mrs. Allen didn't tell us *you* were going,' she continued, to the young man.

'She would have been clever if she had been able to!' Mrs. Nettlepoint ejaculated.

‘Dear mother, I have my telegram,’ Jasper remarked, looking at Grace Mavis.

‘I know you very little,’ the girl said, returning his observation.

‘I’ve danced with you at some ball—for some sufferers by something or other.’

‘I think it was an inundation,’ she replied, smiling. ‘But it was a long time ago—and I haven’t seen you since.’

‘I have been in far countries—to my loss. I should have said it was for a big fire.’

‘It was at the Horticultural Hall. I didn’t remember your name,’ said Grace Mavis.

‘That is very unkind of you, when I recall vividly that you had a pink dress.’

‘Oh, I remember that dress—you looked lovely in it!’ Mrs. Mavis broke out. ‘You must get another just like it—on the other side.’

‘Yes, your daughter looked charming in it,’ said Jasper Nettlepoint. Then he added, to the girl—‘Yet you mentioned my name to your mother.’

‘It came back to me—seeing you here. I had no idea this was your home.’

‘Well, I confess it isn’t, much. Oh, there are some drinks!’ Jasper went on, approaching the tray and its glasses.

‘Indeed there are and quite delicious,’ Mrs. Mavis declared.

‘Won’t you have another then?—a pink one, like your daughter’s gown.’

‘With pleasure, sir. Oh, do see them over,’ Mrs. Mavis continued, accepting from the young man’s hand a third tumbler.

‘My mother and that gentleman? Surely they can take care of themselves,’ said Jasper Nettlepoint.

‘But my daughter—she has a claim as an old friend.’

‘Jasper, what does your telegram say?’ his mother interposed.

He gave no heed to her question: he stood there with his glass in his hand, looking from Mrs. Mavis to Miss Grace.

‘Ah, leave her to me, madam; I’m quite competent,’ I said to Mrs. Mavis.

Then the young man looked at me. The next minute he asked of the young lady—‘Do you mean you are going to Europe?’

‘Yes, to-morrow; in the same ship as your mother.’

‘That’s what we’ve come here for, to see all about it,’ said Mrs. Mavis.

‘My son, take pity on me and tell me what light your telegram throws,’ Mrs. Nettlepoint went on.

‘I will, dearest, when I’ve quenched my thirst.’ And Jasper slowly drained his glass.

‘Well, you’re worse than Gracie,’ Mrs. Mavis commented. ‘She was first one thing and then the other—but only about up to three o’clock yesterday.’

‘Excuse me—won’t you take something?’ Jasper inquired of Gracie; who however declined, as if to make up for her mother’s copious *consommation*. I made privately the reflection that the two ladies ought to take leave, the question of Mrs. Nettlepoint’s goodwill being so satisfactorily settled and the meeting of the morrow at the ship so near at hand; and I went so

far as to judge that their protracted stay, with their hostess visibly in a fidget, was a sign of a want of breeding. Miss Grace after all then was not such an improvement on her mother, for she easily might have taken the initiative of departure, in spite of Mrs. Mavis's imbibing her glass of syrup in little interspaced sips, as if to make it last as long as possible. I watched the girl with an increasing curiosity; I could not help asking myself a question or two about her and even perceiving already (in a dim and general way) that there were some complications in her position. Was it not a complication that she should have wished to remain long enough to assuage a certain suspense, to learn whether or no Jasper were going to sail? Had not something particular passed between them on the occasion or at the period to which they had covertly alluded, and did she really not know that her mother was bringing her to *his* mother's, though she apparently had thought it well not to mention the circumstance? Such things were complications on the part of a young lady betrothed to that curious cross-barred phantom of a Mr. Porterfield. But I am bound to add that she gave me no further warrant for suspecting them than by the simple fact of her encouraging her mother, by her immobility, to linger. Somehow I had a sense that *she* knew better. I got up myself to go, but Mrs. Nettlepoint detained me after seeing that my movement would not be taken as a hint, and I perceived she wished me not to leave my fellow-visitors on her hands. Jasper complained of the closeness of the room, said that it was not a night to sit in a room—one ought to be out in the air, under the sky. He denounced the windows that overlooked the water for not opening upon a balcony or a terrace, until his mother, whom he had not yet satisfied about his telegram, reminded him that there was a beautiful balcony in front, with room for a dozen people. She assured him we would go and sit there if it would please him.

'It will be nice and cool to-morrow, when we steam into the great ocean,' said Miss Mavis, expressing with more vivacity than she had yet thrown into any of her utterances my own thought of half an hour before. Mrs. Nettlepoint replied that it would probably be freezing cold, and her son murmured that he would go and try the drawing-room balcony and report upon it. Just as he was turning away he said, smiling, to Miss Mavis—'Won't you come with me and see if it's pleasant?'

'Oh, well, we had better not stay all night!' her mother exclaimed, but without moving. The girl moved, after a moment's hesitation; she rose and accompanied Jasper into the other room. I observed that her slim tallness showed to advantage as she walked and that she looked well as she passed, with her head thrown back, into the darkness of the other part of the house. There was something rather marked, rather surprising (I scarcely knew why, for the act was simple enough) in her doing so, and perhaps it was our sense of this that held the rest of us somewhat stiffly silent as she remained away. I was waiting for Mrs. Mavis to go, so that I myself might go; and Mrs. Nettlepoint was waiting for her to go so that I might not. This doubtless made the young lady's absence appear to us longer than it really was—it was probably very brief. Her mother moreover, I think, had a vague consciousness of embarrassment. Jasper Nettlepoint presently returned to the back drawing-room to get a glass of syrup for his companion, and he took occasion to remark that it was lovely on the balcony: one really got some air, the breeze was from that quarter. I remembered, as he went away with his tinkling tumbler, that from *my* hand, a few minutes before, Miss Mavis had not been willing to accept this innocent offering. A little later Mrs. Nettlepoint said—'Well, if it's so pleasant there we had better go ourselves.' So we passed to the front and in the other room met the two young people coming in from the balcony. I wondered in the light of subsequent events exactly how long they had been sitting there together. (There were three or four cane chairs which had been placed there for the summer.) If it had been but five minutes, that only made subsequent events more curious. 'We must go, mother,' Miss Mavis immediately said; and a moment later, with a little renewal of chatter as to our general meeting on the ship, the

visitors had taken leave. Jasper went down with them to the door and as soon as they had gone out Mrs. Nettlepoint exclaimed—'Ah, but she'll be a bore—she'll be a bore!'

'Not through talking too much—surely.'

'An affectation of silence is as bad. I hate that particular *pose*; it's coming up very much now; an imitation of the English, like everything else. A girl who tries to be statuesque at sea—that will act on one's nerves!'

'I don't know what she tries to be, but she succeeds in being very handsome.'

'So much the better for you. I'll leave her to you, for I shall be shut up. I like her being placed under my "care."'

'She will be under Jasper's,' I remarked.

'Ah, he won't go—I want it too much.'

'I have an idea he will go.'

'Why didn't he tell me so then—when he came in?'

'He was diverted by Miss Mavis—a beautiful unexpected girl sitting there.'

'Diverted from his mother—trembling for his decision?'

'She's an old friend; it was a meeting after a long separation.'

'Yes, such a lot of them as he knows!' said Mrs. Nettlepoint.

'Such a lot of them?'

'He has so many female friends—in the most varied circles.'

'Well, we can close round her then—for I on my side knew, or used to know, her young man.'

'Her young man?'

'The *fiancé*, the intended, the one she is going out to. He can't by the way be very young now.'

'How odd it sounds!' said Mrs. Nettlepoint.

I was going to reply that it was not odd if you knew Mr. Porterfield, but I reflected that that perhaps only made it odder. I told my companion briefly who he was—that I had met him in the old days in Paris, when I believed for a fleeting hour that I could learn to paint, when I lived with the *jeunesse des écoles*, and her comment on this was simply—'Well, he had better have come out for her!'

'Perhaps so. She looked to me as she sat there as if she might change her mind at the last moment.'

'About her marriage?'

'About sailing. But she won't change now.'

Jasper came back, and his mother instantly challenged him. 'Well, *are* you going?'

'Yes, I shall go,' he said, smiling. 'I have got my telegram.'

'Oh, your telegram!' I ventured to exclaim. 'That charming girl is your telegram.'

He gave me a look, but in the dusk I could not make out very well what it conveyed. Then he bent over his mother, kissing her. 'My news isn't particularly satisfactory. I am going for *you*.'

'Oh, you humbug!' she rejoined. But of course she was delighted.

II

People usually spend the first hours of a voyage in squeezing themselves into their cabins, taking their little precautions, either so excessive or so inadequate, wondering how they can pass so many days in such a hole and asking idiotic questions of the stewards, who appear in comparison such men of the world. My own initiations were rapid, as became an old sailor, and so it seemed were Miss Mavis's, for when I mounted to the deck at the end of half an hour I found her there alone, in the stern of the ship, looking back at the dwindling continent. It dwindled very fast for so big a place. I accosted her, having had no conversation with her amid the crowd of leave-takers and the muddle of farewells before we put off; we talked a little about the boat, our fellow-passengers and our prospects, and then I said—'I think you mentioned last night a name I know—that of Mr. Porterfield.'

'Oh no, I never uttered it,' she replied, smiling at me through her closely-drawn veil.

'Then it was your mother.'

'Very likely it was my mother.' And she continued to smile, as if I ought to have known the difference.

'I venture to allude to him because I have an idea I used to know him,' I went on.

'Oh, I see.' Beyond this remark she manifested no interest in my having known him.

'That is if it's the same one.' It seemed to me it would be silly to say nothing more; so I added 'My Mr. Porterfield was called David.'

'Well, so is ours.' 'Ours' struck me as clever.

'I suppose I shall see him again if he is to meet you at Liverpool,' I continued.

'Well, it will be bad if he doesn't.'

It was too soon for me to have the idea that it would be bad if he did: that only came later. So I remarked that I had not seen him for so many years that it was very possible I should not know him.'

'Well, I have not seen him for a great many years, but I expect I shall know him all the same.'

'Oh, with you it's different,' I rejoined, smiling at her. 'Hasn't he been back since those days?'

'I don't know what days you mean.'

'When I knew him in Paris—ages ago. He was a pupil of the *École des Beaux Arts*. He was studying architecture.'

'Well, he is studying it still,' said Grace Mavis.

'Hasn't he learned it yet?'

'I don't know what he has learned. I shall see.' Then she added: 'Architecture is very difficult and he is tremendously thorough.'

‘Oh, yes, I remember that. He was an admirable worker. But he must have become quite a foreigner, if it’s so many years since he has been at home.’

‘Oh, he is not changeable. If he were changeable——’ But here my interlocutress paused. I suspect she had been going to say that if he were changeable he would have given her up long ago. After an instant she went on: ‘He wouldn’t have stuck so to his profession. You can’t make much by it.’

‘You can’t make much?’

‘It doesn’t make you rich.’

‘Oh, of course you have got to practise it—and to practise it long.’

‘Yes—so Mr. Porterfield says.’

Something in the way she uttered these words made me laugh—they were so serene an implication that the gentleman in question did not live up to his principles. But I checked myself, asking my companion if she expected to remain in Europe long—to live there.

‘Well, it will be a good while if it takes me as long to come back as it has taken me to go out.’

‘And I think your mother said last night that it was your first visit.’

Miss Mavis looked at me a moment. ‘Didn’t mother talk!’

‘It was all very interesting.’

She continued to look at me. ‘You don’t think that.’

‘What have I to gain by saying it if I don’t?’

‘Oh, men have always something to gain.’

‘You make me feel a terrible failure, then! I hope at any rate that it gives you pleasure—the idea of seeing foreign lands.’

‘Mercy—I should think so.’

‘It’s a pity our ship is not one of the fast ones, if you are impatient.’

She was silent a moment; then she exclaimed, ‘Oh, I guess it will be fast enough!’

That evening I went in to see Mrs. Nettlepoint and sat on her sea-trunk, which was pulled out from under the berth to accommodate me. It was nine o’clock but not quite dark, as our northward course had already taken us into the latitude of the longer days. She had made her nest admirably and lay upon her sofa in a becoming dressing-gown and cap, resting from her labours. It was her regular practice to spend the voyage in her cabin, which smelt good (such was the refinement of her art), and she had a secret peculiar to herself for keeping her port open without shipping seas. She hated what she called the mess of the ship and the idea, if she should go above, of meeting stewards with plates of supererogatory food. She professed to be content with her situation (we promised to lend each other books and I assured her familiarly that I should be in and out of her room a dozen times a day), and pitied me for having to mingle in society. She judged this to be a limited privilege, for on the deck before we left the wharf she had taken a view of our fellow-passengers.

‘Oh, I’m an inveterate, almost a professional observer,’ I replied, ‘and with that vice I am as well occupied as an old woman in the sun with her knitting. It puts it in my power, in any situation, to *see* things. I shall see them even here and I shall come down very often and tell you about them. You are not interested to-day, but you will be to-morrow, for a ship is a great

school of gossip. You won't believe the number of researches and problems you will be engaged in by the middle of the voyage.'

'I? Never in the world—lying here with my nose in a book and never seeing anything.'

'You will participate at second hand. You will see through my eyes, hang upon my lips, take sides, feel passions, all sorts of sympathies and indignations. I have an idea that your young lady is the person on board who will interest me most.'

'Mine, indeed! She has not been near me since we left the dock.'

'Well, she is very curious.'

'You have such cold-blooded terms,' Mrs. Nettlepoint murmured. '*Elle ne sait pas se conduire*; she ought to have come to ask about me.'

'Yes, since you are under her care,' I said, smiling. 'As for her not knowing how to behave—well, that's exactly what we shall see.'

'You will, but not I! I wash my hands of her.'

'Don't say that—don't say that.'

Mrs. Nettlepoint looked at me a moment. 'Why do you speak so solemnly?'

In return I considered her. 'I will tell you before we land. And have you seen much of your son?'

'Oh yes, he has come in several times. He seems very much pleased. He has got a cabin to himself.'

'That's great luck,' I said, 'but I have an idea he is always in luck. I was sure I should have to offer him the second berth in my room.'

'And you wouldn't have enjoyed that, because you don't like him,' Mrs. Nettlepoint took upon herself to say.

'What put that into your head?'

'It isn't in my head—it's in my heart, my *cœur de mère*. We guess those things. You think he's selfish—I could see it last night.'

'Dear lady,' I said, 'I have no general ideas about him at all. He is just one of the phenomena I am going to observe. He seems to me a very fine young man. However,' I added, 'since you have mentioned last night I will admit that I thought he rather tantalised you. He played with your suspense.'

'Why, he came at the last just to please me,' said Mrs. Nettlepoint.

I was silent a moment. 'Are you sure it was for your sake?'

'Ah, perhaps it was for yours!'

'When he went out on the balcony with that girl perhaps she asked him to come,' I continued.

'Perhaps she did. But why should he do everything she asks him?'

'I don't know yet, but perhaps I shall know later. Not that he will tell me—for he will never tell me anything: he is not one of those who tell.'

'If she didn't ask him, what you say is a great wrong to her,' said Mrs. Nettlepoint.

'Yes, if she didn't. But you say that to protect Jasper, not to protect her,' I continued, smiling.

‘You *are* cold-blooded—it’s uncanny!’ my companion exclaimed.

‘Ah, this is nothing yet! Wait a while—you’ll see. At sea in general I’m awful—I pass the limits. If I have outraged her in thought I will jump overboard. There are ways of asking (a man doesn’t need to tell a woman that) without the crude words.’

‘I don’t know what you suppose between them,’ said Mrs. Nettlepoint.

‘Nothing but what was visible on the surface. It transpired, as the newspapers say, that they were old friends.’

‘He met her at some promiscuous party—I asked him about it afterwards. She is not a person he could ever think of seriously.’

‘That’s exactly what I believe.’

‘You don’t observe—you imagine,’ Mrs. Nettlepoint pursued. ‘How do you reconcile her laying a trap for Jasper with her going out to Liverpool on an errand of love?’

‘I don’t for an instant suppose she laid a trap; I believe she acted on the impulse of the moment. She is going out to Liverpool on an errand of marriage; that is not necessarily the same thing as an errand of love, especially for one who happens to have had a personal impression of the gentleman she is engaged to.’

‘Well, there are certain decencies which in such a situation the most abandoned of her sex would still observe. You apparently judge her capable—on no evidence—of violating them.’

‘Ah, you don’t understand the shades of things,’ I rejoined. ‘Decencies and violations—there is no need for such heavy artillery! I can perfectly imagine that without the least immodesty she should have said to Jasper on the balcony, in fact if not in words—”I’m in dreadful spirits, but if you come I shall feel better, and that will be pleasant for you too.”’

‘And why is she in dreadful spirits?’

‘She isn’t!’ I replied, laughing.

‘What is she doing?’

‘She is walking with your son.’

Mrs. Nettlepoint said nothing for a moment; then she broke out, inconsequently—‘Ah, she’s horrid!’

‘No, she’s charming!’ I protested.

‘You mean she’s “curious”?’

‘Well, for me it’s the same thing!’

This led my friend of course to declare once more that I was cold-blooded. On the afternoon of the morrow we had another talk, and she told me that in the morning Miss Mavis had paid her a long visit. She knew nothing about anything, but her intentions were good and she was evidently in her own eyes conscientious and decorous. And Mrs. Nettlepoint concluded these remarks with the exclamation ‘Poor young thing!’

‘You think she is a good deal to be pitied, then?’

‘Well, her story sounds dreary—she told me a great deal of it. She fell to talking little by little and went from one thing to another. She’s in that situation when a girl *must* open herself—to some woman.’

‘Hasn’t she got Jasper?’ I inquired.

‘He isn’t a woman. You strike me as jealous of him,’ my companion added.

‘I daresay *he* thinks so—or will before the end. Ah no—ah no!’ And I asked Mrs. Nettlepoint if our young lady struck her as a flirt. She gave me no answer, but went on to remark that it was odd and interesting to her to see the way a girl like Grace Mavis resembled the girls of the kind she herself knew better, the girls of ‘society,’ at the same time that she differed from them; and the way the differences and resemblances were mixed up, so that on certain questions you couldn’t tell where you would find her. You would think she would feel as you did because you had found her feeling so, and then suddenly, in regard to some other matter (which was yet quite the same) she would be terribly wanting. Mrs. Nettlepoint proceeded to observe (to such idle speculations does the vanity of a sea-voyage give encouragement) that she wondered whether it were better to be an ordinary girl very well brought up or an extraordinary girl not brought up at all.

‘Oh, I go in for the extraordinary girl under all circumstances.’

‘It is true that if you are *very* well brought up you are not ordinary,’ said Mrs. Nettlepoint, smelling her strong salts. ‘You are a lady, at any rate. *C’est toujours ça.*’

‘And Miss Mavis isn’t one—is that what you mean?’

‘Well—you have seen her mother.’

‘Yes, but I think your contention would be that among such people the mother doesn’t count.’

‘Precisely; and that’s bad.’

‘I see what you mean. But isn’t it rather hard? If your mother doesn’t know anything it is better you should be independent of her, and yet if you are that constitutes a bad note.’ I added that Mrs. Mavis had appeared to count sufficiently two nights before. She had said and done everything she wanted, while the girl sat silent and respectful. Grace’s attitude (so far as her mother was concerned) had been eminently decent.

‘Yes, but she couldn’t bear it,’ said Mrs. Nettlepoint.

‘Ah, if you know it I may confess that she has told me as much.’

Mrs. Nettlepoint stared. ‘Told you? There’s one of the things they do!’

‘Well, it was only a word. Won’t you let me know whether you think she’s a flirt?’

‘Find out for yourself, since you pretend to study folks.’

‘Oh, your judgment would probably not at all determine mine. It’s in regard to yourself that I ask it.’

‘In regard to myself?’

‘To see the length of maternal immorality.’

Mrs. Nettlepoint continued to repeat my words. ‘Maternal immorality?’

‘You desire your son to have every possible distraction on his voyage, and if you can make up your mind in the sense I refer to that will make it all right. He will have no responsibility.’

‘Heavens, how you analyse! I haven’t in the least your passion for making up my mind.’

‘Then if you chance it you’ll be more immoral still.’

‘Your reasoning is strange,’ said the poor lady; ‘when it was you who tried to put it into my head yesterday that she had asked him to come.’

‘Yes, but in good faith.’

‘How do you mean in good faith?’

‘Why, as girls of that sort do. Their allowance and measure in such matters is much larger than that of young ladies who have been, as you say, *very* well brought up; and yet I am not sure that on the whole I don’t think them the more innocent. Miss Mavis is engaged, and she’s to be married next week, but it’s an old, old story, and there’s no more romance in it than if she were going to be photographed. So her usual life goes on, and her usual life consists (and that of *ces demoiselles* in general) in having plenty of gentlemen’s society. Having it I mean without having any harm from it.’

‘Well, if there is no harm from it what are you talking about and why am I immoral?’

I hesitated, laughing. ‘I retract—you are sane and clear. I am sure she thinks there won’t be any harm,’ I added. ‘That’s the great point.’

‘The great point?’

‘I mean, to be settled.’

‘Mercy, we are not trying them! How can *we* settle it?’

‘I mean of course in our minds. There will be nothing more interesting for the next ten days for our minds to exercise themselves upon.’

‘They will get very tired of it,’ said Mrs. Nettlepoint.

‘No, no, because the interest will increase and the plot will thicken. It can’t help it.’ She looked at me as if she thought me slightly Mephistophelean, and I went on—‘So she told you everything in her life was dreary?’

‘Not everything but most things. And she didn’t tell me so much as I guessed it. She’ll tell me more the next time. She will behave properly now about coming in to see me; I told her she ought to.’

‘I am glad of that,’ I said. ‘Keep her with you as much as possible.’

‘I don’t follow you much,’ Mrs. Nettlepoint replied, ‘but so far as I do I don’t think your remarks are in very good taste.’

‘I’m too excited, I lose my head, cold-blooded as you think me. Doesn’t she like Mr. Porterfield?’

‘Yes, that’s the worst of it.’

‘The worst of it?’

‘He’s so good—there’s no fault to be found with him. Otherwise she would have thrown it all up. It has dragged on since she was eighteen: she became engaged to him before he went abroad to study. It was one of those childish muddles which parents in America might prevent so much more than they do. The thing is to insist on one’s daughter’s waiting, on the engagement’s being long; and then after you have got that started to take it on every occasion as little seriously as possible—to make it die out. You can easily tire it out. However, Mr. Porterfield has taken it seriously for some years. He has done his part to keep it alive. She says he adores her.’

‘His part? Surely his part would have been to marry her by this time.’

‘He has absolutely no money.’

‘He ought to have got some, in seven years.’

‘So I think she thinks. There are some sorts of poverty that are contemptible. But he has a little more now. That’s why he won’t wait any longer. His mother has come out, she has something—a little—and she is able to help him. She will live with them and bear some of the expenses, and after her death the son will have what there is.’

‘How old is she?’ I asked, cynically.

‘I haven’t the least idea. But it doesn’t sound very inspiring. He has not been to America since he first went out.’

‘That’s an odd way of adoring her.’

‘I made that objection mentally, but I didn’t express it to her. She met it indeed a little by telling me that he had had other chances to marry.’

‘That surprises me,’ I remarked. ‘And did she say that *she* had had?’

‘No, and that’s one of the things I thought nice in her; for she must have had. She didn’t try to make out that he had spoiled her life. She has three other sisters and there is very little money at home. She has tried to make money; she has written little things and painted little things, but her talent is apparently not in that direction. Her father has had a long illness and has lost his place—he was in receipt of a salary in connection with some waterworks—and one of her sisters has lately become a widow, with children and without means. And so as in fact she never has married any one else, whatever opportunities she may have encountered, she appears to have just made up her mind to go out to Mr. Porterfield as the least of her evils. But it isn’t very amusing.’

‘That only makes it the more honourable. She will go through with it, whatever it costs, rather than disappoint him after he has waited so long. It is true,’ I continued, ‘that when a woman acts from a sense of honour——’

‘Well, when she does?’ said Mrs. Nettlepoint, for I hesitated perceptibly.

‘It is so extravagant a course that some one has to pay for it.’

‘You are very impertinent. We all have to pay for each other, all the while; and for each other’s virtues as well as vices.’

‘That’s precisely why I shall be sorry for Mr. Porterfield when she steps off the ship with her little bill. I mean with her teeth clenched.’

‘Her teeth are not in the least clenched. She is in perfect good-humour.’

‘Well, we must try and keep her so,’ I said. ‘You must take care that Jasper neglects nothing.’

I know not what reflection this innocent pleasantry of mine provoked on the good lady’s part; the upshot of them at all events was to make her say—‘Well, I never asked her to come; I’m very glad of that. It is all their own doing.’

‘Their own—you mean Jasper’s and hers?’

‘No indeed. I mean her mother’s and Mrs. Allen’s; the girl’s too of course. They put themselves upon us.’

‘Oh yes, I can testify to that. Therefore I’m glad too. We should have missed it, I think.’

‘How seriously you take it!’ Mrs. Nettlepoint exclaimed.

‘Ah, wait a few days!’ I replied, getting up to leave her.

III

The *Patagonia* was slow, but she was spacious and comfortable, and there was a kind of motherly decency in her long, nursing rock and her rustling, old-fashioned gait. It was as if she wished not to present herself in port with the splashed eagerness of a young creature. We were not numerous enough to squeeze each other and yet we were not too few to entertain—with that familiarity and relief which figures and objects acquire on the great bare field of the ocean, beneath the great bright glass of the sky. I had never liked the sea so much before, indeed I had never liked it at all; but now I had a revelation of how, in a midsummer mood, it could please. It was darkly and magnificently blue and imperturbably quiet—save for the great regular swell of its heart-beats, the pulse of its life, and there grew to be something so agreeable in the sense of floating there in infinite isolation and leisure that it was a positive satisfaction the *Patagonia* was not a racer. One had never thought of the sea as the great place of safety, but now it came over one that there is no place so safe from the land. When it does not give you trouble it takes it away—takes away letters and telegrams and newspapers and visits and duties and efforts, all the complications, all the superfluties and superstitions that we have stuffed into our terrene life. The simple absence of the post, when the particular conditions enable you to enjoy the great fact by which it is produced, becomes in itself a kind of bliss, and the clean stage of the deck shows you a play that amuses, the personal drama of the voyage, the movement and interaction, in the strong sea-light, of figures that end by representing something—something moreover of which the interest is never, even in its keenness, too great to suffer you to go to sleep. I, at any rate, dozed a great deal, lying on my rug with a French novel, and when I opened my eyes I generally saw Jasper Nettlepoint passing with his mother's *protégée* on his arm. Somehow at these moments, between sleeping and waking, I had an inconsequent sense that they were a part of the French novel. Perhaps this was because I had fallen into the trick, at the start, of regarding Grace Mavis almost as a married woman, which, as every one knows, is the necessary status of the heroine of such a work. Every revolution of our engine at any rate would contribute to the effect of making her one.

In the saloon, at meals, my neighbour on the right was a certain little Mrs. Peck, a very short and very round person whose head was enveloped in a 'cloud' (a cloud of dirty white wool) and who promptly let me know that she was going to Europe for the education of her children. I had already perceived (an hour after we left the dock) that some energetic step was required in their interest, but as we were not in Europe yet the business could not be said to have begun. The four little Pecks, in the enjoyment of untrammelled leisure, swarmed about the ship as if they had been pirates boarding her, and their mother was as powerless to check their license as if she had been gagged and stowed away in the hold. They were especially to be trusted to run between the legs of the stewards when these attendants arrived with bowls of soup for the languid ladies. Their mother was too busy recounting to her fellow-passengers how many years Miss Mavis had been engaged. In the blank of a marine existence things that are nobody's business very soon become everybody's, and this was just one of those facts that are propagated with a mysterious and ridiculous rapidity. The whisper that carries them is very small, in the great scale of things, of air and space and progress, but it is also very safe, for there is no compression, no sounding-board, to make speakers responsible. And then repetition at sea is somehow not repetition; monotony is in the air, the mind is flat and everything recurs—the bells, the meals, the stewards' faces, the romp of children, the walk, the clothes, the very shoes and buttons of passengers taking their exercise. These things grow at last so insipid that, in comparison, revelations as to the personal history of one's companions have a taste, even when one cares little about the people.

Jasper Nettlepoint sat on my left hand when he was not upstairs seeing that Miss Mavis had her repast comfortably on deck. His mother's place would have been next mine had she

shown herself, and then that of the young lady under her care. The two ladies, in other words, would have been between us, Jasper marking the limit of the party on that side. Miss Mavis was present at luncheon the first day, but dinner passed without her coming in, and when it was half over Jasper remarked that he would go up and look after her.

‘Isn’t that young lady coming—the one who was here to lunch?’ Mrs. Peck asked of me as he left the saloon.

‘Apparently not. My friend tells me she doesn’t like the saloon.’

‘You don’t mean to say she’s sick, do you?’

‘Oh no, not in this weather. But she likes to be above.’

‘And is that gentleman gone up to her?’

‘Yes, she’s under his mother’s care.’

‘And is his mother up there, too?’ asked Mrs. Peck, whose processes were homely and direct.

‘No, she remains in her cabin. People have different tastes. Perhaps that’s one reason why Miss Mavis doesn’t come to table,’ I added—‘her chaperon not being able to accompany her.’

‘Her chaperon?’

‘Mrs. Nettlepoint—the lady under whose protection she is.’

‘Protection?’ Mrs. Peck stared at me a moment, moving some valued morsel in her mouth; then she exclaimed, familiarly, ‘Pshaw!’ I was struck with this and I was on the point of asking her what she meant by it when she continued: ‘Are we not going to see Mrs. Nettlepoint?’

‘I am afraid not. She vows that she won’t stir from her sofa.’

‘Pshaw!’ said Mrs. Peck again. ‘That’s quite a disappointment.’

‘Do you know her then?’

‘No, but I know all about her.’ Then my companion added—‘You don’t mean to say she’s any relation?’

‘Do you mean to me?’

‘No, to Grace Mavis.’

‘None at all. They are very new friends, as I happen to know. Then you are acquainted with our young lady?’ I had not noticed that any recognition passed between them at luncheon.

‘Is she yours too?’ asked Mrs. Peck, smiling at me.

‘Ah, when people are in the same boat—literally—they belong a little to each other.’

‘That’s so,’ said Mrs. Peck. ‘I don’t know Miss Mavis but I know all about her—I live opposite to her on Merrimac Avenue. I don’t know whether you know that part.’

‘Oh yes—it’s very beautiful.’

The consequence of this remark was another ‘Pshaw!’ But Mrs. Peck went on—‘When you’ve lived opposite to people like that for a long time you feel as if you were acquainted. But she didn’t take it up to-day; she didn’t speak to me. She knows who I am as well as she knows her own mother.’

‘You had better speak to her first—she’s shy,’ I remarked.

‘Shy? Why she’s nearly thirty years old. I suppose you know where she’s going.’

‘Oh yes—we all take an interest in that.’

‘That young man, I suppose, particularly.’

‘That young man?’

‘The handsome one, who sits there. Didn’t you tell me he is Mrs. Nettlepoint’s son?’

‘Oh yes; he acts as her deputy. No doubt he does all he can to carry out her function.’

Mrs. Peck was silent a moment. I had spoken jocosely, but she received my pleasantry with a serious face. ‘Well, she might let him eat his dinner in peace!’ she presently exclaimed.

‘Oh, he’ll come back!’ I said, glancing at his place. The repast continued and when it was finished I screwed my chair round to leave the table. Mrs. Peck performed the same movement and we quitted the saloon together. Outside of it was a kind of vestibule, with several seats, from which you could descend to the lower cabins or mount to the promenadedeck. Mrs. Peck appeared to hesitate as to her course and then solved the problem by going neither way. She dropped upon one of the benches and looked up at me.

‘I thought you said he would come back.’

‘Young Nettlepoint? I see he didn’t. Miss Mavis then has given him half of her dinner.’

‘It’s very kind of her! She has been engaged for ages.’

‘Yes, but that will soon be over.’

‘So I suppose—as quick as we land. Every one knows it on Merrimac Avenue. Every one there takes a great interest in it.’

‘Ah, of course, a girl like that: she has many friends.’

‘I mean even people who don’t know her.’

‘I see,’ I went on: ‘she is so handsome that she attracts attention, people enter into her affairs.’

‘She *used* to be pretty, but I can’t say I think she’s anything remarkable to-day. Anyhow, if she attracts attention she ought to be all the more careful what she does. You had better tell her that.’

‘Oh, it’s none of my business!’ I replied, leaving Mrs. Peck and going above. The exclamation, I confess, was not perfectly in accordance with my feeling, or rather my feeling was not perfectly in harmony with the exclamation. The very first thing I did on reaching the deck was to notice that Miss Mavis was pacing it on Jasper Nettlepoint’s arm and that whatever beauty she might have lost, according to Mrs. Peck’s insinuation, she still kept enough to make one’s eyes follow her. She had put on a sort of crimson hood, which was very becoming to her and which she wore for the rest of the voyage. She walked very well, with long steps, and I remember that at this moment the ocean had a gentle evening swell which made the great ship dip slowly, rhythmically, giving a movement that was graceful to graceful pedestrians and a more awkward one to the awkward. It was the loveliest hour of a fine day, the clear early evening, with the glow of the sunset in the air and a purple colour in the sea. I always thought that the waters ploughed by the Homeric heroes must have looked like that. I perceived on that particular occasion moreover that Grace Mavis would for the rest of the voyage be the most visible thing on the ship; the figure that would count most in the composition of groups. She couldn’t help it, poor girl; nature had made her conspicuous—

important, as the painters say. She paid for it by the exposure it brought with it—the danger that people would, as I had said to Mrs. Peck, enter into her affairs.

Jasper Nettlepoint went down at certain times to see his mother, and I watched for one of these occasions (on the third day out) and took advantage of it to go and sit by Miss Mavis. She wore a blue veil drawn tightly over her face, so that if the smile with which she greeted me was dim I could account for it partly by that.

‘Well, we are getting on—we are getting on,’ I said, cheerfully, looking at the friendly, twinkling sea.

‘Are we going very fast?’

‘Not fast, but steadily. *Ohne Hast, ohne Rast*—do you know German?’

‘Well, I’ve studied it—some.’

‘It will be useful to you over there when you travel.’

‘Well yes, if we do. But I don’t suppose we shall much. Mr. Nettlepoint says we ought,’ my interlocutress added in a moment.

‘Ah, of course *he* thinks so. He has been all over the world.’

‘Yes, he has described some of the places. That’s what I should like. I didn’t know I should like it so much.’

‘Like what so much?’

‘Going on this way. I could go on for ever, for ever and ever.’

‘Ah, you know it’s not always like this,’ I rejoined.

‘Well, it’s better than Boston.’

‘It isn’t so good as Paris,’ I said, smiling.

‘Oh, I know all about Paris. There is no freshness in that. I feel as if I had been there.’

‘You mean you have heard so much about it?’

‘Oh yes, nothing else for ten years.’

I had come to talk with Miss Mavis because she was attractive, but I had been rather conscious of the absence of a good topic, not feeling at liberty to revert to Mr. Porterfield. She had not encouraged me, when I spoke to her as we were leaving Boston, to go on with the history of my acquaintance with this gentleman; and yet now, unexpectedly, she appeared to imply (it was doubtless one of the disparities mentioned by Mrs. Nettlepoint) that he might be glanced at without indelicacy.

‘I see, you mean by letters,’ I remarked.

‘I shan’t live in a good part. I know enough to know that,’ she went on.

‘Dear young lady, there are no bad parts,’ I answered, reassuringly.

‘Why, Mr. Nettlepoint says it’s horrid.’

‘It’s horrid?’

‘Up there in the Batignolles. It’s worse than Merrimac Avenue.’

‘Worse—in what way?’

‘Why, even less where the nice people live.’

‘He oughtn’t to say that,’ I returned. ‘Don’t you call Mr. Porterfield a nice person?’ I ventured to subjoin.

‘Oh, it doesn’t make any difference.’ She rested her eyes on me a moment through her veil, the texture of which gave them a suffused prettiness. ‘Do you know him very well?’ she asked.

‘Mr. Porterfield?’

‘No, Mr. Nettlepoint.’

‘Ah, very little. He’s a good deal younger than I.’

She was silent a moment; after which she said: ‘He’s younger than me, too.’ I know not what drollery there was in this but it was unexpected and it made me laugh. Neither do I know whether Miss Mavis took offence at my laughter, though I remember thinking at the moment with compunction that it had brought a certain colour to her cheek. At all events she got up, gathering her shawl and her books into her arm. ‘I’m going down—I’m tired.’

‘Tired of me, I’m afraid.’

‘No, not yet.’

‘I’m like you,’ I pursued. ‘I should like it to go on and on.’

She had begun to walk along the deck to the companion-way and I went with her. ‘Oh, no, I shouldn’t, after all!’

I had taken her shawl from her to carry it, but at the top of the steps that led down to the cabins I had to give it back. ‘Your mother would be glad if she could know,’ I observed as we parted.

‘If she could know?’

‘How well you are getting on. And that good Mrs. Allen.’

‘Oh, mother, mother! She made me come, she pushed me off.’ And almost as if not to say more she went quickly below.

I paid Mrs. Nettlepoint a morning visit after luncheon and another in the evening, before she ‘turned in.’ That same day, in the evening, she said to me suddenly, ‘Do you know what I have done? I have asked Jasper.’

‘Asked him what?’

‘Why, if *she* asked him, you know.’

‘I don’t understand.’

‘You do perfectly. If that girl really asked him—on the balcony—to sail with us.’

‘My dear friend, do you suppose that if she did he would tell you?’

‘That’s just what he says. But he says she didn’t.’

‘And do you consider the statement valuable?’ I asked, laughing out. ‘You had better ask Miss Gracie herself.’

Mrs. Nettlepoint stared. ‘I couldn’t do that.’

‘Incomparable friend, I am only joking. What does it signify now?’

‘I thought you thought everything signified. You were so full of signification!’

‘Yes, but we are farther out now, and somehow in mid-ocean everything becomes absolute.’

‘What else *can* he do with decency?’ Mrs. Nettlepoint went on. ‘If, as my son, he were never to speak to her it would be very rude and you would think that stranger still. Then *you* would do what he does, and where would be the difference?’

‘How do you know what he does? I haven’t mentioned him for twenty-four hours.’

‘Why, she told me herself: she came in this afternoon.’

‘What an odd thing to tell you!’ I exclaimed.

‘Not as she says it. She says he’s full of attention, perfectly devoted—looks after her all the while. She seems to want me to know it, so that I may commend him for it.’

‘That’s charming; it shows her good conscience.’

‘Yes, or her great cleverness.’

Something in the tone in which Mrs. Nettlepoint said this caused me to exclaim in real surprise, ‘Why, what do you suppose she has in her mind?’

‘To get hold of him, to make him go so far that he can’t retreat, to marry him, perhaps.’

‘To marry him? And what will she do with Mr. Porterfield?’

‘She’ll ask me just to explain to him—or perhaps you.’

‘Yes, as an old friend!’ I replied, laughing. But I asked more seriously, ‘Do you see Jasper caught like that?’

‘Well, he’s only a boy—he’s younger at least than she.’

‘Precisely; she regards him as a child.’

‘As a child?’

‘She remarked to me herself to-day that he is so much younger.’

Mrs. Nettlepoint stared. ‘Does she talk of it with you? That shows she has a plan, that she has thought it over!’

I have sufficiently betrayed that I deemed Grace Mavis a singular girl, but I was far from judging her capable of laying a trap for our young companion. Moreover my reading of Jasper was not in the least that he was catchable—could be made to do a thing if he didn’t want to do it. Of course it was not impossible that he might be inclined, that he might take it (or already have taken it) into his head to marry Miss Mavis; but to believe this I should require still more proof than his always being with her. He wanted at most to marry her for the voyage. ‘If you have questioned him perhaps you have tried to make him feel responsible,’ I said to his mother.

‘A little, but it’s very difficult. Interference makes him perverse. One has to go gently. Besides, it’s too absurd—think of her age. If she can’t take care of herself!’ cried Mrs. Nettlepoint.

‘Yes, let us keep thinking of her age, though it’s not so prodigious. And if things get very bad you have one resource left,’ I added.

‘What is that?’

‘You can go upstairs.’

‘Ah, never, never! If it takes that to save her she must be lost. Besides, what good would it do? If I were to go up she could come down here.’

‘Yes, but you could keep Jasper with you.’

‘Could I?’ Mrs. Nettlepoint demanded, in the manner of a woman who knew her son.

In the saloon the next day, after dinner, over the red cloth of the tables, beneath the swinging lamps and the racks of tumblers, decanters and wine-glasses, we sat down to whist, Mrs. Peck, among others, taking a hand in the game. She played very badly and talked too much, and when the rubber was over assuaged her discomfiture (though not mine—we had been partners) with a Welsh rabbit and a tumbler of something hot. We had done with the cards, but while she waited for this refreshment she sat with her elbows on the table shuffling a pack.

‘She hasn’t spoken to me yet—she won’t do it,’ she remarked in a moment.

‘Is it possible there is any one on the ship who hasn’t spoken to you?’

‘Not that girl—she knows too well!’ Mrs. Peck looked round our little circle with a smile of intelligence—she had familiar, communicative eyes. Several of our company had assembled, according to the wont, the last thing in the evening, of those who are cheerful at sea, for the consumption of grilled sardines and devilled bones.

‘What then does she know?’

‘Oh, she knows that I know.’

‘Well, we know what Mrs. Peck knows,’ one of the ladies of the group observed to me, with an air of privilege.

‘Well, you wouldn’t know if I hadn’t told you—from the way she acts,’ said Mrs. Peck, with a small laugh.

‘She is going out to a gentleman who lives over there—he’s waiting there to marry her,’ the other lady went on, in the tone of authentic information. I remember that her name was Mrs. Gotch and that her mouth looked always as if she were whistling.

‘Oh, he knows—I’ve told him,’ said Mrs. Peck.

‘Well, I presume every one knows,’ Mrs. Gotch reflected.

‘Dear madam, is it every one’s business?’ I asked.

‘Why, don’t you think it’s a peculiar way to act?’ Mrs. Gotch was evidently surprised at my little protest.

‘Why, it’s right there—straight in front of you, like a play at the theatre—as if you had paid to see it,’ said Mrs. Peck. ‘If you don’t call it public——!’

‘Aren’t you mixing things up? What do you call public?’

‘Why, the way they go on. They are up there now.’

‘They cuddle up there half the night,’ said Mrs. Gotch. ‘I don’t know when they come down. Any hour you like—when all the lights are out they are up there still.’

‘Oh, you can’t tire them out. They don’t want relief—like the watch!’ laughed one of the gentlemen.

‘Well, if they enjoy each other’s society what’s the harm?’ another asked. ‘They’d do just the same on land.’

‘They wouldn’t do it on the public streets, I suppose,’ said Mrs. Peck. ‘And they wouldn’t do it if Mr. Porterfield was round!’

‘Isn’t that just where your confusion comes in?’ I inquired. ‘It’s public enough that Miss Mavis and Mr. Nettlepoint are always together, but it isn’t in the least public that she is going to be married.’

‘Why, how can you say—when the very sailors know it! The captain knows it and all the officers know it; they see them there—especially at night, when they’re sailing the ship.’

‘I thought there was some rule——’ said Mrs. Gotch.

‘Well, there is—that you’ve got to behave yourself,’ Mrs. Peck rejoined. ‘So the captain told me—he said they have some rule. He said they have to have, when people are too demonstrative.’

‘Too demonstrative?’

‘When they attract so much attention.’

‘Ah, it’s we who attract the attention—by talking about what doesn’t concern us and about what we really don’t know,’ I ventured to declare.

‘She said the captain said he would tell on her as soon as we arrive,’ Mrs. Gotch interposed.

‘*She* said——?’ I repeated, bewildered.

‘Well, he did say so, that he would think it his duty to inform Mr. Porterfield, when he comes on to meet her—if they keep it up in the same way,’ said Mrs. Peck.

‘Oh, they’ll keep it up, don’t you fear!’ one of the gentlemen exclaimed.

‘Dear madam, the captain is laughing at you.’

‘No, he ain’t—he’s right down scandalised. He says he regards us all as a real family and wants the family to be properly behaved.’ I could see Mrs. Peck was irritated by my controversial tone: she challenged me with considerable spirit. ‘How can you say I don’t know it when all the street knows it and has known it for years—for years and years?’ She spoke as if the girl had been engaged at least for twenty. ‘What is she going out for, if not to marry him?’

‘Perhaps she is going to see how he looks,’ suggested one of the gentlemen.

‘He’d look queer—if he knew.’

‘Well, I guess he’ll know,’ said Mrs. Gotch.

‘She’d tell him herself—she wouldn’t be afraid,’ the gentleman went on.

‘Well, she might as well kill him. He’ll jump overboard.’

‘Jump overboard?’ cried Mrs. Gotch, as if she hoped then that Mr. Porterfield would be told.

‘He has just been waiting for this—for years,’ said Mrs. Peck.

‘Do you happen to know him?’ I inquired.

Mrs. Peck hesitated a moment. ‘No, but I know a lady who does. Are you going up?’

I had risen from my place—I had not ordered supper. ‘I’m going to take a turn before going to bed.’

‘Well then, you’ll see!’

Outside the saloon I hesitated, for Mrs. Peck's admonition made me feel for a moment that if I ascended to the deck I should have entered in a manner into her little conspiracy. But the night was so warm and splendid that I had been intending to smoke a cigar in the air before going below, and I did not see why I should deprive myself of this pleasure in order to seem not to mind Mrs. Peck. I went up and saw a few figures sitting or moving about in the darkness. The ocean looked black and small, as it is apt to do at night, and the long mass of the ship, with its vague dim wings, seemed to take up a great part of it. There were more stars than one saw on land and the heavens struck one more than ever as larger than the earth. Grace Mavis and her companion were not, so far as I perceived at first, among the few passengers who were lingering late, and I was glad, because I hated to hear her talked about in the manner of the gossips I had left at supper. I wished there had been some way to prevent it, but I could think of no way but to recommend her privately to change her habits. That would be a very delicate business, and perhaps it would be better to begin with Jasper, though that would be delicate too. At any rate one might let him know, in a friendly spirit, to how much remark he exposed the young lady—leaving this revelation to work its way upon him. Unfortunately I could not altogether believe that the pair were unconscious of the observation and the opinion of the passengers. They were not a boy and a girl; they had a certain social perspective in their eye. I was not very clear as to the details of that behaviour which had made them (according to the version of my good friends in the saloon) a scandal to the ship, for though I looked at them a good deal I evidently had not looked at them so continuously and so hungrily as Mrs. Peck. Nevertheless the probability was that they knew what was thought of them—what naturally would be—and simply didn't care. That made Miss Mavis out rather cynical and even a little immodest; and yet, somehow, if she had such qualities I did not dislike her for them. I don't know what strange, secret excuses I found for her. I presently indeed encountered a need for them on the spot, for just as I was on the point of going below again, after several restless turns and (within the limit where smoking was allowed) as many puffs at a cigar as I cared for, I became aware that a couple of figures were seated behind one of the lifeboats that rested on the deck. They were so placed as to be visible only to a person going close to the rail and peering a little sidewise. I don't think I peered, but as I stood a moment beside the rail my eye was attracted by a dusky object which protruded beyond the boat and which, as I saw at a second glance, was the tail of a lady's dress. I bent forward an instant, but even then I saw very little more; that scarcely mattered, however, for I took for granted on the spot that the persons concealed in so snug a corner were Jasper Nettlepoint and Mr. Porterfield's intended. Concealed was the word, and I thought it a real pity; there was bad taste in it. I immediately turned away and the next moment I found myself face to face with the captain of the ship. I had already had some conversation with him (he had been so good as to invite me, as he had invited Mrs. Nettlepoint and her son and the young lady travelling with them, and also Mrs. Peck, to sit at his table) and had observed with pleasure that he had the art, not universal on the Atlantic liners, of mingling urbanity with seamanship.

'They don't waste much time—your friends in there,' he said, nodding in the direction in which he had seen me looking.

'Ah well, they haven't much to lose.'

'That's what I mean. I'm told *she* hasn't.'

I wanted to say something exculpatory but I scarcely knew what note to strike. I could only look vaguely about me at the starry darkness and the sea that seemed to sleep. 'Well, with these splendid nights, this perfection of weather, people are beguiled into late hours.'

'Yes. We want a nice little blow,' the captain said.

‘A nice little blow?’

‘That would clear the decks!’

The captain was rather dry and he went about his business. He had made me uneasy and instead of going below I walked a few steps more. The other walkers dropped off pair by pair (they were all men) till at last I was alone. Then, after a little, I quitted the field. Jasper and his companion were still behind their lifeboat. Personally I greatly preferred good weather, but as I went down I found myself vaguely wishing, in the interest of I scarcely knew what, unless of decorum, that we might have half a gale.

Miss Mavis turned out, in sea-phrases, early; for the next morning I saw her come up only a little while after I had finished my breakfast, a ceremony over which I contrived not to dawdle. She was alone and Jasper Nettlepoint, by a rare accident, was not on deck to help her. I went to meet her (she was encumbered as usual with her shawl, her sun-umbrella and a book) and laid my hands on her chair, placing it near the stern of the ship, where she liked best to be. But I proposed to her to walk a little before she sat down and she took my arm after I had put her accessories into the chair. The deck was clear at that hour and the morning light was gay; one got a sort of exhilarated impression of fair conditions and an absence of hindrance. I forget what we spoke of first, but it was because I felt these things pleasantly, and not to torment my companion nor to test her, that I could not help exclaiming cheerfully, after a moment, as I have mentioned having done the first day, ‘Well, we are getting on, we are getting on!’

‘Oh yes, I count every hour.’

‘The last days always go quicker,’ I said, ‘and the last hours——’

‘Well, the last hours?’ she asked; for I had instinctively checked myself.

‘Oh, one is so glad then that it is almost the same as if one had arrived. But we ought to be grateful when the elements have been so kind to us,’ I added. ‘I hope you will have enjoyed the voyage.’

She hesitated a moment, then she said, ‘Yes, much more than I expected.’

‘Did you think it would be very bad?’

‘Horrible, horrible!’

The tone of these words was strange but I had not much time to reflect upon it, for turning round at that moment I saw Jasper Nettlepoint come towards us. He was separated from us by the expanse of the white deck and I could not help looking at him from head to foot as he drew nearer. I know not what rendered me on this occasion particularly sensitive to the impression, but it seemed to me that I saw him as I had never seen him before—saw him inside and out, in the intense sea-light, in his personal, his moral totality. It was a quick, vivid revelation; if it only lasted a moment it had a simplifying, certifying effect. He was intrinsically a pleasing apparition, with his handsome young face and a certain absence of compromise in his personal arrangements which, more than any one I have ever seen, he managed to exhibit on shipboard. He had none of the appearance of wearing out old clothes that usually prevails there, but dressed straight, as I heard some one say. This gave him a practical, successful air, as of a young man who would come best out of any predicament. I expected to feel my companion’s hand loosen itself on my arm, as indication that now she must go to him, and was almost surprised she did not drop me. We stopped as we met and Jasper bade us a friendly good-morning. Of course the remark was not slow to be made that

we had another lovely day, which led him to exclaim, in the manner of one to whom criticism came easily, 'Yes, but with this sort of thing consider what one of the others would do!'

'One of the other ships?'

'We should be there now, or at any rate to-morrow.'

'Well then, I'm glad it isn't one of the others,' I said, smiling at the young lady on my arm. My remark offered her a chance to say something appreciative and gave him one even more; but neither Jasper nor Grace Mavis took advantage of the opportunity. What they did do, I perceived, was to look at each other for an instant; after which Miss Mavis turned her eyes silently to the sea. She made no movement and uttered no word, contriving to give me the sense that she had all at once become perfectly passive, that she somehow declined responsibility. We remained standing there with Jasper in front of us, and if the touch of her arm did not suggest that I should give her up, neither did it intimate that we had better pass on. I had no idea of giving her up, albeit one of the things that I seemed to discover just then in Jasper's physiognomy was an imperturbable implication that she was his property. His eye met mine for a moment, and it was exactly as if he had said to me, 'I know what you think, but I don't care a rap.' What I really thought was that he was selfish beyond the limits: that was the substance of my little revelation. Youth is almost always selfish, just as it is almost always conceited, and, after all, when it is combined with health and good parts, good looks and good spirits, it has a right to be, and I easily forgive it if it be really youth. Still it is a question of degree, and what stuck out of Jasper Nettlepoint (if one felt that sort of thing) was that his egotism had a hardness, his love of his own way an avidity. These elements were jaunty and prosperous, they were accustomed to triumph. He was fond, very fond, of women; they were necessary to him and that was in his type; but he was not in the least in love with Grace Mavis. Among the reflections I quickly made this was the one that was most to the point. There was a degree of awkwardness, after a minute, in the way we were planted there, though the apprehension of it was doubtless not in the least with him.

'How is your mother this morning?' I asked.

'You had better go down and see.'

'Not till Miss Mavis is tired of me.'

She said nothing to this and I made her walk again. For some minutes she remained silent; then, rather unexpectedly, she began: 'I've seen you talking to that lady who sits at our table—the one who has so many children.'

'Mrs. Peck? Oh yes, I have talked with her.'

'Do you know her very well?'

'Only as one knows people at sea. An acquaintance makes itself. It doesn't mean very much.'

'She doesn't speak to me—she might if she wanted.'

'That's just what she says of you—that you might speak to her.'

'Oh, if she's waiting for that——!' said my companion, with a laugh. Then she added—'She lives in our street, nearly opposite.'

'Precisely. That's the reason why she thinks you might speak; she has seen you so often and seems to know so much about you.'

'What does she know about me?'

'Ah, you must ask her—I can't tell you!'

‘I don’t care what she knows,’ said my young lady. After a moment she went on—‘She must have seen that I’m not very sociable.’ And then—‘What are you laughing at?’

My laughter was for an instant irrepressible—there was something so droll in the way she had said that.

‘Well, you are not sociable and yet you are. Mrs. Peck is, at any rate, and thought that ought to make it easy for you to enter into conversation with her.’

‘Oh, I don’t care for her conversation—I know what it amounts to.’ I made no rejoinder—I scarcely knew what rejoinder to make—and the girl went on, ‘I know what she thinks and I know what she says.’ Still I was silent, but the next moment I saw that my delicacy had been wasted, for Miss Mavis asked, ‘Does she make out that she knows Mr. Porterfield?’

‘No, she only says that she knows a lady who knows him.’

‘Yes, I know—Mrs. Jeremie. Mrs. Jeremie’s an idiot!’ I was not in a position to controvert this, and presently my young lady said she would sit down. I left her in her chair—I saw that she preferred it—and wandered to a distance. A few minutes later I met Jasper again, and he stopped of his own accord and said to me—

‘We shall be in about six in the evening, on the eleventh day—they promise it.’

‘If nothing happens, of course.’

‘Well, what’s going to happen?’

‘That’s just what I’m wondering!’ And I turned away and went below with the foolish but innocent satisfaction of thinking that I had mystified him.

IV

‘I don’t know what to do, and you must help me,’ Mrs. Nettlepoint said to me that evening, as soon as I went in to see her.

‘I’ll do what I can—but what’s the matter?’

‘She has been crying here and going on—she has quite upset me.’

‘Crying? She doesn’t look like that.’

‘Exactly, and that’s what startled me. She came in to see me this afternoon, as she has done before, and we talked about the weather and the run of the ship and the manners of the stewardess and little commonplaces like that, and then suddenly, in the midst of it, as she sat there, *à propos* of nothing, she burst into tears. I asked her what ailed her and tried to comfort her, but she didn’t explain; she only said it was nothing, the effect of the sea, of leaving home. I asked her if it had anything to do with her prospects, with her marriage; whether she found as that drew near that her heart was not in it; I told her that she mustn’t be nervous, that I could enter into that—in short I said what I could. All that she replied was that she *was* nervous, very nervous, but that it was already over; and then she jumped up and kissed me and went away. Does she look as if she had been crying?’ Mrs. Nettlepoint asked.

‘How can I tell, when she never quits that horrid veil? It’s as if she were ashamed to show her face.’

‘She’s keeping it for Liverpool. But I don’t like such incidents,’ said Mrs. Nettlepoint. ‘I shall go upstairs.’

‘And is that where you want me to help you?’

‘Oh, your arm and that sort of thing, yes. But something more. I feel as if something were going to happen.’

‘That’s exactly what I said to Jasper this morning.’

‘And what did he say?’

‘He only looked innocent, as if he thought I meant a fog or a storm.’

‘Heaven forbid—it isn’t that! I shall never be good-natured again,’ Mrs. Nettlepoint went on; ‘never have a girl put upon me that way. You always pay for it, there are always tiresome complications. What I am afraid of is after we get there. She’ll throw up her engagement; there will be dreadful scenes; I shall be mixed up with them and have to look after her and keep her with me. I shall have to stay there with her till she can be sent back, or even take her up to London. *Voyez-vous ça?*’

I listened respectfully to this and then I said: ‘You are afraid of your son.’

‘Afraid of him?’

‘There are things you might say to him—and with your manner; because you have one when you choose.’

‘Very likely, but what is my manner to his? Besides, I have said everything to him. That is I have said the great thing, that he is making her immensely talked about.’

‘And of course in answer to that he has asked you how you know, and you have told him I have told you.’

‘I had to; and he says it’s none of your business.’

‘I wish he would say that to my face.’

‘He’ll do so perfectly, if you give him a chance. That’s where you can help me. Quarrel with him—he’s rather good at a quarrel, and that will divert him and draw him off.’

‘Then I’m ready to discuss the matter with him for the rest of the voyage.’

‘Very well; I count on you. But he’ll ask you, as he asks me, what the deuce you want him to do.’

‘To go to bed,’ I replied, laughing.

‘Oh, it isn’t a joke.’

‘That’s exactly what I told you at first.’

‘Yes, but don’t exult; I hate people who exult. Jasper wants to know why he should mind her being talked about if she doesn’t mind it herself.’

‘I’ll tell him why,’ I replied; and Mrs. Nettlepoint said she should be exceedingly obliged to me and repeated that she would come upstairs.

I looked for Jasper above that same evening, but circumstances did not favour my quest. I found him—that is I discovered that he was again ensconced behind the lifeboat with Miss Mavis; but there was a needless violence in breaking into their communion, and I put off our interview till the next day. Then I took the first opportunity, at breakfast, to make sure of it. He was in the saloon when I went in and was preparing to leave the table; but I stopped him and asked if he would give me a quarter of an hour on deck a little later—there was something particular I wanted to say to him. He said, ‘Oh yes, if you like,’ with just a visible surprise, but no look of an uncomfortable consciousness. When I had finished my breakfast I

found him smoking on the forward-deck and I immediately began: 'I am going to say something that you won't at all like; to ask you a question that you will think impertinent.'

'Impertinent? that's bad.'

'I am a good deal older than you and I am a friend—of many years—of your mother. There's nothing I like less than to be meddlesome, but I think these things give me a certain right—a sort of privilege. For the rest, my inquiry will speak for itself.'

'Why so many preliminaries?' the young man asked, smiling.

We looked into each other's eyes a moment. What indeed was his mother's manner—her best manner—compared with his? 'Are you prepared to be responsible?'

'To you?'

'Dear no—to the young lady herself. I am speaking of course of Miss Mavis.'

'Ah yes, my mother tells me you have her greatly on your mind.'

'So has your mother herself—now.'

'She is so good as to say so—to oblige you.'

'She would oblige me a great deal more by reassuring me. I am aware that you know I have told her that Miss Mavis is greatly talked about.'

'Yes, but what on earth does it matter?'

'It matters as a sign.'

'A sign of what?'

'That she is in a false position.'

Jasper puffed his cigar, with his eyes on the horizon. 'I don't know whether it's *your* business, what you are attempting to discuss; but it really appears to me it is none of mine. What have I to do with the tattle with which a pack of old women console themselves for not being sea-sick?'

'Do you call it tattle that Miss Mavis is in love with you?'

'Drivelling.'

'Then you are very ungrateful. The tattle of a pack of old women has this importance, that she suspects or knows that it exists, and that nice girls are for the most part very sensitive to that sort of thing. To be prepared not to heed it in this case she must have a reason, and the reason must be the one I have taken the liberty to call your attention to.'

'In love with me in six days, just like that?' said Jasper, smoking.

'There is no accounting for tastes, and six days at sea are equivalent to sixty on land. I don't want to make you too proud. Of course if you recognise your responsibility it's all right and I have nothing to say.'

'I don't see what you mean,' Jasper went on.

'Surely you ought to have thought of that by this time. She's engaged to be married and the gentleman she is engaged to is to meet her at Liverpool. The whole ship knows it (I didn't tell them!) and the whole ship is watching her. It's impertinent if you like, just as I am, but we make a little world here together and we can't blink its conditions. What I ask you is whether you are prepared to allow her to give up the gentleman I have just mentioned for your sake.'

‘For my sake?’

‘To marry her if she breaks with him.’

Jasper turned his eyes from the horizon to my own, and I found a strange expression in them.

‘Has Miss Mavis commissioned you to make this inquiry?’

‘Never in the world.’

‘Well then, I don’t understand it.’

‘It isn’t from another I make it. Let it come from yourself—to yourself.’

‘Lord, you must think I lead myself a life! That’s a question the young lady may put to me any moment that it pleases her.’

‘Let me then express the hope that she will. But what will you answer?’

‘My dear sir, it seems to me that in spite of all the titles you have enumerated you have no reason to expect I will tell you.’ He turned away and I exclaimed, sincerely, ‘Poor girl!’ At this he faced me again and, looking at me from head to foot, demanded: ‘What is it you want me to do?’

‘I told your mother that you ought to go to bed.’

‘You had better do that yourself!’

This time he walked off, and I reflected rather dolefully that the only clear result of my experiment would probably have been to make it vivid to him that she was in love with him. Mrs. Nettlepoint came up as she had announced, but the day was half over: it was nearly three o’clock. She was accompanied by her son, who established her on deck, arranged her chair and her shawls, saw that she was protected from sun and wind, and for an hour was very properly attentive. While this went on Grace Mavis was not visible, nor did she reappear during the whole afternoon. I had not observed that she had as yet been absent from the deck for so long a period. Jasper went away, but he came back at intervals to see how his mother got on, and when she asked him where Miss Mavis was he said he had not the least idea. I sat with Mrs. Nettlepoint at her particular request: she told me she knew that if I left her Mrs. Peck and Mrs. Gotch would come to speak to her. She was flurried and fatigued at having to make an effort, and I think that Grace Mavis’s choosing this occasion for retirement suggested to her a little that she had been made a fool of. She remarked that the girl’s not being there showed her complete want of breeding and that she was really very good to have put herself out for her so; she was a common creature and that was the end of it. I could see that Mrs. Nettlepoint’s advent quickened the speculative activity of the other ladies; they watched her from the opposite side of the deck, keeping their eyes fixed on her very much as the man at the wheel kept his on the course of the ship. Mrs. Peck plainly meditated an approach, and it was from this danger that Mrs. Nettlepoint averted her face.

‘It’s just as we said,’ she remarked to me as we sat there. ‘It is like the bucket in the well. When I come up that girl goes down.’

‘Yes, but you’ve succeeded, since Jasper remains here.’

‘Remains? I don’t see him.’

‘He comes and goes—it’s the same thing.’

‘He goes more than he comes. But *n’en parlons plus*; I haven’t gained anything. I don’t admire the sea at all—what is it but a magnified water-tank? I shan’t come up again.’

‘I have an idea she’ll stay in her cabin now,’ I said. ‘She tells me she has one to herself.’ Mrs. Nettlepoint replied that she might do as she liked, and I repeated to her the little conversation I had had with Jasper.

She listened with interest, but ‘Marry her? mercy!’ she exclaimed. ‘I like the manner in which you give my son away.’

‘You wouldn’t accept that.’

‘Never in the world.’

‘Then I don’t understand your position.’

‘Good heavens, I have none! It isn’t a position to be bored to death.’

‘You wouldn’t accept it even in the case I put to him—that of her believing she had been encouraged to throw over poor Porterfield?’

‘Not even—not even. Who knows what she believes?’

‘Then you do exactly what I said you would—you show me a fine example of maternal immorality.’

‘Maternal fiddlesticks! It was she began it.’

‘Then why did you come up to-day?’

‘To keep you quiet.’

Mrs. Nettlepoint’s dinner was served on deck, but I went into the saloon. Jasper was there but not Grace Mavis, as I had half expected. I asked him what had become of her, if she were ill (he must have thought I had an ignoble pertinacity), and he replied that he knew nothing whatever about her. Mrs. Peck talked to me about Mrs. Nettlepoint and said it had been a great interest to her to see her; only it was a pity she didn’t seem more sociable. To this I replied that she had to beg to be excused—she was not well.

‘You don’t mean to say she’s sick, on this pond?’

‘No, she’s unwell in another way.’

‘I guess I know the way!’ Mrs. Peck laughed. And then she added, ‘I suppose she came up to look after her charge.’

‘Her charge?’

‘Why, Miss Mavis. We’ve talked enough about that.’

‘Quite enough. I don’t know what that had to do with it. Miss Mavis hasn’t been there to-day.’

‘Oh, it goes on all the same.’

‘It goes on?’

‘Well, it’s too late.’

‘Too late?’

‘Well, you’ll see. There’ll be a row.’

This was not comforting, but I did not repeat it above. Mrs. Nettlepoint returned early to her cabin, professing herself much tired. I know not what ‘went on,’ but Grace Mavis continued not to show. I went in late, to bid Mrs. Nettlepoint good-night, and learned from her that the girl had not been to her. She had sent the stewardess to her room for news, to see if she were

ill and needed assistance, and the stewardess came back with the information that she was not there. I went above after this; the night was not quite so fair and the deck was almost empty. In a moment Jasper Nettlepoint and our young lady moved past me together. 'I hope you are better!' I called after her; and she replied, over her shoulder—

'Oh, yes, I had a headache; but the air now does me good!'

I went down again—I was the only person there but they, and I wished to not appear to be watching them—and returning to Mrs. Nettlepoint's room found (her door was open into the little passage) that she was still sitting up.

'She's all right!' I said. 'She's on the deck with Jasper.'

The old lady looked up at me from her book. 'I didn't know you called that all right.'

'Well, it's better than something else.'

'Something else?'

'Something I was a little afraid of.' Mrs. Nettlepoint continued to look at me; she asked me what that was. 'I'll tell you when we are ashore,' I said.

The next day I went to see her, at the usual hour of my morning visit, and found her in considerable agitation. 'The scenes have begun,' she said; 'you know I told you I shouldn't get through without them! You made me nervous last night—I haven't the least idea what you meant; but you made me nervous. She came in to see me an hour ago, and I had the courage to say to her, "I don't know why I shouldn't tell you frankly that I have been scolding my son about you." Of course she asked me what I meant by that, and I said—"It seems to me he drags you about the ship too much, for a girl in your position. He has the air of not remembering that you belong to some one else. There is a kind of want of taste and even of want of respect in it." That produced an explosion; she became very violent.'

'Do you mean angry?'

'Not exactly angry, but very hot and excited—at my presuming to think her relations with my son were not the simplest in the world. I might scold him as much as I liked—that was between ourselves; but she didn't see why I should tell her that I had done so. Did I think she allowed him to treat her with disrespect? That idea was not very complimentary to her! He had treated her better and been kinder to her than most other people—there were very few on the ship that hadn't been insulting. She should be glad enough when she got off it, to her own people, to some one whom no one would have a right to say anything about. What was there in her position that was not perfectly natural? What was the idea of making a fuss about her position? Did I mean that she took it too easily—that she didn't think as much as she ought about Mr. Porterfield? Didn't I believe she was attached to him—didn't I believe she was just counting the hours until she saw him? That would be the happiest moment of her life. It showed how little I knew her, if I thought anything else.'

'All that must have been rather fine—I should have liked to hear it,' I said. 'And what did you reply?'

'Oh, I grovelled; I told her that I accused her (as regards my son) of nothing worse than an excess of good nature. She helped him to pass his time—he ought to be immensely obliged. Also that it would be a very happy moment for me too when I should hand her over to Mr. Porterfield.'

'And will you come up to-day?'

'No indeed—she'll do very well now.'

I gave a sigh of relief. ‘All’s well that ends well!’

Jasper, that day, spent a great deal of time with his mother. She had told me that she really had had no proper opportunity to talk over with him their movements after disembarking. Everything changes a little, the last two or three days of a voyage; the spell is broken and new combinations take place. Grace Mavis was neither on deck nor at dinner, and I drew Mrs. Peck’s attention to the extreme propriety with which she now conducted herself. She had spent the day in meditation and she judged it best to continue to meditate.

‘Ah, she’s afraid,’ said my implacable neighbour.

‘Afraid of what?’

‘Well, that we’ll tell tales when we get there.’

‘Whom do you mean by “we”?’

‘Well, there are plenty, on a ship like this.’

‘Well then, we won’t.’

‘Maybe we won’t have the chance,’ said the dreadful little woman.

‘Oh, at that moment a universal geniality reigns.’

‘Well, she’s afraid, all the same.’

‘So much the better.’

‘Yes, so much the better.’

All the next day, too, the girl remained invisible and Mrs. Nettlepoint told me that she had not been in to see her. She had inquired by the stewardess if she would receive her in her own cabin, and Grace Mavis had replied that it was littered up with things and unfit for visitors: she was packing a trunk over. Jasper made up for his devotion to his mother the day before by now spending a great deal of his time in the smoking-room. I wanted to say to him ‘This is much better,’ but I thought it wiser to hold my tongue. Indeed I had begun to feel the emotion of prospective arrival (I was delighted to be almost back in my dear old Europe again) and had less to spare for other matters. It will doubtless appear to the critical reader that I had already devoted far too much to the little episode of which my story gives an account, but to this I can only reply that the event justified me. We sighted land, the dim yet rich coast of Ireland, about sunset and I leaned on the edge of the ship and looked at it. ‘It doesn’t look like much, does it?’ I heard a voice say, beside me; and, turning, I found Grace Mavis was there. Almost for the first time she had her veil up, and I thought her very pale.

‘It will be more to-morrow,’ I said.

‘Oh yes, a great deal more.’

‘The first sight of land, at sea, changes everything,’ I went on. ‘I always think it’s like waking up from a dream. It’s a return to reality.’

For a moment she made no response to this; then she said, ‘It doesn’t look very real yet.’

‘No, and meanwhile, this lovely evening, the dream is still present.’

She looked up at the sky, which had a brightness, though the light of the sun had left it and that of the stars had not come out. ‘It *is* a lovely evening.’

‘Oh yes, with this we shall do.’

She stood there a while longer, while the growing dusk effaced the line of the land more rapidly than our progress made it distinct. She said nothing more, she only looked in front of her; but her very quietness made me want to say something suggestive of sympathy and service. I was unable to think what to say—some things seemed too wide of the mark and others too importunate. At last, unexpectedly, she appeared to give me my chance. Irrelevantly, abruptly she broke out:

‘Didn’t you tell me that you knew Mr. Porterfield?’

‘Dear me, yes—I used to see him. I have often wanted to talk to you about him.’

She turned her face upon me and in the deepened evening I fancied she looked whiter. ‘What good would that do?’

‘Why, it would be a pleasure,’ I replied, rather foolishly.

‘Do you mean for you?’

‘Well, yes—call it that,’ I said, smiling.

‘Did you know him so well?’

My smile became a laugh and I said—‘You are not easy to make speeches to.’

‘I hate speeches!’ The words came from her lips with a violence that surprised me; they were loud and hard. But before I had time to wonder at it she went on—‘Shall you know him when you see him?’

‘Perfectly, I think.’ Her manner was so strange that one had to notice it in some way, and it appeared to me the best way was to notice it jocularly; so I added, ‘Shan’t you?’

‘Oh, perhaps you’ll point him out!’ And she walked quickly away. As I looked after her I had a singular, a perverse and rather an embarrassed sense of having, during the previous days, and especially in speaking to Jasper Nettlepoint, interfered with her situation to her loss. I had a sort of pang in seeing her move about alone; I felt somehow responsible for it and asked myself why I could not have kept my hands off. I had seen Jasper in the smoking-room more than once that day, as I passed it, and half an hour before this I had observed, through the open door, that he was there. He had been with her so much that without him she had a bereaved, forsaken air. It was better, no doubt, but superficially it made her rather pitiable. Mrs. Peck would have told me that their separation was gammon; they didn’t show together on deck and in the saloon, but they made it up elsewhere. The secret places on shipboard are not numerous; Mrs. Peck’s ‘elsewhere’ would have been vague and I know not what license her imagination took. It was distinct that Jasper had fallen off, but of course what had passed between them on this subject was not so and could never be. Later, through his mother, I had *his* version of that, but I may remark that I didn’t believe it. Poor Mrs. Nettlepoint did, of course. I was almost capable, after the girl had left me, of going to my young man and saying, ‘After all, do return to her a little, just till we get in! It won’t make any difference after we land.’ And I don’t think it was the fear he would tell me I was an idiot that prevented me. At any rate the next time I passed the door of the smoking-room I saw that he had left it. I paid my usual visit to Mrs. Nettlepoint that night, but I troubled her no further about Miss Mavis. She had made up her mind that everything was smooth and settled now, and it seemed to me that I had worried her and that she had worried herself enough. I left her to enjoy the foretaste of arrival, which had taken possession of her mind. Before turning in I went above and found more passengers on deck than I had ever seen so late. Jasper was walking about among them alone, but I forebore to join him. The coast of Ireland had disappeared, but the night and the sea were perfect. On the way to my cabin, when I came down, I met the stewardess in one of

the passages and the idea entered my head to say to her—'Do you happen to know where Miss Mavis is?'

'Why, she's in her room, sir, at this hour.'

'Do you suppose I could speak to her?' It had come into my mind to ask her why she had inquired of me whether I should recognise Mr. Porterfield.

'No, sir,' said the stewardess; 'she has gone to bed.'

'That's all right.' And I followed the young lady's excellent example.

The next morning, while I was dressing, the steward of my side of the ship came to me as usual to see what I wanted. But the first thing he said to me was—'Rather a bad job, sir—a passenger missing.'

'A passenger—missing?'

'A lady, sir. I think you knew her. Miss Mavis, sir.'

'*Missing?*' I cried—staring at him, horror-stricken.

'She's not on the ship. They can't find her.'

'Then where to God is she?'

I remember his queer face. 'Well sir, I suppose you know that as well as I.'

'Do you mean she has jumped overboard?'

'Some time in the night, sir—on the quiet. But it's beyond every one, the way she escaped notice. They usually sees 'em, sir. It must have been about half-past two. Lord, but she was clever, sir. She didn't so much as make a splash. They say she 'ad come against her will, sir.'

I had dropped upon my sofa—I felt faint. The man went on, liking to talk, as persons of his class do when they have something horrible to tell. She usually rang for the stewardess early, but this morning of course there had been no ring. The stewardess had gone in all the same about eight o'clock and found the cabin empty. That was about an hour ago. Her things were there in confusion—the things she usually wore when she went above. The stewardess thought she had been rather strange last night, but she waited a little and then went back. Miss Mavis hadn't turned up—and she didn't turn up. The stewardess began to look for her—she hadn't been seen on deck or in the saloon. Besides, she wasn't dressed—not to show herself; all her clothes were in her room. There was another lady, an old lady, Mrs. Nettlepoint—I would know her—that she was sometimes with, but the stewardess had been with *her* and she knew Miss Mavis had not come near her that morning. She had spoken to *him* and they had taken a quiet look—they had hunted everywhere. A ship's a big place, but you do come to the end of it, and if a person ain't there why they ain't. In short an hour had passed and the young lady was not accounted for: from which I might judge if she ever would be. The watch couldn't account for her, but no doubt the fishes in the sea could—poor miserable lady! The stewardess and he, they had of course thought it their duty very soon to speak to the doctor, and the doctor had spoken immediately to the captain. The captain didn't like it—they never did. But he would try to keep it quiet—they always did.

By the time I succeeded in pulling myself together and getting on, after a fashion, the rest of my clothes I had learned that Mrs. Nettlepoint had not yet been informed, unless the stewardess had broken it to her within the previous few minutes. Her son knew, the young gentleman on the other side of the ship (he had the other steward); my man had seen him come out of his cabin and rush above, just before he came in to me. He *had* gone above, my man was sure; he had not gone to the old lady's cabin. I remember a queer vision when the

steward told me this—the wild flash of a picture of Jasper Nettlepoint leaping with a mad compunction in his young agility over the side of the ship. I hasten to add that no such incident was destined to contribute its horror to poor Grace Mavis's mysterious tragic act. What followed was miserable enough, but I can only glance at it. When I got to Mrs. Nettlepoint's door she was there in her dressing-gown; the stewardess had just told her and she was rushing out to come to me. I made her go back—I said I would go for Jasper. I went for him but I missed him, partly no doubt because it was really, at first, the captain I was after. I found this personage and found him highly scandalised, but he gave me no hope that we were in error, and his displeasure, expressed with seamanlike plainness, was a definite settlement of the question. From the deck, where I merely turned round and looked, I saw the light of another summer day, the coast of Ireland green and near and the sea a more charming colour than it had been at all. When I came below again Jasper had passed back; he had gone to his cabin and his mother had joined him there. He remained there till we reached Liverpool—I never saw him. His mother, after a little, at his request, left him alone. All the world went above to look at the land and chatter about our tragedy, but the poor lady spent the day, dismally enough, in her room. It seemed to me intolerably long; I was thinking so of vague Porterfield and of my prospect of having to face him on the morrow. Now of course I knew why she had asked me if I should recognise him; she had delegated to me mentally a certain pleasant office. I gave Mrs. Peck and Mrs. Gotch a wide berth—I couldn't talk to them. I could, or at least I did a little, to Mrs. Nettlepoint, but with too many reserves for comfort on either side, for I foresaw that it would not in the least do now to mention Jasper to her. I was obliged to assume by my silence that he had had nothing to do with what had happened; and of course I never really ascertained what he *had* had to do. The secret of what passed between him and the strange girl who would have sacrificed her marriage to him on so short an acquaintance remains shut up in his breast. His mother, I know, went to his door from time to time, but he refused her admission. That evening, to be human at a venture, I requested the steward to go in and ask him if he should care to see me, and the attendant returned with an answer which he candidly transmitted. 'Not in the least!' Jasper apparently was almost as scandalised as the captain.

At Liverpool, at the dock, when we had touched, twenty people came on board and I had already made out Mr. Porterfield at a distance. He was looking up at the side of the great vessel with disappointment written (to my eyes) in his face—disappointment at not seeing the woman he loved lean over it and wave her handkerchief to him. Every one was looking at him, every one but she (his identity flew about in a moment) and I wondered if he did not observe it. He used to be lean, he had grown almost fat. The interval between us diminished—he was on the plank and then on the deck with the jostling officers of the customs—all too soon for my equanimity. I met him instantly however, laid my hand on him and drew him away, though I perceived that he had no impression of having seen me before. It was not till afterwards that I thought this a little stupid of him. I drew him far away (I was conscious of Mrs. Peck and Mrs. Gotch looking at us as we passed) into the empty, stale smoking-room; he remained speechless, and that struck me as like him. I had to speak first, he could not even relieve me by saying 'Is anything the matter?' I told him first that she was ill. It was an odious moment.

The Lesson of the Master

I

He had been told the ladies were at church, but this was corrected by what he saw from the top of the steps—they descended from a great height in two arms, with a circular sweep of the most charming effect—at the threshold of the door which, from the long bright gallery, overlooked the immense lawn. Three gentlemen, on the grass, at a distance, sat under the great trees, while the fourth figure showed a crimson dress that told as a “bit of colour” amid the fresh rich green. The servant had so far accompanied Paul Overt as to introduce him to this view, after asking him if he wished first to go to his room. The young man declined that privilege, conscious of no disrepair from so short and easy a journey and always liking to take at once a general perceptive possession of a new scene. He stood there a little with his eyes on the group and on the admirable picture, the wide grounds of an old country-house near London—that only made it better—on a splendid Sunday in June. “But that lady, who’s *she*?” he said to the servant before the man left him.

“I think she’s Mrs. St. George, sir.”

“Mrs. St. George, the wife of the distinguished—” Then Paul Overt checked himself, doubting if a footman would know.

“Yes, sir—probably, sir,” said his guide, who appeared to wish to intimate that a person staying at Summersoft would naturally be, if only by alliance, distinguished. His tone, however, made poor Overt himself feel for the moment scantily so.

“And the gentlemen?” Overt went on.

“Well, sir, one of them’s General Fancourt.”

“Ah yes, I know; thank you.” General Fancourt was distinguished, there was no doubt of that, for something he had done, or perhaps even hadn’t done—the young man couldn’t remember which—some years before in India. The servant went away, leaving the glass doors open into the gallery, and Paul Overt remained at the head of the wide double staircase, saying to himself that the place was sweet and promised a pleasant visit, while he leaned on the balustrade of fine old ironwork which, like all the other details, was of the same period as the house. It all went together and spoke in one voice—a rich English voice of the early part of the eighteenth century. It might have been church-time on a summer’s day in the reign of Queen Anne; the stillness was too perfect to be modern, the nearness counted so as distance, and there was something so fresh and sound in the originality of the large smooth house, the expanse of beautiful brickwork that showed for pink rather than red and that had been kept clear of messy creepers by the law under which a woman with a rare complexion disdains a veil. When Paul Overt became aware that the people under the trees had noticed him he turned back through the open doors into the great gallery which was the pride of the place. It marched across from end to end and seemed—with its bright colours, its high panelled windows, its faded flowered chintzes, its quickly-recognised portraits and pictures, the blue-and-white china of its cabinets and the attenuated festoons and rosettes of its ceiling—a cheerful upholstered avenue into the other century.

Our friend was slightly nervous; that went with his character as a student of fine prose, went with the artist’s general disposition to vibrate; and there was a particular thrill in the idea that Henry St. George might be a member of the party. For the young aspirant he had remained a

high literary figure, in spite of the lower range of production to which he had fallen after his first three great successes, the comparative absence of quality in his later work. There had been moments when Paul Overt almost shed tears for this; but now that he was near him—he had never met him—he was conscious only of the fine original source and of his own immense debt. After he had taken a turn or two up and down the gallery he came out again and descended the steps. He was but slenderly supplied with a certain social boldness—it was really a weakness in him—so that, conscious of a want of acquaintance with the four persons in the distance, he gave way to motions recommended by their not committing him to a positive approach. There was a fine English awkwardness in this—he felt that too as he sauntered vaguely and obliquely across the lawn, taking an independent line. Fortunately there was an equally fine English directness in the way one of the gentlemen presently rose and made as if to “stalk” him, though with an air of conciliation and reassurance. To this demonstration Paul Overt instantly responded, even if the gentleman were not his host. He was tall, straight and elderly and had, like the great house itself, a pink smiling face, and into the bargain a white moustache. Our young man met him halfway while he laughed and said: “Er—Lady Watermouth told us you were coming; she asked me just to look after you.” Paul Overt thanked him, liking him on the spot, and turned round with him to walk toward the others. “They’ve all gone to church—all except us,” the stranger continued as they went; “we’re just sitting here—it’s so jolly.” Overt pronounced it jolly indeed: it was such a lovely place. He mentioned that he was having the charming impression for the first time.

“Ah you’ve not been here before?” said his companion. “It’s a nice little place—not much to *do*, you know”. Overt wondered what he wanted to “do”—he felt that he himself was doing so much. By the time they came to where the others sat he had recognised his initiator for a military man and—such was the turn of Overt’s imagination—had found him thus still more sympathetic. He would naturally have a need for action, for deeds at variance with the pacific pastoral scene. He was evidently so good-natured, however, that he accepted the inglorious hour for what it was worth. Paul Overt shared it with him and with his companions for the next twenty minutes; the latter looked at him and he looked at them without knowing much who they were, while the talk went on without much telling him even what it meant. It seemed indeed to mean nothing in particular; it wandered, with casual pointless pauses and short terrestrial flights, amid names of persons and places—names which, for our friend, had no great power of evocation. It was all sociable and slow, as was right and natural of a warm Sunday morning.

His first attention was given to the question, privately considered, of whether one of the two younger men would be Henry St. George. He knew many of his distinguished contemporaries by their photographs, but had never, as happened, seen a portrait of the great misguided novelist. One of the gentlemen was unimaginable—he was too young; and the other scarcely looked clever enough, with such mild indiscriminating eyes. If those eyes were St. George’s the problem, presented by the ill-matched parts of his genius would be still more difficult of solution. Besides, the deportment of their proprietor was not, as regards the lady in the red dress, such as could be natural, toward the wife of his bosom, even to a writer accused by several critics of sacrificing too much to manner. Lastly Paul Overt had a vague sense that if the gentleman with the expressionless eyes bore the name that had set his heart beating faster (he also had contradictory conventional whiskers—the young admirer of the celebrity had never in a mental vision seen *his* face in so vulgar a frame) he would have given him a sign of recognition or of friendliness, would have heard of him a little, would know something about “Ginistrella,” would have an impression of how that fresh fiction had caught the eye of real criticism. Paul Overt had a dread of being grossly proud, but even morbid modesty might view the authorship of “Ginistrella” as constituting a degree of identity. His

soldierly friend became clear enough: he was “Fancourt,” but was also “the General”; and he mentioned to the new visitor in the course of a few moments that he had but lately returned from twenty years service abroad.

“And now you remain in England?” the young man asked.

“Oh yes; I’ve bought a small house in London.”

“And I hope you like it,” said Overt, looking at Mrs. St. George.

“Well, a little house in Manchester Square—there’s a limit to the enthusiasm *that* inspires.”

“Oh I meant being at home again—being back in Piccadilly.”

“My daughter likes Piccadilly—that’s the main thing. She’s very fond of art and music and literature and all that kind of thing. She missed it in India and she finds it in London, or she hopes she’ll find it. Mr. St. George has promised to help her—he has been awfully kind to her. She has gone to church—she’s fond of that too—but they’ll all be back in a quarter of an hour. You must let me introduce you to her—she’ll be so glad to know you. I dare say she has read every blest word you’ve written.”

“I shall be delighted—I haven’t written so very many,” Overt pleaded, feeling, and without resentment, that the General at least was vagueness itself about that. But he wondered a little why, expressing this friendly disposition, it didn’t occur to the doubtless eminent soldier to pronounce the word that would put him in relation with Mrs. St. George. If it was a question of introductions Miss Fancourt—apparently as yet unmarried—was far away, while the wife of his illustrious confrère was almost between them. This lady struck Paul Overt as altogether pretty, with a surprising juvenility and a high smartness of aspect, something that—he could scarcely have said why—served for mystification. St. George certainly had every right to a charming wife, but he himself would never have imagined the important little woman in the aggressively Parisian dress the partner for life, the alter ego, of a man of letters. That partner in general, he knew, that second self, was far from presenting herself in a single type: observation had taught him that she was not inveterately, not necessarily plain. But he had never before seen her look so much as if her prosperity had deeper foundations than an ink-spotted study-table littered with proof-sheets. Mrs. St. George might have been the wife of a gentleman who “kept” books rather than wrote them, who carried on great affairs in the City and made better bargains than those that poets mostly make with publishers. With this she hinted at a success more personal—a success peculiarly stamping the age in which society, the world of conversation, is a great drawing-room with the City for its antechamber. Overt numbered her years at first as some thirty, and then ended by believing that she might approach her fiftieth. But she somehow in this case juggled away the excess and the difference—you only saw them in a rare glimpse, like the rabbit in the conjurer’s sleeve. She was extraordinarily white, and her every element and item was pretty; her eyes, her ears, her hair, her voice, her hands, her feet—to which her relaxed attitude in her wicker chair gave a great publicity—and the numerous ribbons and trinkets with which she was bedecked. She looked as if she had put on her best clothes to go to church and then had decided they were too good for that and had stayed at home. She told a story of some length about the shabby way Lady Jane had treated the Duchess, as well as an anecdote in relation to a purchase she had made in Paris—on her way back from Cannes; made for Lady Egbert, who had never refunded the money. Paul Overt suspected her of a tendency to figure great people as larger than life, until he noticed the manner in which she handled Lady Egbert, which was so sharply mutinous that it reassured him. He felt he should have understood her better if he might have met her eye; but she scarcely so much as glanced at him. “Ah here they come—all the good ones!” she said at last; and Paul Overt admired at his distance the

return of the church-goers—several persons, in couples and threes, advancing in a flicker of sun and shade at the end of a large green vista formed by the level grass and the overarching boughs.

“If you mean to imply that *we’re* bad, I protest,” said one of the gentlemen—“after making one’s self agreeable all the morning!”

“Ah if they’ve found you agreeable—!” Mrs. St. George gaily cried. “But if we’re good the others are better.”

“They must be angels then,” said the amused General.

“Your husband was an angel, the way he went off at your bidding,” the gentleman who had first spoken declared to Mrs. St. George.

“At my bidding?”

“Didn’t you make him go to church?”

“I never made him do anything in my life but once—when I made him burn up a bad book. That’s all!” At her “That’s all!” our young friend broke into an irrepressible laugh; it lasted only a second, but it drew her eyes to him. His own met them, though not long enough to help him to understand her; unless it were a step towards this that he saw on the instant how the burnt book—the way she alluded to it!—would have been one of her husband’s finest things.

“A bad book?” her interlocutor repeated.

“I didn’t like it. He went to church because your daughter went,” she continued to General Fancourt. “I think it my duty to call your attention to his extraordinary demonstrations to your daughter.”

“Well, if you don’t mind them I don’t,” the General laughed.

“Il s’attache à ses pas. But I don’t wonder—she’s so charming.”

“I hope she won’t make him burn any books!” Paul Overt ventured to exclaim.

“If she’d make him write a few it would be more to the purpose,” said Mrs. St. George. “He has been of a laziness of late—!”

Our young man stared—he was so struck with the lady’s phraseology. Her “Write a few” seemed to him almost as good as her “That’s all.” Didn’t she, as the wife of a rare artist, know what it was to produce one perfect work of art? How in the world did she think they were turned on? His private conviction was that, admirably as Henry St. George wrote, he had written for the last ten years, and especially for the last five, only too much, and there was an instant during which he felt inwardly solicited to make this public. But before he had spoken a diversion was effected by the return of the absentees. They strolled up dispersedly—there were eight or ten of them—and the circle under the trees rearranged itself as they took their place in it. They made it much larger, so that Paul Overt could feel—he was always feeling that sort of thing, as he said to himself—that if the company had already been interesting to watch the interest would now become intense. He shook hands with his hostess, who welcomed him without many words, in the manner of a woman able to trust him to understand and conscious that so pleasant an occasion would in every way speak for itself. She offered him no particular facility for sitting by her, and when they had all subsided again he found himself still next General Fancourt, with an unknown lady on his other flank.

“That’s my daughter—that one opposite,” the General said to him without lose of time. Overt saw a tall girl, with magnificent red hair, in a dress of a pretty grey-green tint and

of a limp silken texture, a garment that clearly shirked every modern effect. It had therefore somehow the stamp of the latest thing, so that our beholder quickly took her for nothing if not contemporaneous.

“She’s very handsome—very handsome,” he repeated while he considered her. There was something noble in her head, and she appeared fresh and strong.

Her good father surveyed her with complacency, remarking soon: “She looks too hot—that’s her walk. But she’ll be all right presently. Then I’ll make her come over and speak to you.”

“I should be sorry to give you that trouble. If you were to take me over *there*—!” the young man murmured.

“My dear sir, do you suppose I put myself out that way? I don’t mean for you, but for Marian,” the General added.

“I would put myself out for her soon enough,” Overt replied; after which he went on: “Will you be so good as to tell me which of those gentlemen is Henry St. George?”

“The fellow talking to my girl. By Jove, he *is* making up to her—they’re going off for another walk.”

“Ah is that he—really?” Our friend felt a certain surprise, for the personage before him seemed to trouble a vision which had been vague only while not confronted with the reality. As soon as the reality dawned the mental image, retiring with a sigh, became substantial enough to suffer a slight wrong. Overt, who had spent a considerable part of his short life in foreign lands, made now, but not for the first time, the reflexion that whereas in those countries he had almost always recognised the artist and the man of letters by his personal “type,” the mould of his face, the character of his head, the expression of his figure and even the indications of his dress, so in England this identification was as little as possible a matter of course, thanks to the greater conformity, the habit of sinking the profession instead of advertising it, the general diffusion of the air of the gentleman—the gentleman committed to no particular set of ideas. More than once, on returning to his own country, he had said to himself about people met in society: “One sees them in this place and that, and one even talks with them; but to find out what they *do* one would really have to be a detective.” In respect to several individuals whose work he was the opposite of “drawn to”—perhaps he was wrong—he found himself adding “No wonder they conceal it—when it’s so bad!” He noted that oftener than in France and in Germany his artist looked like a gentleman—that is like an English one—while, certainly outside a few exceptions, his gentlemen didn’t look like an artist. St. George was not one of the exceptions; that circumstance he definitely apprehended before the great man had turned his back to walk off with Miss Fancourt. He certainly looked better behind than any foreign man of letters—showed for beautifully correct in his tall black hat and his superior frock coat. Somehow, all the same, these very garments—he wouldn’t have minded them so much on a weekday—were disconcerting to Paul Overt, who forgot for the moment that the head of the profession was not a bit better dressed than himself. He had caught a glimpse of a regular face, a fresh colour, a brown moustache and a pair of eyes surely never visited by a fine frenzy, and he promised himself to study these denotements on the first occasion. His superficial sense was that their owner might have passed for a lucky stockbroker—a gentleman driving eastward every morning from a sanitary suburb in a smart dog-cart. That carried out the impression already derived from his wife. Paul’s glance, after a moment, travelled back to this lady, and he saw how her own had followed her husband as he moved off with Miss Fancourt. Overt permitted himself to wonder a little if she were jealous when another woman took him away. Then he made out that Mrs. St. George wasn’t glaring at the indifferent maiden. Her

eyes rested but on her husband, and with unmistakeable serenity. That was the way she wanted him to be—she liked his conventional uniform. Overt longed to hear more about the book she had induced him to destroy.

II

As they all came out from luncheon General Fancourt took hold of him with an “I say, I want you to know my girl!” as if the idea had just occurred to him and he hadn’t spoken of it before. With the other hand he possessed himself all paternally of the young lady. “You know all about him. I’ve seen you with his books. She reads everything—everything!” he went on to Paul. The girl smiled at him and then laughed at her father. The General turned away and his daughter spoke—“Isn’t papa delightful?”

“He is indeed, Miss Fancourt.”

“As if I read you because I read ‘everything’!”

“Oh I don’t mean for saying that,” said Paul Overt. “I liked him from the moment he began to be kind to me. Then he promised me this privilege.”

“It isn’t for you he means it—it’s for me. If you flatter yourself that he thinks of anything in life but me you’ll find you’re mistaken. He introduces every one. He thinks me insatiable.”

“You speak just like him,” laughed our youth.

“Ah but sometimes I want to”—and the girl coloured. “I don’t read everything—I read very little. But I *have* read you.”

“Suppose we go into the gallery,” said Paul Overt. She pleased him greatly, not so much because of this last remark—though that of course was not too disconcerting—as because, seated opposite to him at luncheon, she had given him for half an hour the impression of her beautiful face. Something else had come with it—a sense of generosity, of an enthusiasm which, unlike many enthusiasms, was not all manner. That was not spoiled for him by his seeing that the repast had placed her again in familiar contact with Henry St. George. Sitting next her this celebrity was also opposite our young man, who had been able to note that he multiplied the attentions lately brought by his wife to the General’s notice. Paul Overt had gathered as well that this lady was not in the least discomposed by these fond excesses and that she gave every sign of an unclouded spirit. She had Lord Masham on one side of her and on the other the accomplished Mr. Mulliner, editor of the new high-class lively evening paper which was expected to meet a want felt in circles increasingly conscious that Conservatism must be made amusing, and unconvinced when assured by those of another political colour that it was already amusing enough. At the end of an hour spent in her company Paul Overt thought her still prettier than at the first radiation, and if her profane allusions to her husband’s work had not still rung in his ears he should have liked her—so far as it could be a question of that in connexion with a woman to whom he had not yet spoken and to whom probably he should never speak if it were left to her. Pretty women were a clear need to this genius, and for the hour it was Miss Fancourt who supplied the want. If Overt had promised himself a closer view the occasion was now of the best, and it brought consequences felt by the young man as important. He saw more in St. George’s face, which he liked the better for its not having told its whole story in the first three minutes. That story came out as one read, in short instalments—it was excusable that one’s analogies should be somewhat professional—and the text was a style considerably involved, a language not easy to translate at sight. There were shades of meaning in it and a vague perspective of history which receded as you advanced. Two facts Paul had particularly heeded. The first of these was that he liked the measured mask much better at inscrutable rest than in social agitation; its almost

convulsive smile above all displeased him (as much as any impression from that source could), whereas the quiet face had a charm that grew in proportion as stillness settled again. The change to the expression of gaiety excited, he made out, very much the private protest of a person sitting gratefully in the twilight when the lamp is brought in too soon. His second reflexion was that, though generally averse to the flagrant use of ingratiating arts by a man of age “making up” to a pretty girl, he was not in this case too painfully affected: which seemed to prove either that St. George had a light hand or the air of being younger than he was, or else that Miss Fancourt’s own manner somehow made everything right.

Overt walked with her into the gallery, and they strolled to the end of it, looking at the pictures, the cabinets, the charming vista, which harmonised with the prospect of the summer afternoon, resembling it by a long brightness, with great divans and old chairs that figured hours of rest. Such a place as that had the added merit of giving those who came into it plenty to talk about. Miss Fancourt sat down with her new acquaintance on a flowered sofa, the cushions of which, very numerous, were tight ancient cubes of many sizes, and presently said: “I’m so glad to have a chance to thank you.”

“To thank me—?” He had to wonder.

“I liked your book so much. I think it splendid.”

She sat there smiling at him, and he never asked himself which book she meant; for after all he had written three or four. That seemed a vulgar detail, and he wasn’t even gratified by the idea of the pleasure she told him—her handsome bright face told him—he had given her. The feeling she appealed to, or at any rate the feeling she excited, was something larger, something that had little to do with any quickened pulsation of his own vanity. It was responsive admiration of the life she embodied, the young purity and richness of which appeared to imply that real success was to resemble *that*, to live, to bloom, to present the perfection of a fine type, not to have hammered out headachy fancies with a bent back at an ink-stained table. While her grey eyes rested on him—there was a wideish space between these, and the division of her rich-coloured hair, so thick that it ventured to be smooth, made a free arch above them—he was almost ashamed of that exercise of the pen which it was her present inclination to commend. He was conscious he should have liked better to please her in some other way. The lines of her face were those of a woman grown, but the child lingered on in her complexion and in the sweetness of her mouth. Above all she was natural—that was indubitable now; more natural than he had supposed at first, perhaps on account of her æsthetic toggery, which was conventionally unconventional, suggesting what he might have called a tortuous spontaneity. He had feared that sort of thing in other cases, and his fears had been justified; for, though he was an artist to the essence, the modern reactionary nymph, with the brambles of the woodland caught in her folds and a look as if the satyrs had toyed with her hair, made him shrink not as a man of starch and patent leather, but as a man potentially himself a poet or even a faun. The girl was really more candid than her costume, and the best proof of it was her supposing her liberal character suited by any uniform. This was a fallacy, since if she was draped as a pessimist he was sure she liked the taste of life. He thanked her for her appreciation—aware at the same time that he didn’t appear to thank her enough and that she might think him ungracious. He was afraid she would ask him to explain something he had written, and he always winced at that—perhaps too timidly—for to his own ear the explanation of a work of art sounded fatuous. But he liked her so much as to feel a confidence that in the long run he should be able to show her he wasn’t rudely evasive. Moreover she surely wasn’t quick to take offence, wasn’t irritable; she could be trusted to wait. So when he said to her, “Ah don’t talk of anything I’ve done, don’t talk of it *here*; there’s another man in the house who’s the actuality!”—when he uttered

this short sincere protest it was with the sense that she would see in the words neither mock humility nor the impatience of a successful man bored with praise.

“You mean Mr. St. George—isn’t he delightful?”

Paul Overt met her eyes, which had a cool morning-light that would have half-broken his heart if he hadn’t been so young. “Alas I don’t know him. I only admire him at a distance.”

“Oh you must know him—he wants so to talk to you,” returned Miss Fancourt, who evidently had the habit of saying the things that, by her quick calculation, would give people pleasure. Paul saw how she would always calculate on everything’s being simple between others.

“I shouldn’t have supposed he knew anything about me,” he professed.

“He does then—everything. And if he didn’t I should be able to tell him.”

“To tell him everything?” our friend smiled.

“You talk just like the people in your book!” she answered.

“Then they must all talk alike.”

She thought a moment, not a bit disconcerted. “Well, it must be so difficult. Mr. St. George tells me it *is*—terribly. I’ve tried too—and I find it so. I’ve tried to write a novel.”

“Mr. St. George oughtn’t to discourage you,” Paul went so far as to say.

“You do much more—when you wear that expression.”

“Well, after all, why try to be an artist?” the young man pursued. “It’s so poor—so poor!”

“I don’t know what you mean,” said Miss Fancourt, who looked grave.

“I mean as compared with being a person of action—as living your works.”

“But what’s art but an intense life—if it be real?” she asked. “I think it’s the only one—everything else is so clumsy!” Her companion laughed, and she brought out with her charming serenity what next struck her. “It’s so interesting to meet so many celebrated people.”

“So I should think—but surely it isn’t new to you.”

“Why I’ve never seen any one—any one: living always in Asia.”

The way she talked of Asia somehow enchanted him. “But doesn’t that continent swarm with great figures? Haven’t you administered provinces in India and had captive rajahs and tributary princes chained to your car?”

It was as if she didn’t care even *should* he amuse himself at her cost. “I was with my father, after I left school to go out there. It was delightful being with him—we’re alone together in the world, he and I—but there was none of the society I like best. One never heard of a picture—never of a book, except bad ones.”

“Never of a picture? Why, wasn’t all life a picture?”

She looked over the delightful place where they sat. “Nothing to compare to this. I adore England!” she cried.

It fairly stirred in him the sacred chord. “Ah of course I don’t deny that we must do something with her, poor old dear, yet.”

“She hasn’t been touched, really,” said the girl.

“Did Mr. St. George say that?”

There was a small and, as he felt, harmless spark of irony in his question; which, however, she answered very simply, not noticing the insinuation. “Yes, he says England hasn’t been touched—not considering all there is,” she went on eagerly. “He’s so interesting about our country. To listen to him makes one want so to do something.”

“It would make *me* want to,” said Paul Overt, feeling strongly, on the instant, the suggestion of what she said and that of the emotion with which she said it, and well aware of what an incentive, on St. George’s lips, such a speech might be.

“Oh you—as if you hadn’t! I should like so to hear you talk together,” she added ardently.

“That’s very genial of you; but he’d have it all his own way. I’m prostrate before him.”

She had an air of earnestness. “Do you think then he’s so perfect?”

“Far from it. Some of his later books seem to me of a queerness—!”

“Yes, yes—he knows that.”

Paul Overt stared. “That they seem to me of a queerness—!”

“Well yes, or at any rate that they’re not what they should be. He told me he didn’t esteem them. He has told me such wonderful things—he’s so interesting.”

There was a certain shock for Paul Overt in the knowledge that the fine genius they were talking of had been reduced to so explicit a confession and had made it, in his misery, to the first comer; for though Miss Fancourt was charming what was she after all but an immature girl encountered at a country-house? Yet precisely this was part of the sentiment he himself had just expressed: he would make way completely for the poor peccable great man not because he didn’t read him clear, but altogether because he did. His consideration was half composed of tenderness for superficialities which he was sure their perpetrator judged privately, judged more ferociously than any one, and which represented some tragic intellectual secret. He would have his reasons for his psychology à fleur de peau, and these reasons could only be cruel ones, such as would make him dearer to those who already were fond of him. “You excite my envy. I have my reserves, I discriminate—but I love him,” Paul said in a moment. “And seeing him for the first time this way is a great event for me.”

“How momentous—how magnificent!” cried the girl. “How delicious to bring you together!”

“Your doing it—that makes it perfect,” our friend returned.

“He’s as eager as you,” she went on. “But it’s so odd you shouldn’t have met.”

“It’s not really so odd as it strikes you. I’ve been out of England so much—made repeated absences all these last years.”

She took this in with interest. “And yet you write of it as well as if you were always here.”

“It’s just the being away perhaps. At any rate the best bits, I suspect, are those that were done in dreary places abroad.”

“And why were they dreary?”

“Because they were health-resorts—where my poor mother was dying.”

“Your poor mother?”—she was all sweet wonder.

“We went from place to place to help her to get better. But she never did. To the deadly Riviera (I hate it!) to the high Alps, to Algiers, and far away—a hideous journey—to Colorado.”

“And she isn’t better?” Miss Fancourt went on.

“She died a year ago.”

“Really?—like mine! Only that’s years since. Some day you must tell me about your mother,” she added.

He could at first, on this, only gaze at her. “What right things you say! If you say them to St. George I don’t wonder he’s in bondage.”

It pulled her up for a moment. “I don’t know what you mean. He doesn’t make speeches and professions at all—he isn’t ridiculous.”

“I’m afraid you consider then that I am.”

“No, I don’t”—she spoke it rather shortly. And then she added: “He understands—understands everything.”

The young man was on the point of saying jocosely: “And I don’t—is that it?” But these words, in time, changed themselves to others slightly less trivial: “Do you suppose he understands his wife?”

Miss Fancourt made no direct answer, but after a moment’s hesitation put it: “Isn’t she charming?”

“Not in the least!”

“Here he comes. Now you must know him,” she went on. A small group of visitors had gathered at the other end of the gallery and had been there overtaken by Henry St. George, who strolled in from a neighbouring room. He stood near them a moment, not falling into the talk but taking up an old miniature from a table and vaguely regarding it. At the end of a minute he became aware of Miss Fancourt and her companion in the distance; whereupon, laying down his miniature, he approached them with the same procrastinating air, his hands in his pockets and his eyes turned, right and left, to the pictures. The gallery was so long that this transit took some little time, especially as there was a moment when he stopped to admire the fine Gainsborough. “He says Mrs. St. George has been the making of him,” the girl continued in a voice slightly lowered.

“Ah he’s often obscure!” Paul laughed.

“Obscure?” she repeated as if she heard it for the first time. Her eyes rested on her other friend, and it wasn’t lost upon Paul that they appeared to send out great shafts of softness. “He’s going to speak to us!” she fondly breathed. There was a sort of rapture in her voice, and our friend was startled. “Bless my soul, does she care for him like *that*?—is she in love with him?” he mentally enquired. “Didn’t I tell you he was eager?” she had meanwhile asked of him.

“It’s eagerness dissimulated,” the young man returned as the subject of their observation lingered before his Gainsborough. “He edges toward us shyly. Does he mean that she saved him by burning that book?”

“That book? what book did she burn?” The girl quickly turned her face to him.

“Hasn’t he told you then?”

“Not a word.”

“Then he doesn’t tell you everything!” Paul had guessed that she pretty much supposed he did. The great man had now resumed his course and come nearer; in spite of which his more qualified admirer risked a profane observation: “St. George and the Dragon is what the anecdote suggests!”

His companion, however, didn’t hear it; she smiled at the dragon’s adversary. “He *is* eager—he *is*!” she insisted.

“Eager for you—yes.”

But meanwhile she had called out: “I’m sure you want to know Mr. Overt. You’ll be great friends, and it will always be delightful to me to remember I was here when you first met and that I had something to do with it.”

There was a freshness of intention in the words that carried them off; nevertheless our young man was sorry for Henry St. George, as he was sorry at any time for any person publicly invited to be responsive and delightful. He would have been so touched to believe that a man he deeply admired should care a straw for him that he wouldn’t play with such a presumption if it were possibly vain. In a single glance of the eye of the pardonable Master he read—having the sort of divination that belonged to his talent—that this personage had ever a store of friendly patience, which was part of his rich outfit, but was versed in no printed page of a rising scribbler. There was even a relief, a simplification, in that: liking him so much already for what he had done, how could one have liked him any more for a perception which must at the best have been vague? Paul Overt got up, trying to show his compassion, but at the same instant he found himself encompassed by St. George’s happy personal art—a manner of which it was the essence to conjure away false positions. It all took place in a moment. Paul was conscious that he knew him now, conscious of his handshake and of the very quality of his hand; of his face, seen nearer and consequently seen better, of a general fraternising assurance, and in particular of the circumstance that St. George didn’t dislike him (as yet at least) for being imposed by a charming but too gushing girl, attractive enough without such danglers. No irritation at any rate was reflected in the voice with which he questioned Miss Fancourt as to some project of a walk—a general walk of the company round the park. He had soon said something to Paul about a talk—“We must have a tremendous lot of talk; there are so many things, aren’t there?”—but our friend could see this idea wouldn’t in the present case take very immediate effect. All the same he was extremely happy, even after the matter of the walk had been settled—the three presently passed back to the other part of the gallery, where it was discussed with several members of the party; even when, after they had all gone out together, he found himself for half an hour conjoined with Mrs. St. George. Her husband had taken the advance with Miss Fancourt, and this pair were quite out of sight. It was the prettiest of rambles for a summer afternoon—a grassy circuit, of immense extent, skirting the limit of the park within. The park was completely surrounded by its old mottled but perfect red wall, which, all the way on their left, constituted in itself an object of interest. Mrs. St. George mentioned to him the surprising number of acres thus enclosed, together with numerous other facts relating to the property and the family, and the family’s other properties: she couldn’t too strongly urge on him the importance of seeing their other houses. She ran over the names of these and rang the changes on them with the facility of practice, making them appear an almost endless list. She had received Paul Overt very amiably on his breaking ground with her by the mention of his joy in having just made her husband’s acquaintance, and struck him as so alert and so accommodating a little woman that he was rather ashamed of his *mot* about her to Miss Fancourt; though he reflected that a hundred other people, on a hundred occasions, would have been sure to make it. He got on with Ms. St. George, in short, better than he expected; but this didn’t prevent her suddenly

becoming aware that she was faint with fatigue and must take her way back to the house by the shortest cut. She professed that she hadn't the strength of a kitten and was a miserable wreck; a character he had been too preoccupied to discern in her while he wondered in what sense she could be held to have been the making of her husband. He had arrived at a glimmering of the answer when she announced that she must leave him, though this perception was of course provisional. While he was in the very act of placing himself at her disposal for the return the situation underwent a change; Lord Masham had suddenly turned up, coming back to them, overtaking them, emerging from the shrubbery—Overt could scarcely have said how he appeared—and Mrs. St. George had protested that she wanted to be left alone and not to break up the party. A moment later she was walking off with Lord Masham. Our friend fell back and joined Lady Watermouth, to whom he presently mentioned that Mrs. St. George had been obliged to renounce the attempt to go further.

"She oughtn't to have come out at all," her ladyship rather grumpily remarked.

"Is she so very much of an invalid?"

"Very bad indeed." And his hostess added with still greater austerity: "She oughtn't really to come to one!" He wondered what was implied by this, and presently gathered that it was not a reflexion on the lady's conduct or her moral nature: it only represented that her strength was not equal to her aspirations.

III

The smoking-room at Summersoft was on the scale of the rest of the place; high light commodious and decorated with such refined old carvings and mouldings that it seemed rather a bower for ladies who should sit at work at fading crewels than a parliament of gentlemen smoking strong cigars. The gentlemen mustered there in considerable force on the Sunday evening, collecting mainly at one end, in front of one of the cool fair fireplaces of white marble, the entablature of which was adorned with a delicate little Italian "subject." There was another in the wall that faced it, and, thanks to the mild summer night, a fire in neither; but a nucleus for aggregation was furnished on one side by a table in the chimney-corner laden with bottles, decanters and tall tumblers. Paul Overt was a faithless smoker; he would puff a cigarette for reasons with which tobacco had nothing to do. This was particularly the case on the occasion of which I speak; his motive was the vision of a little direct talk with Henry St. George. The "tremendous" communion of which the great man had held out hopes to him earlier in the day had not yet come off, and this saddened him considerably, for the party was to go its several ways immediately after breakfast on the morrow. He had, however, the disappointment of finding that apparently the author of "Shadowmere" was not disposed to prolong his vigil. He wasn't among the gentlemen assembled when Paul entered, nor was he one of those who turned up, in bright habiliments, during the next ten minutes. The young man waited a little, wondering if he had only gone to put on something extraordinary; this would account for his delay as well as contribute further to Overt's impression of his tendency to do the approved superficial thing. But he didn't arrive—he must have been putting on something more extraordinary than was probable. Our hero gave him up, feeling a little injured, a little wounded, at this loss of twenty coveted words. He wasn't angry, but he puffed his cigarette sighingly, with the sense of something rare possibly missed. He wandered away with his regret and moved slowly round the room, looking at the old prints on the walls. In this attitude he presently felt a hand on his shoulder and a friendly voice in his ear "This is good. I hoped I should find you. I came down on purpose." St. George was there without a change of dress and with a fine face—his graver one—to which our young man all in a flutter responded. He explained that it was only for the

Master—the idea of a little talk—that he had sat up, and that, not finding him, he had been on the point of going to bed.

“Well, you know, I don’t smoke—my wife doesn’t let me,” said St. George, looking for a place to sit down. “It’s very good for me—very good for me. Let us take that sofa.”

“Do you mean smoking’s good for you?”

“No no—her not letting me. It’s a great thing to have a wife who’s so sure of all the things one can do without. One might never find them out one’s self. She doesn’t allow me to touch a cigarette.” They took possession of a sofa at a distance from the group of smokers, and St. George went on: “Have you got one yourself?”

“Do you mean a cigarette?”

“Dear no—a wife.”

“No; and yet I’d give up my cigarette for one.”

“You’d give up a good deal more than that,” St. George returned. “However, you’d get a great deal in return. There’s a something to be said for wives,” he added, folding his arms and crossing his outstretched legs. He declined tobacco altogether and sat there without returning fire. His companion stopped smoking, touched by his courtesy; and after all they were out of the fumes, their sofa was in a far-away corner. It would have been a mistake, St. George went on, a great mistake for them to have separated without a little chat; “for I know all about you,” he said, “I know you’re very remarkable. You’ve written a very distinguished book.”

“And how do you know it?” Paul asked.

“Why, my dear fellow, it’s in the air, it’s in the papers, it’s everywhere.” St. George spoke with the immediate familiarity of a confrère—a tone that seemed to his neighbour the very rustle of the laurel. “You’re on all men’s lips and, what’s better, on all women’s. And I’ve just been reading your book.”

“Just? You hadn’t read it this afternoon,” said Overt.

“How do you know that?”

“I think you should know how I know it,” the young man laughed.

“I suppose Miss Fancourt told you.”

“No indeed—she led me rather to suppose you had.”

“Yes—that’s much more what she’d do. Doesn’t she shed a rosy glow over life? But you didn’t believe her?” asked St. George.

“No, not when you came to us there.”

“Did I pretend? did I pretend badly?” But without waiting for an answer to this St. George went on: “You ought always to believe such a girl as that—always, always. Some women are meant to be taken with allowances and reserves; but you must take *her* just as she is.”

“I like her very much,” said Paul Overt.

Something in his tone appeared to excite on his companion’s part a momentary sense of the absurd; perhaps it was the air of deliberation attending this judgement. St. George broke into a laugh to reply. “It’s the best thing you can do with her. She’s a rare young lady! In point of fact, however, I confess I hadn’t read you this afternoon.”

“Then you see how right I was in this particular case not to believe Miss Fancourt.”

“How right? how can I agree to that when I lost credit by it?”

“Do you wish to pass exactly for what she represents you? Certainly you needn’t be afraid,” Paul said.

“Ah, my dear young man, don’t talk about passing—for the likes of me! I’m passing away—nothing else than that. She has a better use for her young imagination (isn’t it fine?) than in ‘representing’ in any way such a weary wasted used-up animal!” The Master spoke with a sudden sadness that produced a protest on Paul’s part; but before the protest could be uttered he went on, reverting to the latter’s striking novel: “I had no idea you were so good—one hears of so many things. But you’re surprisingly good.”

“I’m going to be surprisingly better,” Overt made bold to reply.

“I see that, and it’s what fetches me. I don’t see so much else—as one looks about—that’s going to be surprisingly better. They’re going to be consistently worse—most of the things. It’s so much easier to be worse—heaven knows I’ve found it so. I’m not in a great glow, you know, about what’s breaking out all over the place. But you *must* be better—you really must keep it up. I haven’t of course. It’s very difficult—that’s the devil of the whole thing, keeping it up. But I see you’ll be able to. It will be a great disgrace if you don’t.”

“It’s very interesting to hear you speak of yourself; but I don’t know what you mean by your allusions to your having fallen off,” Paul Overt observed with pardonable hypocrisy. He liked his companion so much now that the fact of any decline of talent or of care had ceased for the moment to be vivid to him.

“Don’t say that—don’t say that,” St. George returned gravely, his head resting on the top of the sofa-back and his eyes on the ceiling. “You know perfectly what I mean. I haven’t read twenty pages of your book without seeing that you can’t help it.”

“You make me very miserable,” Paul ecstatically breathed.

“I’m glad of that, for it may serve as a kind of warning. Shocking enough it must be, especially to a young fresh mind, full of faith—the spectacle of a man meant for better things sunk at my age in such dishonour.” St. George, in the same contemplative attitude, spoke softly but deliberately, and without perceptible emotion. His tone indeed suggested an impersonal lucidity that was practically cruel—cruel to himself—and made his young friend lay an argumentative hand on his arm. But he went on while his eyes seemed to follow the graces of the eighteenth-century ceiling: “Look at me well, take my lesson to heart—for it *is* a lesson. Let that good come of it at least that you shudder with your pitiful impression, and that this may help to keep you straight in the future. Don’t become in your old age what I have in mine—the depressing, the deplorable illustration of the worship of false gods!”

“What do you mean by your old age?” the young man asked.

“It has made me old. But I like your youth.”

Paul answered nothing—they sat for a minute in silence. They heard the others going on about the governmental majority. Then “What do you mean by false gods?” he enquired.

His companion had no difficulty whatever in saying, “The idols of the market; money and luxury and ‘the world;’ placing one’s children and dressing one’s wife; everything that drives one to the short and easy way. Ah the vile things they make one do!”

“But surely one’s right to want to place one’s children.”

“One has no business to have any children,” St. George placidly declared. “I mean of course if one wants to do anything good.”

“But aren’t they an inspiration—an incentive?”

“An incentive to damnation, artistically speaking.”

“You touch on very deep things—things I should like to discuss with you,” Paul said. “I should like you to tell me volumes about yourself. This is a great feast for *me!*”

“Of course it is, cruel youth. But to show you I’m still not incapable, degraded as I am, of an act of faith, I’ll tie my vanity to the stake for you and burn it to ashes. You must come and see me—you must come and see us,” the Master quickly substituted. “Mrs. St. George is charming; I don’t know whether you’ve had any opportunity to talk with her. She’ll be delighted to see you; she likes great celebrities, whether incipient or predominant. You must come and dine—my wife will write to you. Where are you to be found?”

“This is my little address”—and Overt drew out his pocketbook and extracted a visiting-card. On second thoughts, however, he kept it back, remarking that he wouldn’t trouble his friend to take charge of it but would come and see him straightway in London and leave it at his door if he should fail to obtain entrance.

“Ah you’ll probably fail; my wife’s always out—or when she isn’t out is knocked up from having been out. You must come and dine—though that won’t do much good either, for my wife insists on big dinners.” St. George turned it over further, but then went on: “You must come down and see us in the country, that’s the best way; we’ve plenty of room, and it isn’t bad.”

“You’ve a house in the country?” Paul asked enviously.

“Ah not like this! But we have a sort of place we go to—an hour from Euston. That’s one of the reasons.”

“One of the reasons?”

“Why my books are so bad.”

“You must tell me all the others!” Paul longingly laughed.

His friend made no direct rejoinder to this, but spoke again abruptly. “Why have I never seen you before?”

The tone of the question was singularly flattering to our hero, who felt it to imply the great man’s now perceiving he had for years missed something. “Partly, I suppose, because there has been no particular reason why you should see me. I haven’t lived in the world—in your world. I’ve spent many years out of England, in different places abroad.”

“Well, please don’t do it any more. You must do England—there’s such a lot of it.”

“Do you mean I must write about it?” and Paul struck the note of the listening candour of a child.

“Of course you must. And tremendously well, do you mind? That takes off a little of my esteem for this thing of yours—that it goes on abroad. Hang ‘abroad!’ Stay at home and do things here—do subjects we can measure.”

“I’ll do whatever you tell me,” Overt said, deeply attentive. “But pardon me if I say I don’t understand how you’ve been reading my book,” he added. “I’ve had you before me all the afternoon, first in that long walk, then at tea on the lawn, till we went to dress for dinner, and all the evening at dinner and in this place.”

St. George turned his face about with a smile. "I gave it but a quarter of an hour."

"A quarter of an hour's immense, but I don't understand where you put it in. In the drawing-room after dinner you weren't reading—you were talking to Miss Fancourt."

"It comes to the same thing, because we talked about 'Ginistrella.' She described it to me—she lent me her copy."

"Lent it to you?"

"She travels with it."

"It's incredible," Paul blushed.

"It's glorious for you, but it also turned out very well for me. When the ladies went off to bed she kindly offered to send the book down to me. Her maid brought it to me in the hall and I went to my room with it. I hadn't thought of coming here, I do that so little. But I don't sleep early, I always have to read an hour or two. I sat down to your novel on the spot, without undressing, without taking off anything but my coat. I think that's a sign my curiosity had been strongly roused about it. I read a quarter of an hour, as I tell you, and even in a quarter of an hour I was greatly struck."

"Ah the beginning isn't very good—it's the whole thing!" said Overt, who had listened to this recital with extreme interest. "And you laid down the book and came after me?" he asked.

"That's the way it moved me. I said to myself 'I see it's off his own bat, and he's there, by the way, and the day's over and I haven't said twenty words to him.' It occurred to me that you'd probably be in the smoking-room and that it wouldn't be too late to repair my omission. I wanted to do something civil to you, so I put on my coat and came down. I shall read your book again when I go up."

Our friend faced round in his place—he was touched as he had scarce ever been by the picture of such a demonstration in his favour. "You're really the kindest of men. *Cela s'est passé comme ça?*—and I've been sitting here with you all this time and never apprehended it and never thanked you!"

"Thank Miss Fancourt—it was she who wound me up. She has made me feel as if I had read your novel."

"She's an angel from heaven!" Paul declared.

"She is indeed. I've never seen any one like her. Her interest in literature's touching—something quite peculiar to herself; she takes it all so seriously. She feels the arts and she wants to feel them more. To those who practise them it's almost humiliating—her curiosity, her sympathy, her good faith. How can anything be as fine as she supposes it?"

"She's a rare organisation," the younger man sighed.

"The richest I've ever seen—an artistic intelligence really of the first order. And lodged in such a form!" St. George exclaimed.

"One would like to represent such a girl as that," Paul continued.

"Ah there it is—there's nothing like life!" said his companion. "When you're finished, squeezed dry and used up and you think the sack's empty, you're still appealed to, you still get touches and thrills, the idea springs up—out of the lap of the actual—and shows you there's always something to be done. But I shan't do it—she's not for me!"

"How do you mean, not for you?"

“Oh it’s all over—she’s for you, if you like.”

“Ah much less!” said Paul. “She’s not for a dingy little man of letters; she’s for the world, the bright rich world of bribes and rewards. And the world will take hold of her—it will carry her away.”

“It will try—but it’s just a case in which there may be a fight. It would be worth fighting, for a man who had it in him, with youth and talent on his side.”

These words rang not a little in Paul Overt’s consciousness—they held him briefly silent. “It’s a wonder she has remained as she is; giving herself away so—with so much to give away.”

“Remaining, you mean, so ingenuous—so natural? Oh she doesn’t care a straw—she gives away because she overflows. She has her own feelings, her own standards; she doesn’t keep remembering that she must be proud. And then she hasn’t been here long enough to be spoiled; she has picked up a fashion or two, but only the amusing ones. She’s a provincial—a provincial of genius,” St. George went on; “her very blunders are charming, her mistakes are interesting. She has come back from Asia with all sorts of excited curiosities and unappeased appetities. She’s first-rate herself and she expends herself on the second-rate. She’s life herself and she takes a rare interest in imitations. She mixes all things up, but there are none in regard to which she hasn’t perceptions. She sees things in a perspective—as if from the top of the Himalayas—and she enlarges everything she touches. Above all she exaggerates—to herself, I mean. She exaggerates you and me!”

There was nothing in that description to allay the agitation caused in our younger friend by such a sketch of a fine subject. It seemed to him to show the art of St. George’s admired hand, and he lost himself in gazing at the vision—this hovered there before him—of a woman’s figure which should be part of the glory of a novel. But at the end of a moment the thing had turned into smoke, and out of the smoke—the last puff of a big cigar—proceeded the voice of General Fancourt, who had left the others and come and planted himself before the gentlemen on the sofa. “I suppose that when you fellows get talking you sit up half the night.”

“Half the night?—*jamais de la vie!* I follow a hygiene”—and St. George rose to his feet.

“I see—you’re hothouse plants,” laughed the General. “That’s the way you produce your flowers.”

“I produce mine between ten and one every morning—I bloom with a regularity!” St. George went on.

“And with a splendour!” added the polite General, while Paul noted how little the author of “Shadowmere” minded, as he phrased it to himself, when addressed as a celebrated storyteller. The young man had an idea *he* should never get used to that; it would always make him uncomfortable—from the suspicion that people would think they had to—and he would want to prevent it. Evidently his great colleague had toughened and hardened—had made himself a surface. The group of men had finished their cigars and taken up their bedroom candlesticks; but before they all passed out Lord Watermouth invited the pair of guests who had been so absorbed together to “have” something. It happened that they both declined; upon which General Fancourt said: “Is that the hygiene? You don’t water the flowers?”

“Oh I should drown them!” St. George replied; but, leaving the room still at his young friend’s side, he added whimsically, for the latter’s benefit, in a lower tone: “My wife doesn’t let me.”

“Well I’m glad I’m not one of you fellows!” the General richly concluded.

The nearness of Summersoft to London had this consequence, chilling to a person who had had a vision of sociability in a railway-carriage, that most of the company, after breakfast, drove back to town, entering their own vehicles, which had come out to fetch them, while their servants returned by train with their luggage. Three or four young men, among whom was Paul Overt, also availed themselves of the common convenience; but they stood in the portico of the house and saw the others roll away. Miss Fancourt got into a victoria with her father after she had shaken hands with our hero and said, smiling in the frankest way in the world, “I *must* see you more. Mrs. St. George is so nice: she has promised to ask us both to dinner together.” This lady and her husband took their places in a perfectly-appointed brougham—she required a closed carriage—and as our young man waved his hat to them in response to their nods and flourishes he reflected that, taken together, they were an honourable image of success, of the material rewards and the social credit of literature. Such things were not the full measure, but he nevertheless felt a little proud for literature.

IV

Before a week had elapsed he met Miss Fancourt in Bond Street, at a private view of the works of a young artist in “black-and-white” who had been so good as to invite him to the stuffy scene. The drawings were admirable, but the crowd in the one little room was so dense that he felt himself up to his neck in a sack of wool. A fringe of people at the outer edge endeavoured by curving forward their backs and presenting, below them, a still more convex surface of resistance to the pressure of the mass, to preserve an interval between their noses and the glazed mounts of the pictures; while the central body, in the comparative gloom projected by a wide horizontal screen hung under the skylight and allowing only a margin for the day, remained upright dense and vague, lost in the contemplation of its own ingredients. This contemplation sat especially in the sad eyes of certain female heads, surmounted with hats of strange convolution and plumage, which rose on long necks above the others. One of the heads Paul perceived, was much the so most beautiful of the collection, and his next discovery was that it belonged to Miss Fancourt. Its beauty was enhanced by the glad smile she sent him across surrounding obstructions, a smile that drew him to her as fast as he could make his way. He had seen for himself at Summersoft that the last thing her nature contained was an affectation of indifference; yet even with this circumspection he took a fresh satisfaction in her not having pretended to await his arrival with composure. She smiled as radiantly as if she wished to make him hurry, and as soon as he came within earshot she broke out in her voice of joy: “He’s here—he’s here—he’s coming back in a moment!”

“Ah your father?” Paul returned as she offered him her hand.

“Oh dear no, this isn’t in my poor father’s line. I mean Mr. St. George. He has just left me to speak to some one—he’s coming back. It’s he who brought me—wasn’t it charming?”

“Ah that gives him a pull over me—I couldn’t have ‘brought’ you, could I?”

“If you had been so kind as to propose it—why not you as well as he?” the girl returned with a face that, expressing no cheap coquetry, simply affirmed a happy fact.

“Why he’s a *père de famille*. They’ve privileges,” Paul explained. And then quickly: “Will you go to see places with *me*?” he asked.

“Anything you like!” she smiled. “I know what you mean, that girls have to have a lot of people—” Then she broke off: “I don’t know; I’m free. I’ve always been like that—I can go

about with any one. I'm so glad to meet you," she added with a sweet distinctness that made those near her turn round.

"Let me at least repay that speech by taking you out of this squash," her friend said. "Surely people aren't happy here!"

"No, they're awfully mornes, aren't they? But I'm very happy indeed and I promised Mr. St. George to remain in this spot till he comes back. He's going to take me away. They send him invitations for things of this sort—more than he wants. It was so kind of him to think of me."

"They also send me invitations of this kind—more than *I* want. And if thinking of *you* will do it—!" Paul went on.

"Oh I delight in them—everything that's life—everything that's London!"

"They don't have private views in Asia, I suppose," he laughed. "But what a pity that for this year, even in this gorged city, they're pretty well over."

"Well, next year will do, for I hope you believe we're going to be friends always. Here he comes!" Miss Fancourt continued before Paul had time to respond.

He made out St. George in the gaps of the crowd, and this perhaps led to his hurrying a little to say: "I hope that doesn't mean I'm to wait till next year to see you."

"No, no—aren't we to meet at dinner on the twenty-fifth?" she panted with an eagerness as happy as his own.

"That's almost next year. Is there no means of seeing you before?"

She stared with all her brightness. "Do you mean you'd *come*?"

"Like a shot, if you'll be so good as to ask me!"

"On Sunday then—this next Sunday?"

"What have I done that you should doubt it?" the young man asked with delight.

Miss Fancourt turned instantly to St. George, who had now joined them, and announced triumphantly: "He's coming on Sunday—this next Sunday!"

"Ah my day—my day too!" said the famous novelist, laughing, to their companion.

"Yes, but not yours only. You shall meet in Manchester Square; you shall talk—you shall be wonderful!"

"We don't meet often enough," St. George allowed, shaking hands with his disciple. "Too many things—ah too many things! But we must make it up in the country in September. You won't forget you've promised me that?"

"Why he's coming on the twenty-fifth—you'll see him then," said the girl.

"On the twenty-fifth?" St. George asked vaguely.

"We dine with you; I hope you haven't forgotten. He's dining out that day," she added gaily to Paul.

"Oh bless me, yes—that's charming! And you're coming? My wife didn't tell me," St. George said to him. "Too many things—too many things!" he repeated.

"Too many people—too many people!" Paul exclaimed, giving ground before the penetration of an elbow.

“You oughtn’t to say that. They all read you.”

“Me? I should like to see them! Only two or three at most,” the young man returned.

“Did you ever hear anything like that? He knows, haughtily, how good he is!” St. George declared, laughing to Miss Fancourt. “They read *me*, but that doesn’t make me like them any better. Come away from them, come away!” And he led the way out of the exhibition.

“He’s going to take me to the Park,” Miss Fancourt observed to Overt with elation as they passed along the corridor that led to the street.

“Ah does he go there?” Paul asked, taking the fact for a somewhat unexpected illustration of St. George’s moeurs.

“It’s a beautiful day—there’ll be a great crowd. We’re going to look at the people, to look at types,” the girl went on. “We shall sit under the trees; we shall walk by the Row.”

“I go once a year—on business,” said St. George, who had overheard Paul’s question.

“Or with a country cousin, didn’t you tell me? I’m the country cousin!” she continued over her shoulder to Paul as their friend drew her toward a hansom to which he had signalled. The young man watched them get in; he returned, as he stood there, the friendly wave of the hand with which, ensconced in the vehicle beside her, St. George took leave of him. He even lingered to see the vehicle start away and lose itself in the confusion of Bond Street. He followed it with his eyes; it put to him embarrassing things. “She’s not for *me*!” the great novelist had said emphatically at Summersoft; but his manner of conducting himself toward her appeared not quite in harmony with such a conviction. How could he have behaved differently if she *had* been for him? An indefinite envy rose in Paul Overt’s heart as he took his way on foot alone; a feeling addressed alike strangely enough, to each of the occupants of the hansom. How much he should like to rattle about London with such a girl! How much he should like to go and look at “types” with St. George!

The next Sunday at four o’clock he called in Manchester Square, where his secret wish was gratified by his finding Miss Fancourt alone. She was in a large bright friendly occupied room, which was painted red all over, draped with the quaint cheap florid stuffs that are represented as coming from southern and eastern countries, where they are fabled to serve as the counterpanes of the peasantry, and bedecked with pottery of vivid hues, ranged on casual shelves, and with many water-colour drawings from the hand (as the visitor learned) of the young lady herself, commemorating with a brave breadth the sunsets, the mountains, the temples and palaces of India. He sat an hour—more than an hour, two hours—and all the while no one came in. His hostess was so good as to remark, with her liberal humanity, that it was delightful they weren’t interrupted; it was so rare in London, especially at that season, that people got a good talk. But luckily now, of a fine Sunday, half the world went out of town, and that made it better for those who didn’t go, when these others were in sympathy. It was the defect of London—one of two or three, the very short list of those she recognised in the teeming world-city she adored—that there were too few good chances for talk; you never had time to carry anything far.

“Too many things—too many things!” Paul said, quoting St. George’s exclamation of a few days before.

“Ah yes, for him there are too many—his life’s too complicated.”

“Have you seen it *near*? That’s what I should like to do; it might explain some mysteries,” her visitor went on. She asked him what mysteries he meant, and he said: “Oh peculiarities

of his work, inequalities, superficialities. For one who looks at it from the artistic point of view it contains a bottomless ambiguity.”

She became at this, on the spot, all intensity. “Ah do describe that more—it’s so interesting. There are no such suggestive questions. I’m so fond of them. He thinks he’s a failure—fancy!” she beautifully wailed.

“That depends on what his ideal may have been. With his gifts it ought to have been high. But till one knows what he really proposed to himself—? Do *you* know by chance?” the young man broke off.

“Oh he doesn’t talk to me about himself. I can’t make him. It’s too provoking.”

Paul was on the point of asking what then he did talk about, but discretion checked it and he said instead: “Do you think he’s unhappy at home?”

She seemed to wonder. “At home?”

“I mean in his relations with his wife. He has a mystifying little way of alluding to her.”

“Not to me,” said Marian Fancourt with her clear eyes. “That wouldn’t be right, would it?” she asked gravely.

“Not particularly; so I’m glad he doesn’t mention her to you. To praise her might bore you, and he has no business to do anything else. Yet he knows you better than me.”

“Ah but he respects *you*!” the girl cried as with envy.

Her visitor stared a moment, then broke into a laugh. “Doesn’t he respect you?”

“Of course, but not in the same way. He respects what you’ve done—he told me so, the other day.”

Paul drank it in, but retained his faculties. “When you went to look at types?”

“Yes—we found so many: he has such an observation of them! He talked a great deal about your book. He says it’s really important.”

“Important! Ah the grand creature!”—and the author of the work in question groaned for joy.

“He was wonderfully amusing, he was inexpressibly droll, while we walked about. He sees everything; he has so many comparisons and images, and they’re always exactly right. C’est d’un trouvé, as they say.”

“Yes, with his gifts, such things as he ought to have done!” Paul sighed.

“And don’t you think he *has* done them?”

Ah it was just the point. “A part of them, and of course even that part’s immense. But he might have been one of the greatest. However, let us not make this an hour of qualifications. Even as they stand,” our friend earnestly concluded, “his writings are a mine of gold.”

To this proposition she ardently responded, and for half an hour the pair talked over the Master’s principal productions. She knew them well—she knew them even better than her visitor, who was struck with her critical intelligence and with something large and bold in the movement in her mind. She said things that startled him and that evidently had come to her directly; they weren’t picked-up phrases—she placed them too well. St. George had been right about her being first-rate, about her not being afraid to gush, not remembering that she must be proud. Suddenly something came back to her, and she said: “I recollect that he did

speak of Mrs. St. George to me once. He said, apropos of something or other, that she didn't care for perfection."

"That's a great crime in an artist's wife," Paul returned.

"Yes, poor thing!" and the girl sighed with a suggestion of many reflexions, some of them mitigating. But she presently added: "Ah perfection, perfection—how one ought to go in for it! I wish *I* could."

"Every one can in his way," her companion opined.

"In *his* way, yes—but not in hers. Women are so hampered—so condemned! Yet it's a kind of dishonour if you don't, when you want to *do* something, isn't it?" Miss Fancourt pursued, dropping one train in her quickness to take up another, an accident that was common with her. So these two young persons sat discussing high themes in their eclectic drawing-room, in their London "season"—discussing, with extreme seriousness, the high theme of perfection. It must be said in extenuation of this eccentricity that they were interested in the business. Their tone had truth and their emotion beauty; they weren't posturing for each other or for some one else.

The subject was so wide that they found themselves reducing it; the perfection to which for the moment they agreed to confine their speculations was that of the valid, the exemplary work of art. Our young woman's imagination, it appeared, had wandered far in that direction, and her guest had the rare delight of feeling in their conversation a full interchange. This episode will have lived for years in his memory and even in his wonder; it had the quality that fortune distils in a single drop at a time—the quality that lubricates many ensuing frictions. He still, whenever he likes, has a vision of the room, the bright red sociable talkative room with the curtains that, by a stroke of successful audacity, had the note of vivid blue. He remembers where certain things stood, the particular book open on the table and the almost intense odour of the flowers placed, at the left, somewhere behind him. These facts were the fringe, as it were, of a fine special agitation which had its birth in those two hours and of which perhaps the main sign was in its leading him inwardly and repeatedly to breathe "I had no idea there was any one like this—I had no idea there was any one like this!" Her freedom amazed him and charmed him—it seemed so to simplify the practical question. She was on the footing of an independent personage—a motherless girl who had passed out of her teens and had a position and responsibilities, who wasn't held down to the limitations of a little miss. She came and went with no dragged duenna, she received people alone, and, though she was totally without hardness, the question of protection or patronage had no relevancy in regard to her. She gave such an impression of the clear and the noble combined with the easy and the natural that in spite of her eminent modern situation she suggested no sort of sister-hood with the "fast" girl. Modern she was indeed, and made Paul Overt, who loved old colour, the golden glaze of time, think with some alarm of the muddled palette of the future. He couldn't get used to her interest in the arts he cared for; it seemed too good to be real—it was so unlikely an adventure to tumble into such a well of sympathy. One might stray into the desert easily—that was on the cards and that was the law of life; but it was too rare an accident to stumble on a crystal well. Yet if her aspirations seemed at one moment too extravagant to be real they struck him at the next as too intelligent to be false. They were both high and lame, and, whims for whims, he preferred them to any he had met in a like relation. It was probable enough she would leave them behind—exchange them for politics or "smartness" or mere prolific maternity, as was the custom of scribbling daubing educated flattered girls in an age of luxury and a society of leisure. He noted that the water-colours on the walls of the room she sat in had mainly the quality of being naïves, and reflected that naïveté in art is like a zero in a number: its

importance depends on the figure it is united with. Meanwhile, however, he had fallen in love with her. Before he went away, at any rate, he said to her: "I thought St. George was coming to see you to-day, but he doesn't turn up."

For a moment he supposed she was going to cry "Comment donc? Did you come here only to meet him?" But the next he became aware of how little such a speech would have fallen in with any note of flirtation he had as yet perceived in her. She only replied: "Ah yes, but I don't think he'll come. He recommended me not to expect him." Then she gaily but all gently added: "He said it wasn't fair to you. But I think I could manage two."

"So could I," Paul Overt returned, stretching the point a little to meet her. In reality his appreciation of the occasion was so completely an appreciation of the woman before him that another figure in the scene, even so esteemed a one as St. George, might for the hour have appealed to him vainly. He left the house wondering what the great man had meant by its not being fair to him; and, still more than that, whether he had actually stayed away from the force of that idea. As he took his course through the Sunday solitude of Manchester Square, swinging his stick and with a good deal of emotion fermenting in his soul, it appeared to him he was living in a world strangely magnanimous. Miss Fancourt had told him it was possible she should be away, and that her father should be, on the following Sunday, but that she had the hope of a visit from him in the other event. She promised to let him know should their absence fail, and then he might act accordingly. After he had passed into one of the streets that open from the Square he stopped, without definite intentions, looking sceptically for a cab. In a moment he saw a hansom roll through the place from the other side and come a part of the way toward him. He was on the point of hailing the driver when he noticed a "fare" within; then he waited, seeing the man prepare to deposit his passenger by pulling up at one of the houses. The house was apparently the one he himself had just quitted; at least he drew that inference as he recognised Henry St. George in the person who stepped out of the hansom. Paul turned off as quickly as if he had been caught in the act of spying. He gave up his cab—he preferred to walk; he would go nowhere else. He was glad St. George hadn't renounced his visit altogether—that would have been too absurd. Yes, the world was magnanimous, and even he himself felt so as, on looking at his watch, he noted but six o'clock, so that he could mentally congratulate his successor on having an hour still to sit in Miss Fancourt's drawing-room. He himself might use that hour for another visit, but by the time he reached the Marble Arch the idea of such a course had become incongruous to him. He passed beneath that architectural effort and walked into the Park till he got upon the spreading grass. Here he continued to walk; he took his way across the elastic turf and came out by the Serpentine. He watched with a friendly eye the diversions of the London people, he bent a glance almost encouraging on the young ladies paddling their sweethearts about the lake and the guardsmen tickling tenderly with their bearskins the artificial flowers in the Sunday hats of their partners. He prolonged his meditative walk; he went into Kensington Gardens, he sat upon the penny chairs, he looked at the little sail-boats launched upon the round pond and was glad he had no engagement to dine. He repaired for this purpose, very late, to his club, where he found himself unable to order a repast and told the waiter to bring whatever there was. He didn't even observe what he was served with, and he spent the evening in the library of the establishment, pretending to read an article in an American magazine. He failed to discover what it was about; it appeared in a dim way to be about Marian Fancourt.

Quite late in the week she wrote to him that she was not to go into the country—it had only just been settled. Her father, she added, would never settle anything, but put it all on her. She felt her responsibility—she had to—and since she was forced this was the way she had decided. She mentioned no reasons, which gave our friend all the clearer field for bold

conjecture about them. In Manchester Square on this second Sunday he esteemed his fortune less good, for she had three or four other visitors. But there were three or four compensations; perhaps the greatest of which was that, learning how her father had after all, at the last hour, gone out of town alone, the bold conjecture I just now spoke of found itself becoming a shade more bold. And then her presence was her presence, and the personal red room was there and was full of it, whatever phantoms passed and vanished, emitting incomprehensible sounds. Lastly, he had the resource of staying till every one had come and gone and of believing this grateful to her, though she gave no particular sign. When they were alone together he came to his point. "But St. George did come—last Sunday. I saw him as I looked back."

"Yes; but it was the last time."

"The last time?"

"He said he would never come again."

Paul Overt stared. "Does he mean he wishes to cease to see you?"

"I don't know what he means," the girl bravely smiled. "He won't at any rate see me here."

"And pray why not?"

"I haven't the least idea," said Marian Fancourt, whose visitor found her more perversely sublime than ever yet as she professed this clear helplessness.

V

"Oh I say, I want you to stop a little," Henry St. George said to him at eleven o'clock the night he dined with the head of the profession. The company—none of it indeed *of* the profession—had been numerous and was taking its leave; our young man, after bidding good-night to his hostess, had put out his hand in farewell to the master of the house. Besides drawing from the latter the protest I have cited this movement provoked a further priceless word about their chance now to have a talk, their going into his room, his having still everything to say. Paul Overt was all delight at this kindness; nevertheless he mentioned in weak jocose qualification the bare fact that he had promised to go to another place which was at a considerable distance.

"Well then you'll break your promise, that's all. You quite awful humbug!" St. George added in a tone that confirmed our young man's ease.

"Certainly I'll break it—but it was a real promise."

"Do you mean to Miss Fancourt? You're following her?" his friend asked.

He answered by a question. "Oh is *she* going?"

"Base impostor!" his ironic host went on. "I've treated you handsomely on the article of that young lady: I won't make another concession. Wait three minutes—I'll be with you." He gave himself to his departing guests, accompanied the long-trained ladies to the door. It was a hot night, the windows were open, the sound of the quick carriages and of the linkmen's call came into the house. The affair had rather glittered; a sense of festal things was in the heavy air: not only the influence of that particular entertainment, but the suggestion of the wide hurry of pleasure which in London on summer nights fills so many of the happier quarters of the complicated town. Gradually Mrs. St. George's drawing-room emptied itself; Paul was left alone with his hostess, to whom he explained the motive of his waiting. "Ah yes, some intellectual, some *professional*, talk," she leered; "at this season doesn't one miss it? Poor dear Henry, I'm so glad!" The young man looked out of the window a moment, at

the called hansoms that lurched up, at the smooth broughams that rolled away. When he turned round Mrs. St. George had disappeared; her husband's voice rose to him from below—he was laughing and talking, in the portico, with some lady who awaited her carriage. Paul had solitary possession, for some minutes, of the warm deserted rooms where the covered tinted lamplight was soft, the seats had been pushed about and the odour of flowers lingered. They were large, they were pretty, they contained objects of value; everything in the picture told of a "good house." At the end of five minutes a servant came in with a request from the Master that he would join him downstairs; upon which, descending, he followed his conductor through a long passage to an apartment thrown out, in the rear of the habitation, for the special requirements, as he guessed, of a busy man of letters.

St. George was in his shirt-sleeves in the middle of a large high room—a room without windows, but with a wide skylight at the top, that of a place of exhibition. It was furnished as a library, and the serried bookshelves rose to the ceiling, a surface of incomparable tone produced by dimly-gilt "backs" interrupted here and there by the suspension of old prints and drawings. At the end furthest from the door of admission was a tall desk, of great extent, at which the person using it could write only in the erect posture of a clerk in a counting-house; and stretched from the entrance to this structure was a wide plain band of crimson cloth, as straight as a garden-path and almost as long, where, in his mind's eye, Paul at once beheld the Master pace to and fro during vexed hours—hours, that is, of admirable composition. The servant gave him a coat, an old jacket with a hang of experience, from a cupboard in the wall, retiring afterwards with the garment he had taken off. Paul Overt welcomed the coat; it was a coat for talk, it promised confidences—having visibly received so many—and had tragic literary elbows. "Ah we're practical—we're practical!" St. George said as he saw his visitor look the place over. "Isn't it a good big cage for going round and round? My wife invented it and she locks me up here every morning."

Our young man breathed—by way of tribute—with a certain oppression. "You don't miss a window—a place to look out?"

"I did at first awfully; but her calculation was just. It saves time, it has saved me many months in these ten years. Here I stand, under the eye of day—in London of course, very often, it's rather a bleared old eye—walled in to my trade. I can't get away—so the room's a fine lesson in concentration. I've learnt the lesson, I think; look at that big bundle of proof and acknowledge it." He pointed to a fat roll of papers, on one of the tables, which had not been undone.

"Are you bringing out another—?" Paul asked in a tone the fond deficiencies of which he didn't recognise till his companion burst out laughing, and indeed scarce even then.

"You humbug, you humbug!"—St. George appeared to enjoy caressing him, as it were, with that opprobrium. "Don't I know what you think of them?" he asked, standing there with his hands in his pockets and with a new kind of smile. It was as if he were going to let his young votary see him all now.

"Upon my word in that case you know more than I do!" the latter ventured to respond, revealing a part of the torment of being able neither clearly to esteem nor distinctly to renounce him.

"My dear fellow," said the more and more interesting Master, "don't imagine I talk about my books specifically; they're not a decent subject—il ne manqueraient plus que ça! I'm not so bad as you may apprehend! About myself, yes, a little, if you like; though it wasn't for that I brought you down here. I want to ask you something—very much indeed; I value this chance. Therefore sit down. We're practical, but there *is* a sofa, you see—for she does

humour my poor bones so far. Like all really great administrators and disciplinarians she knows when wisely to relax.” Paul sank into the corner of a deep leathern couch, but his friend remained standing and explanatory. “If you don’t mind, in this room, this is my habit. From the door to the desk and from the desk to the door. That shakes up my imagination gently; and don’t you see what a good thing it is that there’s no window for her to fly out of? The eternal standing as I write (I stop at that bureau and put it down, when anything comes, and so we go on) was rather wearisome at first, but we adopted it with an eye to the long run; you’re in better order—if your legs don’t break down!—and you can keep it up for more years. Oh we’re practical—we’re practical!” St. George repeated, going to the table and taking up all mechanically the bundle of proofs. But, pulling off the wrapper, he had a change of attention that appealed afresh to our hero. He lost himself a moment, examining the sheets of his new book, while the younger man’s eyes wandered over the room again.

“Lord, what good things I should do if I had such a charming place as this to do them in!” Paul reflected. The outer world, the world of accident and ugliness, was so successfully excluded, and within the rich protecting square, beneath the patronising sky, the dream-figures, the summoned company, could hold their particular revel. It was a fond prevision of Overt’s rather than an observation on actual data, for which occasions had been too few, that the Master thus more closely viewed would have the quality, the charming gift, of flashing out, all surprisingly, in personal intercourse and at moments of suspended or perhaps even of diminished expectation. A happy relation with him would be a thing proceeding by jumps, not by traceable stages.

“Do you read them—really?” he asked, laying down the proofs on Paul’s enquiring of him how soon the work would be published. And when the young man answered “Oh yes, always,” he was moved to mirth again by something he caught in his manner of saying that. “You go to see your grandmother on her birthday—and very proper it is, especially as she won’t last for ever. She has lost every faculty and every sense; she neither sees, nor hears, nor speaks; but all customary pieties and kindly habits are respectable. Only you’re strong if you *do* read ‘em! I couldn’t, my dear fellow. You are strong, I know; and that’s just a part of what I wanted to say to you. You’re very strong indeed. I’ve been going into your other things—they’ve interested me immensely. Some one ought to have told me about them before—some one I could believe. But whom can one believe? You’re wonderfully on the right road—it’s awfully decent work. Now do you mean to keep it up?—that’s what I want to ask you.”

“Do I mean to do others?” Paul asked, looking up from his sofa at his erect inquisitor and feeling partly like a happy little boy when the school-master is gay, and partly like some pilgrim of old who might have consulted a world-famous oracle. St. George’s own performance had been infirm, but as an adviser he would be infallible.

“Others—others? Ah the number won’t matter; one other would do, if it were really a further step—a throb of the same effort. What I mean is have you it in your heart to go in for some sort of decent perfection?”

“Ah decency, ah perfection—!” the young man sincerely sighed. “I talked of them the other Sunday with Miss Fancourt.”

It produced on the Master’s part a laugh of odd acrimony. “Yes, they’ll ‘talk’ of them as much as you like! But they’ll do little to help one to them. There’s no obligation of course; only you strike me as capable,” he went on. “You must have thought it all over. I can’t believe you’re without a plan. That’s the sensation you give me, and it’s so rare that it really

stirs one up—it makes you remarkable. If you haven't a plan, if you *don't* mean to keep it up, surely you're within your rights; it's nobody's business, no one can force you, and not more than two or three people will notice you don't go straight. The others—all the rest, every blest soul in England, will think you do—will think you are keeping it up: upon my honour they will! I shall be one of the two or three who know better. Now the question is whether you can do it for two or three. Is that the stuff you're made of?"

It locked his guest a minute as in closed throbbing arms. "I could do it for one, if you were the one."

"Don't say that; I don't deserve it; it scorches me," he protested with eyes suddenly grave and glowing. "The 'one' is of course one's self, one's conscience, one's idea, the singleness of one's aim. I think of that pure spirit as a man thinks of a woman he has in some detested hour of his youth loved and forsaken. She haunts him with reproachful eyes, she lives for ever before him. As an artist, you know, I've married for money." Paul stared and even blushed a little, confounded by this avowal; whereupon his host, observing the expression of his face, dropped a quick laugh and pursued: "You don't follow my figure. I'm not speaking of my dear wife, who had a small fortune—which, however, was not my bribe. I fell in love with her, as many other people have done. I refer to the mercenary muse whom I led to the altar of literature. Don't, my boy, put your nose into *that* yoke. The awful jade will lead you a life!"

Our hero watched him, wondering and deeply touched. "Haven't you been happy!"

"Happy? It's a kind of hell."

"There are things I should like to ask you," Paul said after a pause.

"Ask me anything in all the world. I'd turn myself inside out to save you."

"To 'save' me?" he quavered.

"To make you stick to it—to make you see it through. As I said to you the other night at Summersoft, let my example be vivid to you."

"Why your books are not so bad as that," said Paul, fairly laughing and feeling that if ever a fellow had breathed the air of art—!

"So bad as what?"

"Your talent's so great that it's in everything you do, in what's less good as well as in what's best. You've some forty volumes to show for it—forty volumes of wonderful life, of rare observation, of magnificent ability."

"I'm very clever, of course I know that"—but it was a thing, in fine, this author made nothing of. "Lord, what rot they'd all be if I hadn't been I'm a successful charlatan," he went on—"I've been able to pass off my system. But do you know what it is? It's cartonpierre."

"Carton-pierre?" Paul was struck, and gaped.

"Lincrusta-Walton!"

"Ah don't say such things—you make me bleed!" the younger man protested. "I see you in a beautiful fortunate home, living in comfort and honour."

"Do you call it honour?"—his host took him up with an intonation that often comes back to him. "That's what I want *you* to go in for. I mean the real thing. This is brummagem."

"Brummagem?" Paul ejaculated while his eyes wandered, by a movement natural at the moment, over the luxurious room.

“Ah they make it so well to-day—it’s wonderfully deceptive!”

Our friend thrilled with the interest and perhaps even more with the pity of it. Yet he wasn’t afraid to seem to patronise when he could still so far envy. “Is it deceptive that I find you living with every appearance of domestic felicity—blest with a devoted, accomplished wife, with children whose acquaintance I haven’t yet had the pleasure of making, but who *must* be delightful young people, from what I know of their parents?”

St. George smiled as for the candour of his question. “It’s all excellent, my dear fellow—heaven forbid I should deny it. I’ve made a great deal of money; my wife has known how to take care of it, to use it without wasting it, to put a good bit of it by, to make it fructify. I’ve got a loaf on the shelf; I’ve got everything in fact but the great thing.”

“The great thing?” Paul kept echoing.

“The sense of having done the best—the sense which is the real life of the artist and the absence of which is his death, of having drawn from his intellectual instrument the finest music that nature had hidden in it, of having played it as it should be played. He either does that or he doesn’t—and if he doesn’t he isn’t worth speaking of. Therefore, precisely, those who really know *don’t* speak of him. He may still hear a great chatter, but what he hears most is the incorruptible silence of Fame. I’ve squared her, you may say, for my little hour—but what’s my little hour? Don’t imagine for a moment,” the Master pursued, “that I’m such a cad as to have brought you down here to abuse or to complain of my wife to you. She’s a woman of distinguished qualities, to whom my obligations are immense; so that, if you please, we’ll say nothing about her. My boys—my children are all boys—are straight and strong, thank God, and have no poverty of growth about them, no penury of needs. I receive periodically the most satisfactory attestation from Harrow, from Oxford, from Sandhurst—oh we’ve done the best for them!—of their eminence as living thriving consuming organisms.”

“It must be delightful to feel that the son of one’s loins is at Sandhurst,” Paul remarked enthusiastically.

“It is—it’s charming. Oh I’m a patriot!”

The young man then could but have the greater tribute of questions to pay. “Then what did you mean—the other night at Summersoft—by saying that children are a curse?”

“My dear youth, on what basis are we talking?” and St. George dropped upon the sofa at a short distance from him. Sitting a little sideways he leaned back against the opposite arm with his hands raised and interlocked behind his head. “On the supposition that a certain perfection’s possible and even desirable—*isn’t* it so? Well, all I say is that one’s children interfere with perfection. One’s wife interferes. Marriage interferes.”

“You think then the artist shouldn’t marry?”

“He does so at his peril—he does so at his cost.”

“Not even when his wife’s in sympathy with his work?”

“She never is—she can’t be! Women haven’t a conception of such things.”

“Surely they on occasion work themselves,” Paul objected.

“Yes, very badly indeed. Oh of course, often, they think they understand, they think they sympathise. Then it is they’re most dangerous. Their idea is that you shall do a great lot and get a great lot of money. Their great nobleness and virtue, their exemplary conscientiousness as British females, is in keeping you up to that. My wife makes all my bargains with my publishers for me, and has done so for twenty years. She does it consummately well—that’s

why I'm really pretty well off. Aren't you the father of their innocent babes, and will you withhold from them their natural sustenance? You asked me the other night if they're not an immense incentive. Of course they are—there's no doubt of that!"

Paul turned it over: it took, from eyes he had never felt open so wide, so much looking at. "For myself I've an idea I need incentives."

"Ah well then, n'en parlons plus!" his companion handsomely smiled.

"*You* are an incentive, I maintain," the young man went on. "You don't affect me in the way you'd apparently like to. Your great success is what I see—the pomp of Ennismore Gardens!"

"Success?"—St. George's eyes had a cold fine light. "Do you call it success to be spoken of as you'd speak of me if you were sitting here with another artist—a young man intelligent and sincere like yourself? Do you call it success to make you blush—as you would blush!—if some foreign critic (some fellow, of course I mean, who should know what he was talking about and should have shown you he did, as foreign critics like to show it) were to say to you: 'He's the one, in this country, whom they consider the most perfect, isn't he?' Is it success to be the occasion of a young Englishman's having to stammer as you would have to stammer at such a moment for old England? No, no; success is to have made people wriggle to another tune. Do try it!"

Paul continued all gravely to glow. "Try what?"

"Try to do some really good work."

"Oh I want to, heaven knows!"

"Well, you can't do it without sacrifices—don't believe that for a moment," the Master said. "I've made none. I've had everything. In other words I've missed everything."

"You've had the full rich masculine human general life, with all the responsibilities and duties and burdens and sorrows and joys—all the domestic and social initiations and complications. They must be immensely suggestive, immensely amusing," Paul anxiously submitted.

"Amusing?"

"For a strong man—yes."

"They've given me subjects without number, if that's what you mean; but they've taken away at the same time the power to use them. I've touched a thousand things, but which one of them have I turned into gold? The artist has to do only with that—he knows nothing of any baser metal. I've led the life of the world, with my wife and my progeny; the clumsy conventional expensive materialised vulgarised brutalised life of London. We've got everything handsome, even a carriage—we're perfect Philistines and prosperous hospitable eminent people. But, my dear fellow, don't try to stultify yourself and pretend you don't know what we *haven't* got. It's bigger than all the rest. Between artists—come!" the Master wound up. "You know as well as you sit there that you'd put a pistol-ball into your brain if you had written my books!"

It struck his listener that the tremendous talk promised by him at Summersoft had indeed come off, and with a promptitude, a fulness, with which the latter's young imagination had scarcely reckoned. His impression fairly shook him and he throbbed with the excitement of such deep soundings and such strange confidences. He throbbed indeed with the conflict of his feelings—bewilderment and recognition and alarm, enjoyment and protest and assent, all

commingled with tenderness (and a kind of shame in the participation) for the sores and bruises exhibited by so fine a creature, and with a sense of the tragic secret nursed under his trappings. The idea of *his*, Paul Overt's, becoming the occasion of such an act of humility made him flush and pant, at the same time that his consciousness was in certain directions too much alive not to swallow—and not intensely to taste—every offered spoonful of the revelation. It had been his odd fortune to blow upon the deep waters, to make them surge and break in waves of strange eloquence. But how couldn't he give out a passionate contradiction of his host's last extravagance, how couldn't he enumerate to him the parts of his work he loved, the splendid things he had found in it, beyond the compass of any other writer of the day? St. George listened a while, courteously; then he said, laying his hand on his visitor's: "That's all very well; and if your idea's to do nothing better there's no reason you shouldn't have as many good things as I—as many human and material appendages, as many sons or daughters, a wife with as many gowns, a house with as many servants, a stable with as many horses, a heart with as many aches." The Master got up when he had spoken thus—he stood a moment—near the sofa looking down on his agitated pupil. "Are you possessed of any property?" it occurred to him to ask.

"None to speak of."

"Oh well then there's no reason why you shouldn't make a goodish income—if you set about it the right way. Study *me* for that—study me well. You may really have horses."

Paul sat there some minutes without speaking. He looked straight before him—he turned over many things. His friend had wandered away, taking up a parcel of letters from the table where the roll of proofs had lain. "What was the book Mrs. St. George made you burn—the one she didn't like?" our young man brought out.

"The book she made me burn—how did you know that?" The Master looked up from his letters quite without the facial convulsion the pupil had feared.

"I heard her speak of it at Summersoft."

"Ah yes—she's proud of it. I don't know—it was rather good."

"What was it about?"

"Let me see." And he seemed to make an effort to remember. "Oh yes—it was about myself." Paul gave an irrepressible groan for the disappearance of such a production, and the elder man went on: "Oh but *you* should write it—*you* should do me." And he pulled up—from the restless motion that had come upon him; his fine smile a generous glare. "There's a subject, my boy: no end of stuff in it!"

Again Paul was silent, but it was all tormenting. "Are there no women who really understand—who can take part in a sacrifice?"

"How can they take part? They themselves are the sacrifice. They're the idol and the altar and the flame."

"Isn't there even *one* who sees further?" Paul continued.

For a moment St. George made no answer; after which, having torn up his letters, he came back to the point all ironic. "Of course I know the one you mean. But not even Miss Fancourt."

"I thought you admired her so much."

"It's impossible to admire her more. Are you in love with her?" St. George asked.

"Yes," Paul Overt presently said.

“Well then give it up.”

Paul stared. “Give up my ‘love’?”

“Bless me, no. Your idea.” And then as our hero but still gazed: “The one you talked with her about. The idea of a decent perfection.”

“She’d help it—she’d help it!” the young man cried.

“For about a year—the first year, yes. After that she’d be as a millstone round its neck.”

Paul frankly wondered. “Why she has a passion for the real thing, for good work—for everything you and I care for most.”

“You and I’ is charming, my dear fellow!” his friend laughed. “She has it indeed, but she’d have a still greater passion for her children—and very proper too. She’d insist on everything’s being made comfortable, advantageous, propitious for them. That isn’t the artist’s business.”

“The artist—the artist! Isn’t he a man all the same?”

St. George had a grand grimace. “I mostly think not. You know as well as I what he has to do: the concentration, the finish, the independence he must strive for from the moment he begins to wish his work really decent. Ah my young friend, his relation to women, and especially to the one he’s most intimately concerned with, is at the mercy of the damning fact that whereas he can in the nature of things have but one standard, they have about fifty. That’s what makes them so superior,” St. George amusingly added. “Fancy an artist with a change of standards as you’d have a change of shirts or of dinner-plates. To *do* it—to do it and make it divine—is the only thing he has to think about. ‘Is it done or not?’ is his only question. Not ‘Is it done as well as a proper solicitude for my dear little family will allow?’ He has nothing to do with the relative—he has only to do with the absolute; and a dear little family may represent a dozen relatives.”

“Then you don’t allow him the common passions and affections of men?” Paul asked.

“Hasn’t he a passion, an affection, which includes all the rest? Besides, let him have all the passions he likes—if he only keeps his independence. He must be able to be poor.”

Paul slowly got up. “Why then did you advise me to make up to her?”

St. George laid his hand on his shoulder. “Because she’d make a splendid wife! And I hadn’t read you then.”

The young man had a strained smile. “I wish you had left me alone!”

“I didn’t know that that wasn’t good enough for you,” his host returned.

“What a false position, what a condemnation of the artist, that he’s a mere disfranchised monk and can produce his effect only by giving up personal happiness. What an arraignment of art!” Paul went on with a trembling voice.

“Ah you don’t imagine by chance that I’m defending art? ‘Arraignment’—I should think so! Happy the societies in which it hasn’t made its appearance, for from the moment it comes they have a consuming ache, they have an incurable corruption, in their breast. Most assuredly is the artist in a false position! But I thought we were taking him for granted. Pardon me,” St. George continued: “‘Ginistrella’ made me!”

Paul stood looking at the floor—one o’clock struck, in the stillness, from a neighbouring church-tower. “Do you think she’d ever look at me?” he put to his friend at last.

“Miss Fancourt—as a suitor? Why shouldn’t I think it? That’s why I’ve tried to favour you—I’ve had a little chance or two of bettering your opportunity.”

“Forgive my asking you, but do you mean by keeping away yourself?” Paul said with a blush.

“I’m an old idiot—my place isn’t there,” St. George stated gravely.

“I’m nothing yet, I’ve no fortune; and there must be so many others,” his companion pursued.

The Master took this considerably in, but made little of it. “You’re a gentleman and a man of genius. I think you might do something.”

“But if I must give that up—the genius?”

“Lots of people, you know, think I’ve kept mine,” St. George wonderfully grinned.

“You’ve a genius for mystification!” Paul declared; but grasping his hand gratefully in attenuation of this judgement.

“Poor dear boy, I do worry you! But try, try, all the same. I think your chances are good and you’ll win a great prize.”

Paul held fast the other’s hand a minute; he looked into the strange deep face. “No, I *am* an artist—I can’t help it!”

“Ah show it then!” St. George pleadingly broke out. “Let me see before I die the thing I most want, the thing I yearn for: a life in which the passion—ours—is really intense. If you can be rare don’t fail of it! Think what it is—how it counts—how it lives!”

They had moved to the door and he had closed both his hands over his companion’s. Here they paused again and our hero breathed deep. “I want to live!”

“In what sense?”

“In the greatest.”

“Well then stick to it—see it through.”

“With your sympathy—your help?”

“Count on that—you’ll be a great figure to me. Count on my highest appreciation, my devotion. You’ll give me satisfaction—if that has any weight with you.” After which, as Paul appeared still to waver, his host added: “Do you remember what you said to me at Summersoft?”

“Something infatuated, no doubt!”

“‘I’ll do anything in the world you tell me.’ You said that.”

“And you hold me to it?”

“Ah what am I?” the Master expressively sighed.

“Lord, what things I shall have to do!” Paul almost moaned as he departed.

VI

“It goes on too much abroad—hang abroad!” These or something like them had been the Master’s remarkable words in relation to the action of “Ginistrella”; and yet, though they had made a sharp impression on the author of that work, like almost all spoken words from the same source, he a week after the conversation I have noted left England for a long absence and full of brave intentions. It is not a perversion of the truth to pronounce that encounter the direct cause of his departure. If the oral utterance of the eminent writer had the privilege of

moving him deeply it was especially on his turning it over at leisure, hours and days later, that it appeared to yield him its full meaning and exhibit its extreme importance. He spent the summer in Switzerland and, having in September begun a new task, determined not to cross the Alps till he should have made a good start. To this end he returned to a quiet corner he knew well, on the edge of the Lake of Geneva and within sight of the towers of Chillon: a region and a view for which he had an affection that sprang from old associations and was capable of mysterious revivals and refreshments. Here he lingered late, till the snow was on the nearer hills, almost down to the limit to which he could climb when his stint, on the shortening afternoons, was performed. The autumn was fine, the lake was blue and his book took form and direction. These felicities, for the time, embroidered his life, which he suffered to cover him with its mantle. At the end of six weeks he felt he had learnt St. George's lesson by heart, had tested and proved its doctrine. Nevertheless he did a very inconsistent thing: before crossing the Alps he wrote to Marian Fancourt. He was aware of the perversity of this act, and it was only as a luxury, an amusement, the reward of a strenuous autumn, that he justified it. She had asked of him no such favour when, shortly before he left London, three days after their dinner in Ennismore Gardens, he went to take leave of her. It was true she had had no ground—he hadn't named his intention of absence. He had kept his counsel for want of due assurance: it was that particular visit that was, the next thing, to settle the matter. He had paid the visit to see how much he really cared for her, and quick departure, without so much as an explicit farewell, was the sequel to this enquiry, the answer to which had created within him a deep yearning. When he wrote her from Clarens he noted that he owed her an explanation (more than three months after!) for not having told her what he was doing.

She replied now briefly but promptly, and gave him a striking piece of news: that of the death, a week before, of Mrs. St. George. This exemplary woman had succumbed, in the country, to a violent attack of inflammation of the lungs—he would remember that for a long time she had been delicate. Miss Fancourt added that she believed her husband overwhelmed by the blow; he would miss her too terribly—she had been everything in life to him. Paul Overt, on this, immediately wrote to St. George. He would from the day of their parting have been glad to remain in communication with him, but had hitherto lacked the right excuse for troubling so busy a man. Their long nocturnal talk came back to him in every detail, but this was no bar to an expression of proper sympathy with the head of the profession, for hadn't that very talk made it clear that the late accomplished lady was the influence that ruled his life? What catastrophe could be more cruel than the extinction of such an influence? This was to be exactly the tone taken by St. George in answering his young friend upwards of a month later. He made no allusion of course to their important discussion. He spoke of his wife as frankly and generously as if he had quite forgotten that occasion, and the feeling of deep bereavement was visible in his words. "She took everything off my hands—off my mind. She carried on our life with the greatest art, the rarest devotion, and I was free, as few men can have been, to drive my pen, to shut myself up with my trade. This was a rare service—the highest she could have rendered me. Would I could have acknowledged it more fitly!"

A certain bewilderment, for our hero, disengaged itself from these remarks: they struck him as a contradiction, a retraction, strange on the part of a man who hadn't the excuse of witlessness. He had certainly not expected his correspondent to rejoice in the death of his wife, and it was perfectly in order that the rupture of a tie of more than twenty years should have left him sore. But if she had been so clear a blessing what in the name of consistency had the dear man meant by turning him upside down that night—by dosing him to that degree, at the most sensitive hour of his life, with the doctrine of renunciation? If Mrs. St.

George was an irreparable loss, then her husband's inspired advice had been a bad joke and renunciation was a mistake. Overt was on the point of rushing back to London to show that, for his part, he was perfectly willing to consider it so, and he went so far as to take the manuscript of the first chapters of his new book out of his table-drawer, to insert it into a pocket of his portmanteau. This led to his catching a glimpse of certain pages he hadn't looked at for months, and that accident, in turn, to his being struck with the high promise they revealed—a rare result of such retrospections, which it was his habit to avoid as much as possible: they usually brought home to him that the glow of composition might be a purely subjective and misleading emotion. On this occasion a certain belief in himself disengaged itself whimsically from the serried erasures of his first draft, making him think it best after all to pursue his present trial to the end. If he could write as well under the rigour of privation it might be a mistake to change the conditions before that spell had spent itself. He would go back to London of course, but he would go back only when he should have finished his book. This was the vow he privately made, restoring his manuscript to the table-drawer. It may be added that it took him a long time to finish his book, for the subject was as difficult as it was fine, and he was literally embarrassed by the fulness of his notes. Something within him warned him that he must make it supremely good—otherwise he should lack, as regards his private behaviour, a handsome excuse. He had a horror of this deficiency and found himself as firm as need be on the question of the lamp and the file. He crossed the Alps at last and spent the winter, the spring, the ensuing summer, in Italy, where still, at the end of a twelvemonth, his task was unachieved. “Stick to it—see it through”: this general injunction of St. George's was good also for the particular case. He applied it to the utmost, with the result that when in its slow order the summer had come round again he felt he had given all that was in him. This time he put his papers into his portmanteau, with the address of his publisher attached, and took his way northward.

He had been absent from London for two years—two years which, seeming to count as more, had made such a difference in his own life—through the production of a novel far stronger, he believed, than “Ginistrella”—that he turned out into Piccadilly, the morning after his arrival, with a vague expectation of changes, of finding great things had happened. But there were few transformations in Piccadilly—only three or four big red houses where there had been low black ones—and the brightness of the end of June peeped through the rusty railings of the Green Park and glittered in the varnish of the rolling carriages as he had seen it in other, more cursory Junes. It was a greeting he appreciated; it seemed friendly and pointed, added to the exhilaration of his finished book, of his having his own country and the huge oppressive amusing city that suggested everything, that contained everything, under his hand again. “Stay at home and do things here—do subjects we can measure,” St. George had said; and now it struck him he should ask nothing better than to stay at home for ever. Late in the afternoon he took his way to Manchester Square, looking out for a number he hadn't forgotten. Miss Fancourt, however, was not at home, so that he turned rather dejectedly from the door. His movement brought him face to face with a gentleman just approaching it and recognised on another glance as Miss Fancourt's father. Paul saluted this personage, and the General returned the greeting with his customary good manner—a manner so good, however, that you could never tell whether it meant he placed you. The disappointed caller felt the impulse to address him; then, hesitating, became both aware of having no particular remark to make, and convinced that though the old soldier remembered him he remembered him wrong. He therefore went his way without computing the irresistible effect his own evident recognition would have on the General, who never neglected a chance to gossip. Our young man's face was expressive, and observation seldom let it pass. He hadn't taken ten steps before he heard himself called after with a friendly semi-articulate “Er—I beg your pardon!” He turned round and the General, smiling at him from the porch, said: “Won't you

come in? I won't leave you the advantage of me!" Paul declined to come in, and then felt regret, for Miss Fancourt, so late in the afternoon, might return at any moment. But her father gave him no second chance; he appeared mainly to wish not to have struck him as ungracious. A further look at the visitor had recalled something, enough at least to enable him to say: "You've come back, you've come back?" Paul was on the point of replying that he had come back the night before, but he suppressed, the next instant, this strong light on the immediacy of his visit and, giving merely a general assent, alluded to the young lady he deplored not having found. He had come late in the hope she would be in. "I'll tell her—I'll tell her," said the old man; and then he added quickly, gallantly: "You'll be giving us something new? It's a long time, isn't it?" Now he remembered him right.

"Rather long. I'm very slow." Paul explained. "I met you at Summersoft a long time ago."

"Oh yes—with Henry St. George. I remember very well. Before his poor wife—" General Fancourt paused a moment, smiling a little less. "I dare say you know."

"About Mrs. St. George's death? Certainly—I heard at the time."

"Oh no, I mean—I mean he's to be married."

"Ah I've not heard that!" But just as Paul was about to add "To whom?" the General crossed his intention.

"When did you come back? I know you've been away—by my daughter. She was very sorry. You ought to give her something new."

"I came back last night," said our young man, to whom something had occurred which made his speech for the moment a little thick.

"Ah most kind of you to come so soon. Couldn't you turn up at dinner?"

"At dinner?" Paul just mechanically repeated, not liking to ask whom St. George was going to marry, but thinking only of that.

"There are several people, I believe. Certainly St. George. Or afterwards if you like better. I believe my daughter expects—" He appeared to notice something in the visitor's raised face (on his steps he stood higher) which led him to interrupt himself, and the interruption gave him a momentary sense of awkwardness, from which he sought a quick issue. "Perhaps then you haven't heard she's to be married."

Paul gaped again. "To be married?"

"To Mr. St. George—it has just been settled. Odd marriage, isn't it?" Our listener uttered no opinion on this point: he only continued to stare. "But I dare say it will do—she's so awfully literary!" said the General.

Paul had turned very red. "Oh it's a surprise—very interesting, very charming! I'm afraid I can't dine—so many thanks!"

"Well, you must come to the wedding!" cried the General. "Oh I remember that day at Summersoft. He's a great man, you know."

"Charming—charming!" Paul stammered for retreat. He shook hands with the General and got off. His face was red and he had the sense of its growing more and more crimson. All the evening at home—he went straight to his rooms and remained there dinnerless—his cheek burned at intervals as if it had been smitten. He didn't understand what had happened to him, what trick had been played him, what treachery practised. "None, none," he said to himself. "I've nothing to do with it. I'm out of it—it's none of my business." But that bewildered murmur was followed again and again by the incongruous ejaculation: "Was it a

plan—was it a plan?” Sometimes he cried to himself, breathless, “Have I been duped, sold, swindled?” If at all, he was an absurd, an abject victim. It was as if he hadn’t lost her till now. He had renounced her, yes; but that was another affair—that was a closed but not a locked door. Now he seemed to see the door quite slammed in his face. Did he expect her to wait—was she to give him his time like that: two years at a stretch? He didn’t know what he had expected—he only knew what he hadn’t. It wasn’t this—it wasn’t this. Mystification bitterness and wrath rose and boiled in him when he thought of the deference, the devotion, the credulity with which he had listened to St. George. The evening wore on and the light was long; but even when it had darkened he remained without a lamp. He had flung himself on the sofa, where he lay through the hours with his eyes either closed or gazing at the gloom, in the attitude of a man teaching himself to bear something, to bear having been made a fool of. He had made it too easy—that idea passed over him like a hot wave. Suddenly, as he heard eleven o’clock strike, he jumped up, remembering what General Fancourt had said about his coming after dinner. He’d go—he’d see her at least; perhaps he should see what it meant. He felt as if some of the elements of a hard sum had been given him and the others were wanting: he couldn’t do his sum till he had got all his figures.

He dressed and drove quickly, so that by half-past eleven he was at Manchester Square. There were a good many carriages at the door—a party was going on; a circumstance which at the last gave him a slight relief, for now he would rather see her in a crowd. People passed him on the staircase; they were going away, going “on” with the hunted herdlike movement of London society at night. But sundry groups remained in the drawing-room, and it was some minutes, as she didn’t hear him announced, before he discovered and spoke to her. In this short interval he had seen St. George talking to a lady before the fireplace; but he at once looked away, feeling unready for an encounter, and therefore couldn’t be sure the author of “Shadowmere” noticed him. At all events he didn’t come over though Miss Fancourt did as soon as she saw him—she almost rushed at him, smiling rustling radiant beautiful. He had forgotten what her head, what her face offered to the sight; she was in white, there were gold figures on her dress and her hair was a casque of gold. He saw in a single moment that she was happy, happy with an aggressive splendour. But she wouldn’t speak to him of that, she would speak only of himself.

“I’m so delighted; my father told me. How kind of you to come!” She struck him as so fresh and brave, while his eyes moved over her, that he said to himself irresistibly: “Why to him, why not to youth, to strength, to ambition, to a future? Why, in her rich young force, to failure, to abdication to superannuation?” In his thought at that sharp moment he blasphemed even against all that had been left of his faith in the peccable Master. “I’m so sorry I missed you,” she went on. “My father told me. How charming of you to have come so soon!”

“Does that surprise you?” Paul Overt asked.

“The first day? No, from you—nothing that’s nice.” She was interrupted by a lady who bade her good-night, and he seemed to read that it cost her nothing to speak to him in that tone; it was her old liberal lavish way, with a certain added amplitude that time had brought; and if this manner began to operate on the spot, at such a juncture in her history, perhaps in the other days too it had meant just as little or as much—a mere mechanical charity, with the difference now that she was satisfied, ready to give but in want of nothing. Oh she was satisfied—and why shouldn’t she be? Why shouldn’t she have been surprised at his coming the first day—for all the good she had ever got from him? As the lady continued to hold her attention Paul turned from her with a strange irritation in his complicated artistic soul and a sort of disinterested disappointment. She was so happy that it was almost stupid—a disproof of the extraordinary intelligence he had formerly found in her. Didn’t she know how bad St.

George could be, hadn't she recognised the awful thinness—? If she didn't she was nothing, and if she did why such an insolence of serenity? This question expired as our young man's eyes settled at last on the genius who had advised him in a great crisis. St. George was still before the chimney-piece, but now he was alone—fixed, waiting, as if he meant to stop after every one—and he met the clouded gaze of the young friend so troubled as to the degree of his right (the right his resentment would have enjoyed) to regard himself as a victim. Somehow the ravage of the question was checked by the Master's radiance. It was as fine in its way as Marian Fancourt's, it denoted the happy human being; but also it represented to Paul Overt that the author of "Shadowmere" had now definitely ceased to count—ceased to count as a writer. As he smiled a welcome across the place he was almost banal, was almost smug. Paul fancied that for a moment he hesitated to make a movement, as if for all the world he *had* his bad conscience; then they had already met in the middle of the room and had shaken hands—expressively, cordially on St. George's part. With which they had passed back together to where the elder man had been standing, while St. George said: "I hope you're never going away again. I've been dining here; the General told me." He was handsome, he was young, he looked as if he had still a great fund of life. He bent the friendliest, most unconfessing eyes on his disciple of a couple of years before; asked him about everything, his health, his plans, his late occupations, the new book. "When will it be out—soon, soon, I hope? Splendid, eh? That's right; you're a comfort, you're a luxury! I've read you all over again these last six months." Paul waited to see if he would tell him what the General had told him in the afternoon and what Miss Fancourt, verbally at least, of course hadn't. But as it didn't come out he at last put the question.

"Is it true, the great news I hear—that you're to be married?"

"Ah you have heard it then?"

"Didn't the General tell you?" Paul asked.

The Master's face was wonderful. "Tell me what?"

"That he mentioned it to me this afternoon?"

"My dear fellow, I don't remember. We've been in the midst of people. I'm sorry, in that case, that I lose the pleasure, myself, of announcing to you a fact that touches me so nearly. It *is* a fact, strange as it may appear. It has only just become one. Isn't it ridiculous?" St. George made this speech without confusion, but on the other hand, so far as our friend could judge, without latent impudence. It struck his interlocutor that, to talk so comfortably and coolly, he must simply have forgotten what had passed between them. His next words, however, showed he hadn't, and they produced, as an appeal to Paul's own memory, an effect which would have been ludicrous if it hadn't been cruel. "Do you recall the talk we had at my house that night, into which Miss Fancourt's name entered? I've often thought of it since."

"Yes; no wonder you said what you did"—Paul was careful to meet his eyes.

"In the light of the present occasion? Ah but there was no light then. How could I have foreseen this hour?"

"Didn't you think it probable?"

"Upon my honour, no," said Henry St. George. "Certainly I owe you that assurance. Think how my situation has changed."

"I see—I see," our young man murmured.

His companion went on as if, now that the subject had been broached, he was, as a person of imagination and tact, quite ready to give every satisfaction—being both by his genius and his method so able to enter into everything another might feel. “But it’s not only that; for honestly, at my age, I never dreamed—a widower with big boys and with so little else! It has turned out differently from anything one could have dreamed, and I’m fortunate beyond all measure. She has been so free, and yet she consents. Better than any one else perhaps—for I remember how you liked her before you went away, and how she liked you—you can intelligently congratulate me.”

“She has been so free!” Those words made a great impression on Paul Overt, and he almost writhed under that irony in them as to which it so little mattered whether it was designed or casual. Of course she had been free, and appreciably perhaps by his own act; for wasn’t the Master’s allusion to her having liked him a part of the irony too? “I thought that by your theory you disapproved of a writer’s marrying.”

“Surely—surely. But you don’t call me a writer?”

“You ought to be ashamed,” said Paul.

“Ashamed of marrying again?”

“I won’t say that—but ashamed of your reasons.”

The elder man beautifully smiled. “You must let me judge of them, my good friend.”

“Yes; why not? For you judged wonderfully of mine.”

The tone of these words appeared suddenly, for St. George, to suggest the unsuspected. He stared as if divining a bitterness. “Don’t you think I’ve been straight?”

“You might have told me at the time perhaps.”

“My dear fellow, when I say I couldn’t pierce futurity—!”

“I mean afterwards.”

The Master wondered. “After my wife’s death?”

“When this idea came to you.”

“Ah never, never! I wanted to save you, rare and precious as you are.”

Poor Overt looked hard at him. “Are you marrying Miss Fancourt to save me?”

“Not absolutely, but it adds to the pleasure. I shall be the making of you,” St. George smiled. “I was greatly struck, after our talk, with the brave devoted way you quitted the country, and still more perhaps with your force of character in remaining abroad. You’re very strong—you’re wonderfully strong.”

Paul tried to sound his shining eyes; the strange thing was that he seemed sincere—not a mocking fiend. He turned away, and as he did so heard the Master say something about his giving them all the proof, being the joy of his old age. He faced him again, taking another look. “Do you mean to say you’ve stopped writing?”

“My dear fellow, of course I have. It’s too late. Didn’t I tell you?”

“I can’t believe it!”

“Of course you can’t—with your own talent! No, no; for the rest of my life I shall only read *you*.”

“Does she know that—Miss Fancourt?”

“She will—she will.” Did he mean this, our young man wondered, as a covert intimation that the assistance he should derive from that young lady’s fortune, moderate as it was, would make the difference of putting it in his power to cease to work ungratefully an exhausted vein? Somehow, standing there in the ripeness of his successful manhood, he didn’t suggest that any of his veins were exhausted. “Don’t you remember the moral I offered myself to you that night as pointing?” St. George continued. “Consider at any rate the warning I am at present.”

This was too much—he *was* the mocking fiend. Paul turned from him with a mere nod for good-night and the sense in a sore heart that he might come back to him and his easy grace, his fine way of arranging things, some time in the far future, but couldn’t fraternise with him now. It was necessary to his soreness to believe for the hour in the intensity of his grievance—all the more cruel for its not being a legal one. It was doubtless in the attitude of hugging this wrong that he descended the stairs without taking leave of Miss Fancourt, who hadn’t been in view at the moment he quitted the room. He was glad to get out into the honest dusky unsophisticating night, to move fast, to take his way home on foot. He walked a long time, going astray, paying no attention. He was thinking of too many other things. His steps recovered their direction, however, and at the end of an hour he found himself before his door in the small inexpensive empty street. He lingered, questioning himself still before going in, with nothing around and above him but moonless blackness, a bad lamp or two and a few far-away dim stars. To these last faint features he raised his eyes; he had been saying to himself that he should have been “sold” indeed, diabolically sold, if now, on his new foundation, at the end of a year, St. George were to put forth something of his prime quality—something of the type of “Shadowmere” and finer than his finest. Greatly as he admired his talent Paul literally hoped such an incident wouldn’t occur; it seemed to him just then that he shouldn’t be able to bear it. His late adviser’s words were still in his ears—“You’re very strong, wonderfully strong.” Was he really? Certainly he would have to be, and it might a little serve for revenge. *Is he?* the reader may ask in turn, if his interest has followed the perplexed young man so far. The best answer to that perhaps is that he’s doing his best, but that it’s too soon to say. When the new book came out in the autumn Mr. and Mrs. St. George found it really magnificent. The former still has published nothing but Paul doesn’t even yet feel safe. I may say for him, however, that if this event were to occur he would really be the very first to appreciate it: which is perhaps a proof that the Master was essentially right and that Nature had dedicated him to intellectual, not to personal passion.

The Pupil

CHAPTER I

The poor young man hesitated and procrastinated: it cost him such an effort to broach the subject of terms, to speak of money to a person who spoke only of feelings and, as it were, of the aristocracy. Yet he was unwilling to take leave, treating his engagement as settled, without some more conventional glance in that direction than he could find an opening for in the manner of the large affable lady who sat there drawing a pair of soiled gants de Suède through a fat jewelled hand and, at once pressing and gliding, repeated over and over everything but the thing he would have liked to hear. He would have liked to hear the figure of his salary; but just as he was nervously about to sound that note the little boy came back—the little boy Mrs. Moreen had sent out of the room to fetch her fan. He came back without the fan, only with the casual observation that he couldn't find it. As he dropped this cynical confession he looked straight and hard at the candidate for the honour of taking his education in hand. This personage reflected somewhat grimly that the thing he should have to teach his little charge would be to appear to address himself to his mother when he spoke to her—especially not to make her such an improper answer as that.

When Mrs. Moreen bethought herself of this pretext for getting rid of their companion Pemberton supposed it was precisely to approach the delicate subject of his remuneration. But it had been only to say some things about her son that it was better a boy of eleven shouldn't catch. They were extravagantly to his advantage save when she lowered her voice to sigh, tapping her left side familiarly, "And all overclouded by *this*, you know; all at the mercy of a weakness—!" Pemberton gathered that the weakness was in the region of the heart. He had known the poor child was not robust: this was the basis on which he had been invited to treat, through an English lady, an Oxford acquaintance, then at Nice, who happened to know both his needs and those of the amiable American family looking out for something really superior in the way of a resident tutor.

The young man's impression of his prospective pupil, who had come into the room as if to see for himself the moment Pemberton was admitted, was not quite the soft solicitation the visitor had taken for granted. Morgan Moreen was somehow sickly without being "delicate," and that he looked intelligent—it is true Pemberton wouldn't have enjoyed his being stupid—only added to the suggestion that, as with his big mouth and big ears he really couldn't be called pretty, he might too utterly fail to please. Pemberton was modest, was even timid; and the chance that his small scholar might prove cleverer than himself had quite figured, to his anxiety, among the dangers of an untried experiment. He reflected, however, that these were risks one had to run when one accepted a position, as it was called, in a private family; when as yet one's university honours had, pecuniarily speaking, remained barren. At any rate when Mrs. Moreen got up as to intimate that, since it was understood he would enter upon his duties within the week she would let him off now, he succeeded, in spite of the presence of the child, in squeezing out a phrase about the rate of payment. It was not the fault of the conscious smile which seemed a reference to the lady's expensive identity, it was not the fault of this demonstration, which had, in a sort, both vagueness and point, if the allusion didn't sound rather vulgar. This was exactly because she became still more gracious to reply: "Oh I can assure you that all that will be quite regular."

Pemberton only wondered, while he took up his hat, what "all that" was to amount to—people had such different ideas. Mrs. Moreen's words, however, seemed to commit the

family to a pledge definite enough to elicit from the child a strange little comment in the shape of the mocking foreign ejaculation “Oh la-la!”

Pemberton, in some confusion, glanced at him as he walked slowly to the window with his back turned, his hands in his pockets and the air in his elderly shoulders of a boy who didn't play. The young man wondered if he should be able to teach him to play, though his mother had said it would never do and that this was why school was impossible. Mrs. Moreen exhibited no discomfiture; she only continued blandly: “Mr. Moreen will be delighted to meet your wishes. As I told you, he has been called to London for a week. As soon as he comes back you shall have it out with him.”

This was so frank and friendly that the young man could only reply, laughing as his hostess laughed: “Oh I don't imagine we shall have much of a battle.”

“They'll give you anything you like,” the boy remarked unexpectedly, returning from the window. “We don't mind what anything costs—we live awfully well.”

“My darling, you're too quaint!” his mother exclaimed, putting out to caress him a practised but ineffectual hand. He slipped out of it, but looked with intelligent innocent eyes at Pemberton, who had already had time to notice that from one moment to the other his small satiric face seemed to change its time of life. At this moment it was infantine, yet it appeared also to be under the influence of curious intuitions and knowledges. Pemberton rather disliked precocity and was disappointed to find gleams of it in a disciple not yet in his teens. Nevertheless he divined on the spot that Morgan wouldn't prove a bore. He would prove on the contrary a source of agitation. This idea held the young man, in spite of a certain repulsion.

“You pompous little person! We're not extravagant!” Mrs. Moreen gaily protested, making another unsuccessful attempt to draw the boy to her side. “You must know what to expect,” she went on to Pemberton.

“The less you expect the better!” her companion interposed. “But we *are* people of fashion.”

“Only so far as *you* make us so!” Mrs. Moreen tenderly mocked. “Well then, on Friday—don't tell me you're superstitious—and mind you don't fail us. Then you'll see us all. I'm so sorry the girls are out. I guess you'll like the girls. And, you know, I've another son, quite different from this one.”

“He tries to imitate me,” Morgan said to their friend.

“He tries? Why he's twenty years old!” cried Mrs. Moreen.

“You're very witty,” Pemberton remarked to the child—a proposition his mother echoed with enthusiasm, declaring Morgan's sallies to be the delight of the house.

The boy paid no heed to this; he only enquired abruptly of the visitor, who was surprised afterwards that he hadn't struck him as offensively forward: “Do you *want* very much to come?”

“Can you doubt it after such a description of what I shall hear?” Pemberton replied. Yet he didn't want to come at all; he was coming because he had to go somewhere, thanks to the collapse of his fortune at the end of a year abroad spent on the system of putting his scant patrimony into a single full wave of experience. He had had his full wave but couldn't pay the score at his inn. Moreover he had caught in the boy's eyes the glimpse of a far-off appeal.

“Well, I’ll do the best I can for you,” said Morgan; with which he turned away again. He passed out of one of the long windows; Pemberton saw him go and lean on the parapet of the terrace. He remained there while the young man took leave of his mother, who, on Pemberton’s looking as if he expected a farewell from him, interposed with: “Leave him, leave him; he’s so strange!” Pemberton supposed her to fear something he might say. “He’s a genius—you’ll love him,” she added. “He’s much the most interesting person in the family.” And before he could invent some civility to oppose to this she wound up with: “But we’re all good, you know!”

“He’s a genius—you’ll love him!” were words that recurred to our aspirant before the Friday, suggesting among many things that geniuses were not invariably loveable. However, it was all the better if there was an element that would make tutorship absorbing: he had perhaps taken too much for granted it would only disgust him. As he left the villa after his interview he looked up at the balcony and saw the child leaning over it. “We shall have great larks!” he called up.

Morgan hung fire a moment and then gaily returned: “By the time you come back I shall have thought of something witty!”

This made Pemberton say to himself “After all he’s rather nice.”

CHAPTER II

On the Friday he saw them all, as Mrs. Moreen had promised, for her husband had come back and the girls and the other son were at home. Mr. Moreen had a white moustache, a confiding manner and, in his buttonhole, the ribbon of a foreign order—bestowed, as Pemberton eventually learned, for services. For what services he never clearly ascertained: this was a point—one of a large number—that Mr. Moreen’s manner never confided. What it emphatically did confide was that he was even more a man of the world than you might first make out. Ulick, the firstborn, was in visible training for the same profession—under the disadvantage as yet, however, of a buttonhole but feebly floral and a moustache with no pretensions to type. The girls had hair and figures and manners and small fat feet, but had never been out alone. As for Mrs. Moreen Pemberton saw on a nearer view that her elegance was intermittent and her parts didn’t always match. Her husband, as she had promised, met with enthusiasm Pemberton’s ideas in regard to a salary. The young man had endeavoured to keep these stammerings modest, and Mr. Moreen made it no secret that *he* found them wanting in “style.” He further mentioned that he aspired to be intimate with his children, to be their best friend, and that he was always looking out for them. That was what he went off for, to London and other places—to look out; and this vigilance was the theory of life, as well as the real occupation, of the whole family. They all looked out, for they were very frank on the subject of its being necessary. They desired it to be understood that they were earnest people, and also that their fortune, though quite adequate for earnest people, required the most careful administration. Mr. Moreen, as the parent bird, sought sustenance for the nest. Ulick invoked support mainly at the club, where Pemberton guessed that it was usually served on green cloth. The girls used to do up their hair and their frocks themselves, and our young man felt appealed to to be glad, in regard to Morgan’s education, that, though it must naturally be of the best, it didn’t cost too much. After a little he *was* glad, forgetting at times his own needs in the interest inspired by the child’s character and culture and the pleasure of making easy terms for him.

During the first weeks of their acquaintance Morgan had been as puzzling as a page in an unknown language—altogether different from the obvious little Anglo-Saxons who had misrepresented childhood to Pemberton. Indeed the whole mystic volume in which the boy

had been amateurishly bound demanded some practice in translation. To-day, after a considerable interval, there is something phantasmagoria, like a prismatic reflexion or a serial novel, in Pemberton's memory of the queerness of the Moreens. If it were not for a few tangible tokens—a lock of Morgan's hair cut by his own hand, and the half-dozen letters received from him when they were disjoined—the whole episode and the figures peopling it would seem too inconsequent for anything but dreamland. Their supreme quaintness was their success—as it appeared to him for a while at the time; since he had never seen a family so brilliantly equipped for failure. Wasn't it success to have kept him so hatefully long? Wasn't it success to have drawn him in that first morning at déjeuner, the Friday he came—it was enough to *make* one superstitious—so that he utterly committed himself, and this not by calculation or on a signal, but from a happy instinct which made them, like a band of gypsies, work so neatly together? They amused him as much as if they had really been a band of gypsies. He was still young and had not seen much of the world—his English years had been properly arid; therefore the reversed conventions of the Moreens—for they had *their* desperate proprieties—struck him as topsy-turvy. He had encountered nothing like them at Oxford; still less had any such note been struck to his younger American ear during the four years at Yale in which he had richly supposed himself to be reacting against a Puritan strain. The reaction of the Moreens, at any rate, went ever so much further. He had thought himself very sharp that first day in hitting them all off in his mind with the “cosmopolite” label. Later it seemed feeble and colourless—confessedly helplessly provisional.

He yet when he first applied it felt a glow of joy—for an instructor he was still empirical—rise from the apprehension that living with them would really be to see life. Their sociable strangeness was an intimation of that—their chatter of tongues, their gaiety and good humour, their infinite dawdling (they were always getting themselves up, but it took forever, and Pemberton had once found Mr. Moreen shaving in the drawing-room), their French, their Italian and, cropping up in the foreign fluencies, their cold tough slices of American. They lived on macaroni and coffee—they had these articles prepared in perfection—but they knew recipes for a hundred other dishes. They overflowed with music and song, were always humming and catching each other up, and had a sort of professional acquaintance with Continental cities. They talked of “good places” as if they had been pickpockets or strolling players. They had at Nice a villa, a carriage, a piano and a banjo, and they went to official parties. They were a perfect calendar of the “days” of their friends, which Pemberton knew them, when they were indisposed, to get out of bed to go to, and which made the week larger than life when Mrs. Moreen talked of them with Paula and Amy. Their initiations gave their new inmate at first an almost dazzling sense of culture. Mrs. Moreen had translated something at some former period—an author whom it made Pemberton feel borné never to have heard of. They could imitate Venetian and sing Neapolitan, and when they wanted to say something very particular communicated with each other in an ingenious dialect of their own, an elastic spoken cipher which Pemberton at first took for some patois of one of their countries, but which he “caught on to” as he would not have grasped provincial development of Spanish or German.

“It's the family language—Ultramoreen,” Morgan explained to him drolly enough; but the boy rarely condescended to use it himself, though he dealt in colloquial Latin as if he had been a little prelate.

Among all the “days” with which Mrs. Moreen's memory was taxed she managed to squeeze in one of her own, which her friends sometimes forgot. But the house drew a frequented air from the number of fine people who were freely named there and from several mysterious men with foreign titles and English clothes whom Morgan called the princes and who, on

sofas with the girls, talked French very loud—though sometimes with some oddity of accent—as if to show they were saying nothing improper. Pemberton wondered how the princes could ever propose in that tone and so publicly: he took for granted cynically that this was what was desired of them. Then he recognised that even for the chance of such an advantage Mrs. Moreen would never allow Paula and Amy to receive alone. These young ladies were not at all timid, but it was just the safeguards that made them so candidly free. It was a houseful of Bohemians who wanted tremendously to be Philistines.

In one respect, however, certainly they achieved no rigour—they were wonderfully amiable and ecstatic about Morgan. It was a genuine tenderness, an artless admiration, equally strong in each. They even praised his beauty, which was small, and were as afraid of him as if they felt him of finer clay. They spoke of him as a little angel and a prodigy—they touched on his want of health with long vague faces. Pemberton feared at first an extravagance that might make him hate the boy, but before this happened he had become extravagant himself. Later, when he had grown rather to hate the others, it was a bribe to patience for him that they were at any rate nice about Morgan, going on tiptoe if they fancied he was showing symptoms, and even giving up somebody's "day" to procure him a pleasure. Mixed with this too was the oddest wish to make him independent, as if they had felt themselves not good enough for him. They passed him over to the new members of their circle very much as if wishing to force some charity of adoption on so free an agent and get rid of their own charge. They were delighted when they saw Morgan take so to his kind playfellow, and could think of no higher praise for the young man. It was strange how they contrived to reconcile the appearance, and indeed the essential fact, of adoring the child with their eagerness to wash their hands of him. Did they want to get rid of him before he should find them out? Pemberton was finding them out month by month. The boy's fond family, however this might be, turned their backs with exaggerated delicacy, as if to avoid the reproach of interfering. Seeing in time how little he had in common with them—it was by *them* he first observed it; they proclaimed it with complete humility—his companion was moved to speculate on the mysteries of transmission, the far jumps of heredity. Where his detachment from most of the things they represented had come from was more than an observer could say—it certainly had burrowed under two or three generations.

As for Pemberton's own estimate of his pupil, it was a good while before he got the point of view, so little had he been prepared for it by the smug young barbarians to whom the tradition of tutorship, as hitherto revealed to him, had been adjusted. Morgan was scrappy and surprising, deficient in many properties supposed common to the genus and abounding in others that were the portion only of the supernaturally clever. One day his friend made a great stride: it cleared up the question to perceive that Morgan *was* supernaturally clever and that, though the formula was temporarily meagre, this would be the only assumption on which one could successfully deal with him. He had the general quality of a child for whom life had not been simplified by school, a kind of homebred sensibility which might have been as bad for himself but was charming for others, and a whole range of refinement and perception—little musical vibrations as taking as picked-up airs—begotten by wandering about Europe at the tail of his migratory tribe. This might not have been an education to recommend in advance, but its results with so special a subject were as appreciable as the marks on a piece of fine porcelain. There was at the same time in him a small strain of stoicism, doubtless the fruit of having had to begin early to bear pain, which counted for pluck and made it of less consequence that he might have been thought at school rather a polyglot little beast. Pemberton indeed quickly found himself rejoicing that school was out of the question: in any million of boys it was probably good for all but one, and Morgan was that millionth. It would have made him comparative and superior—it might have made him

really require kicking. Pemberton would try to be school himself—a bigger seminary than five hundred grazing donkeys, so that, winning no prizes, the boy would remain unconscious and irresponsible and amusing—amusing, because, though life was already intense in his childish nature, freshness still made there a strong draught for jokes. It turned out that even in the still air of Morgan's various disabilities jokes flourished greatly. He was a pale lean acute undeveloped little cosmopolite, who liked intellectual gymnastics and who also, as regards the behaviour of mankind, had noticed more things than you might suppose, but who nevertheless had his proper playroom of superstitions, where he smashed a dozen toys a day.

CHAPTER III

At Nice once, toward evening, as the pair rested in the open air after a walk, and looked over the sea at the pink western lights, he said suddenly to his comrade: "Do you like it, you know—being with us all in this intimate way?"

"My dear fellow, why should I stay if I didn't?"

"How do I know you'll stay? I'm almost sure you won't, very long."

"I hope you don't mean to dismiss me," said Pemberton.

Morgan debated, looking at the sunset. "I think if I did right I ought to."

"Well, I know I'm supposed to instruct you in virtue; but in that case don't do right."

"You're very young—fortunately," Morgan went on, turning to him again.

"Oh yes, compared with you!"

"Therefore it won't matter so much if you do lose a lot of time."

"That's the way to look at it," said Pemberton accommodatingly.

They were silent a minute; after which the boy asked: "Do you like my father and my mother very much?"

"Dear me, yes. They're charming people."

Morgan received this with another silence; then unexpectedly, familiarly, but at the same time affectionately, he remarked: "You're a jolly old humbug!"

For a particular reason the words made our young man change colour. The boy noticed in an instant that he had turned red, whereupon he turned red himself and pupil and master exchanged a longish glance in which there was a consciousness of many more things than are usually touched upon, even tacitly, in such a relation. It produced for Pemberton an embarrassment; it raised in a shadowy form a question—this was the first glimpse of it—destined to play a singular and, as he imagined, owing to the altogether peculiar conditions, an unprecedented part in his intercourse with his little companion. Later, when he found himself talking with the youngster in a way in which few youngsters could ever have been talked with, he thought of that clumsy moment on the bench at Nice as the dawn of an understanding that had broadened. What had added to the clumsiness then was that he thought it his duty to declare to Morgan that he might abuse him, Pemberton, as much as he liked, but must never abuse his parents. To this Morgan had the easy retort that he hadn't dreamed of abusing them; which appeared to be true: it put Pemberton in the wrong.

"Then why am I a humbug for saying *I* think them charming?" the young man asked, conscious of a certain rashness.

"Well—they're not your parents."

“They love you better than anything in the world—never forget that,” said Pemberton.

“Is that why you like them so much?”

“They’re very kind to me,” Pemberton replied evasively.

“You *are* a humbug!” laughed Morgan, passing an arm into his tutor’s. He leaned against him looking oft at the sea again and swinging his long thin legs.

“Don’t kick my shins,” said Pemberton while he reflected “Hang it, I can’t complain of them to the child!”

“There’s another reason, too,” Morgan went on, keeping his legs still.

“Another reason for what?”

“Besides their not being your parents.”

“I don’t understand you,” said Pemberton.

“Well, you will before long. All right!”

He did understand fully before long, but he made a fight even with himself before he confessed it. He thought it the oddest thing to have a struggle with the child about. He wondered he didn’t hate the hope of the Moreens for bringing the struggle on. But by the time it began any such sentiment for that scion was closed to him. Morgan was a special case, and to know him was to accept him on his own odd terms. Pemberton had spent his aversion to special cases before arriving at knowledge. When at last he did arrive his quandary was great. Against every interest he had attached himself. They would have to meet things together. Before they went home that evening at Nice the boy had said, clinging to his arm:

“Well, at any rate you’ll hang on to the last.”

“To the last?”

“Till you’re fairly beaten.”

“*You* ought to be fairly beaten!” cried the young man, drawing him closer.

CHAPTER IV

A year after he had come to live with them Mr. and Mrs. Moreen suddenly gave up the villa at Nice. Pemberton had got used to suddenness, having seen it practised on a considerable scale during two jerky little tours—one in Switzerland the first summer, and the other late in the winter, when they all ran down to Florence and then, at the end of ten days, liking it much less than they had intended, straggled back in mysterious depression. They had returned to Nice “for ever,” as they said; but this didn’t prevent their squeezing, one rainy muggy May night, into a second-class railway-carriage—you could never tell by which class they would travel—where Pemberton helped them to stow away a wonderful collection of bundles and bags. The explanation of this manœuvre was that they had determined to spend the summer “in some bracing place”; but in Paris they dropped into a small furnished apartment—a fourth floor in a third-rate avenue, where there was a smell on the staircase and the portier was hateful—and passed the next four months in blank indigence.

The better part of this baffled sojourn was for the preceptor and his pupil, who, visiting the Invalides and Notre Dame, the Conciergerie and all the museums, took a hundred remunerative rambles. They learned to know their Paris, which was useful, for they came back another year for a longer stay, the general character of which in Pemberton’s memory to-day mixes pitifully and confusedly with that of the first. He sees Morgan’s shabby

knickerbockers—the everlasting pair that didn't match his blouse and that as he grew longer could only grow faded. He remembers the particular holes in his three or four pair of coloured stockings.

Morgan was dear to his mother, but he never was better dressed than was absolutely necessary—partly, no doubt, by his own fault, for he was as indifferent to his appearance as a German philosopher. “My dear fellow, you *are* coming to pieces,” Pemberton would say to him in sceptical remonstrance; to which the child would reply, looking at him serenely up and down: “My dear fellow, so are you! I don't want to cast you in the shade.” Pemberton could have no rejoinder for this—the assertion so closely represented the fact. If however the deficiencies of his own wardrobe were a chapter by themselves he didn't like his little charge to look too poor. Later he used to say “Well, if we're poor, why, after all, shouldn't we look it?” and he consoled himself with thinking there was something rather elderly and gentlemanly in Morgan's disrepair—it differed from the untidiness of the urchin who plays and spoils his things. He could trace perfectly the degrees by which, in proportion as her little son confined himself to his tutor for society, Mrs. Moreen shrewdly forbore to renew his garments. She did nothing that didn't show, neglected him because he escaped notice, and then, as he illustrated this clever policy, discouraged at home his public appearances. Her position was logical enough—those members of her family who did show had to be showy.

During this period and several others Pemberton was quite aware of how he and his comrade might strike people; wandering languidly through the Jardin des Plantes as if they had nowhere to go, sitting on the winter days in the galleries of the Louvre, so splendidly ironical to the homeless, as if for the advantage of the calorifère. They joked about it sometimes: it was the sort of joke that was perfectly within the boy's compass. They figured themselves as part of the vast vague hand-to-mouth multitude of the enormous city and pretended they were proud of their position in it—it showed them “such a lot of life” and made them conscious of a democratic brotherhood. If Pemberton couldn't feel a sympathy in destitution with his small companion—for after all Morgan's fond parents would never have let him really suffer—the boy would at least feel it with him, so it came to the same thing. He used sometimes to wonder what people would think they were—to fancy they were looked askance at, as if it might be a suspected case of kidnapping. Morgan wouldn't be taken for a young patrician with a preceptor—he wasn't smart enough; though he might pass for his companion's sickly little brother. Now and then he had a five-franc piece, and except once, when they bought a couple of lovely neckties, one of which he made Pemberton accept, they laid it out scientifically in old books. This was sure to be a great day, always spent on the quays, in a rummage of the dusty boxes that garnish the parapets. Such occasions helped them to live, for their books ran low very soon after the beginning of their acquaintance. Pemberton had a good many in England, but he was obliged to write to a friend and ask him kindly to get some fellow to give him something for them.

If they had to relinquish that summer the advantage of the bracing climate the young man couldn't but suspect this failure of the cup when at their very lips to have been the effect of a rude jostle of his own. This had represented his first blow-out, as he called it, with his patrons; his first successful attempt—though there was little other success about it—to bring them to a consideration of his impossible position. As the ostensible eve of a costly journey the moment had struck him as favourable to an earnest protest, the presentation of an ultimatum. Ridiculous as it sounded, he had never yet been able to compass an uninterrupted private interview with the elder pair or with either of them singly. They were always flanked by their elder children, and poor Pemberton usually had his own little charge at his side. He was conscious of its being a house in which the surface of one's delicacy got rather smudged; nevertheless he had preserved the bloom of his scruple against announcing to Mr. and Mrs.

Moreen with publicity that he shouldn't be able to go on longer without a little money. He was still simple enough to suppose Ulick and Paula and Amy might not know that since his arrival he had only had a hundred and forty francs; and he was magnanimous enough to wish not to compromise their parents in their eyes. Mr. Moreen now listened to him, as he listened to every one and to every thing, like a man of the world, and seemed to appeal to him—though not of course too grossly—to try and be a little more of one himself. Pemberton recognised in fact the importance of the character—from the advantage it gave Mr. Moreen. He was not even confused or embarrassed, whereas the young man in his service was more so than there was any reason for. Neither was he surprised—at least any more than a gentleman had to be who freely confessed himself a little shocked—though not perhaps strictly at Pemberton.

“We must go into this, mustn't we, dear?” he said to his wife. He assured his young friend that the matter should have his very best attention; and he melted into space as elusively as if, at the door, he were taking an inevitable but deprecatory precedence. When, the next moment, Pemberton found himself alone with Mrs. Moreen it was to hear her say “I see, I see”—stroking the roundness of her chin and looking as if she were only hesitating between a dozen easy remedies. If they didn't make their push Mr. Moreen could at least disappear for several days. During his absence his wife took up the subject again spontaneously, but her contribution to it was merely that she had thought all the while they were getting on so beautifully. Pemberton's reply to this revelation was that unless they immediately put down something on account he would leave them on the spot and for ever. He knew she would wonder how he would get away, and for a moment expected her to enquire. She didn't, for which he was almost grateful to her, so little was he in a position to tell.

“You won't, you *know* you won't—you're too interested,” she said. “You are interested, you know you are, you dear kind man!” She laughed with almost condemnatory archness, as if it were a reproach—though she wouldn't insist; and flirted a soiled pocket-handkerchief at him.

Pemberton's mind was fully made up to take his step the following week. This would give him time to get an answer to a letter he had despatched to England. If he did in the event nothing of the sort—that is if he stayed another year and then went away only for three months—it was not merely because before the answer to his letter came (most unsatisfactory when it did arrive) Mr. Moreen generously counted out to him, and again with the sacrifice to “form” of a marked man of the world, three hundred francs in elegant ringing gold. He was irritated to find that Mrs. Moreen was right, that he couldn't at the pinch bear to leave the child. This stood out clearer for the very reason that, the night of his desperate appeal to his patrons, he had seen fully for the first time where he was. Wasn't it another proof of the success with which those patrons practised their arts that they had managed to avert for so long the illuminating flash? It descended on our friend with a breadth of effect which perhaps would have struck a spectator as comical, after he had returned to his little servile room, which looked into a close court where a bare dirty opposite wall took, with the sound of shrill clatter, the reflexion of lighted back windows. He had simply given himself away to a band of adventurers. The idea, the word itself, wore a romantic horror for him—he had always lived on such safe lines. Later it assumed a more interesting, almost a soothing, sense: it pointed a moral, and Pemberton could enjoy a moral. The Moreens were adventurers not merely because they didn't pay their debts, because they lived on society, but because their whole view of life, dim and confused and instinctive, like that of clever colour-blind animals, was speculative and rapacious and mean. Oh they were “respectable,” and that only made them more immondes. The young man's analysis, while he brooded, put it at last very simply—they were adventurers because they were toadies and snobs. That was the completest account of them—it was the law of their being. Even when this truth became

vivid to their ingenious inmate he remained unconscious of how much his mind had been prepared for it by the extraordinary little boy who had now become such a complication in his life. Much less could he then calculate on the information he was still to owe the extraordinary little boy.

CHAPTER V

But it was during the ensuing time that the real problem came up—the problem of how far it was excusable to discuss the turpitude of parents with a child of twelve, of thirteen, of fourteen. Absolutely inexcusable and quite impossible it of course at first appeared; and indeed the question didn't press for some time after Pemberton had received his three hundred francs. They produced a temporary lull, a relief from the sharpest pressure. The young man frugally amended his wardrobe and even had a few francs in his pocket. He thought the Moreens looked at him as if he were almost too smart, as if they ought to take care not to spoil him. If Mr. Moreen hadn't been such a man of the world he would perhaps have spoken of the freedom of such neckties on the part of a subordinate. But Mr. Moreen was always enough a man of the world to let things pass—he had certainly shown that. It was singular how Pemberton guessed that Morgan, though saying nothing about it, knew something had happened. But three hundred francs, especially when one owed money, couldn't last for ever; and when the treasure was gone—the boy knew when it had failed—Morgan did break ground. The party had returned to Nice at the beginning of the winter, but not to the charming villa. They went to an hotel, where they stayed three months, and then moved to another establishment, explaining that they had left the first because, after waiting and waiting, they couldn't get the rooms they wanted. These apartments, the rooms they wanted, were generally very splendid; but fortunately they never *could* get them—fortunately, I mean, for Pemberton, who reflected always that if they had got them there would have been a still scantier educational fund. What Morgan said at last was said suddenly, irrelevantly, when the moment came, in the middle of a lesson, and consisted of the apparently unfeeling words: “You ought to filer, you know—you really ought.”

Pemberton stared. He had learnt enough French slang from Morgan to know that to filer meant to cut sticks. “Ah my dear fellow, don't turn me off!”

Morgan pulled a Greek lexicon toward him—he used a Greek-German—to look out a word, instead of asking it of Pemberton. “You can't go on like this, you know.”

“Like what, my boy?”

“You know they don't pay you up,” said Morgan, blushing and turning his leaves.

“Don't pay me?” Pemberton stared again and feigned amazement. “What on earth put that into your head?”

“It has been there a long time,” the boy replied rummaging his book.

Pemberton was silent, then he went on: “I say, what are you hunting for? They pay me beautifully.”

“I'm hunting for the Greek for awful whopper,” Morgan dropped.

“Find that rather for gross impertinence and disabuse your mind. What do I want of money?”

“Oh that's another question!”

Pemberton wavered—he was drawn in different ways. The severely correct thing would have been to tell the boy that such a matter was none of his business and bid him go on with his lines. But they were really too intimate for that; it was not the way he was in the habit of

treating him; there had been no reason it should be. On the other hand Morgan had quite lighted on the truth—he really shouldn't be able to keep it up much longer; therefore why not let him know one's real motive for forsaking him? At the same time it wasn't decent to abuse to one's pupil the family of one's pupil; it was better to misrepresent than to do that. So in reply to his comrade's last exclamation he just declared, to dismiss the subject, that he had received several payments.

"I say—I say!" the boy ejaculated, laughing.

"That's all right," Pemberton insisted. "Give me your written rendering."

Morgan pushed a copybook across the table, and he began to read the page, but with something running in his head that made it no sense. Looking up after a minute or two he found the child's eyes fixed on him and felt in them something strange. Then Morgan said: "I'm not afraid of the stern reality."

"I haven't yet seen the thing you *are* afraid of—I'll do you that justice!"

This came out with a jump—it was perfectly true—and evidently gave Morgan pleasure. "I've thought of it a long time," he presently resumed.

"Well, don't think of it any more."

The boy appeared to comply, and they had a comfortable and even an amusing hour. They had a theory that they were very thorough, and yet they seemed always to be in the amusing part of lessons, the intervals between the dull dark tunnels, where there were waysides and jolly views. Yet the morning was brought to a violent end by Morgan's suddenly leaning his arms on the table, burying his head in them and bursting into tears: at which Pemberton was the more startled that, as it then came over him, it was the first time he had ever seen the boy cry and that the impression was consequently quite awful.

The next day, after much thought, he took a decision and, believing it to be just, immediately acted on it. He cornered Mr. and Mrs. Moreen again and let them know that if on the spot they didn't pay him all they owed him he wouldn't only leave their house but would tell Morgan exactly what had brought him to it.

"Oh you *haven't* told him?" cried Mrs. Moreen with a pacifying hand on her well-dressed bosom.

"Without warning you? For what do you take me?" the young man returned.

Mr. and Mrs. Moreen looked at each other; he could see that they appreciated, as tending to their security, his superstition of delicacy, and yet that there was a certain alarm in their relief. "My dear fellow," Mr. Moreen demanded, "what use can you have, leading the quiet life we all do, for such a lot of money?"—a question to which Pemberton made no answer, occupied as he was in noting that what passed in the mind of his patrons was something like: "Oh then, if we've felt that the child, dear little angel, has judged us and how he regards us, and we haven't been betrayed, he must have guessed—and in short it's *general!*" an inference that rather stirred up Mr. and Mrs. Moreen, as Pemberton had desired it should. At the same time, if he had supposed his threat would do something towards bringing them round, he was disappointed to find them taking for granted—how vulgar their perception *had* been!—that he had already given them away. There was a mystic uneasiness in their parental breasts, and that had been the inferior sense of it. None the less however, his threat did touch them; for if they had escaped it was only to meet a new danger. Mr. Moreen appealed to him, on every precedent, as a man of the world; but his wife had recourse, for the

first time since his domestication with them, to a fine hauteur, reminding him that a devoted mother, with her child, had arts that protected her against gross misrepresentation.

“I should misrepresent you grossly if I accused you of common honesty!” our friend replied; but as he closed the door behind him sharply, thinking he had not done himself much good, while Mr. Moreen lighted another cigarette, he heard his hostess shout after him more touchingly:

“Oh you do, you *do*, put the knife to one’s throat!”

The next morning, very early, she came to his room. He recognised her knock, but had no hope she brought him money; as to which he was wrong, for she had fifty francs in her hand. She squeezed forward in her dressing-gown, and he received her in his own, between his bath-tub and his bed. He had been tolerably schooled by this time to the “foreign ways” of his hosts. Mrs. Moreen was ardent, and when she was ardent she didn’t care what she did; so she now sat down on his bed, his clothes being on the chairs, and, in her preoccupation, forgot, as she glanced round, to be ashamed of giving him such a horrid room. What Mrs. Moreen’s ardour now bore upon was the design of persuading him that in the first place she was very good-natured to bring him fifty francs, and that in the second, if he would only see it, he was really too absurd to expect to be paid. Wasn’t he paid enough without perpetual money—wasn’t he paid by the comfortable luxurious home he enjoyed with them all, without a care, an anxiety, a solitary want? Wasn’t he sure of his position, and wasn’t that everything to a young man like him, quite unknown, with singularly little to show, the ground of whose exorbitant pretensions it had never been easy to discover? Wasn’t he paid above all by the sweet relation he had established with Morgan—quite ideal as from master to pupil—and by the simple privilege of knowing and living with so amazingly gifted a child; than whom really (and she meant literally what she said) there was no better company in Europe? Mrs. Moreen herself took to appealing to him as a man of the world; she said “Voyons, mon cher,” and “My dear man, look here now”; and urged him to be reasonable, putting it before him that it was truly a chance for him. She spoke as if, according as he *should* be reasonable, he would prove himself worthy to be her son’s tutor and of the extraordinary confidence they had placed in him.

After all, Pemberton reflected, it was only a difference of theory and the theory didn’t matter much. They had hitherto gone on that of remunerated, as now they would go on that of gratuitous, service; but why should they have so many words about it? Mrs. Moreen at all events continued to be convincing; sitting there with her fifty francs she talked and reiterated, as women reiterate, and bored and irritated him, while he leaned against the wall with his hands in the pockets of his wrapper, drawing it together round his legs and looking over the head of his visitor at the grey negations of his window. She wound up with saying: “You see I bring you a definite proposal.”

“A definite proposal?”

“To make our relations regular, as it were—to put them on a comfortable footing.”

“I see—it’s a system,” said Pemberton. “A kind of organised blackmail.”

Mrs. Moreen bounded up, which was exactly what he wanted. “What do you mean by that?”

“You practise on one’s fears—one’s fears about the child if one should go away.”

“And pray what would happen to him in that event?” she demanded, with majesty.

“Why he’d be alone with *you*.”

“And pray with whom *should* a child be but with those whom he loves most?”

“If you think that, why don’t you dismiss me?”

“Do you pretend he loves you more than he loves *us*?” cried Mrs. Moreen.

“I think he ought to. I make sacrifices for him. Though I’ve heard of those *you* make I don’t see them.”

Mrs. Moreen stared a moment; then with emotion she grasped her inmate’s hand. “*Will* you make it—the sacrifice?”

He burst out laughing. “I’ll see. I’ll do what I can. I’ll stay a little longer. Your calculation’s just—I *do* hate intensely to give him up; I’m fond of him and he thoroughly interests me, in spite of the inconvenience I suffer. You know my situation perfectly. I haven’t a penny in the world and, occupied as you see me with Morgan, am unable to earn money.”

Mrs. Moreen tapped her undressed arm with her folded bank-note. “Can’t you write articles? Can’t you translate as *I* do?”

“I don’t know about translating; it’s wretchedly paid.”

“I’m glad to earn what I can,” said Mrs. Moreen with prodigious virtue.

“You ought to tell me who you do it for.” Pemberton paused a moment, and she said nothing; so he added: “I’ve tried to turn off some little sketches, but the magazines won’t have them—they’re declined with thanks.”

“You see then you’re not such a phoenix,” his visitor pointedly smiled—“to pretend to abilities you’re sacrificing for our sake.”

“I haven’t time to do things properly,” he ruefully went on. Then as it came over him that he was almost abjectly good-natured to give these explanations he added: “If I stay on longer it must be on one condition—that Morgan shall know distinctly on what footing I am.”

Mrs. Moreen demurred. “Surely you don’t want to show off to a child?”

“To show *you* off, do you mean?”

Again she cast about, but this time it was to produce a still finer flower. “And *you* talk of blackmail!”

“You can easily prevent it,” said Pemberton.

“And *you* talk of practising on fears,” she bravely pushed on.

“Yes, there’s no doubt I’m a great scoundrel.”

His patroness met his eyes—it was clear she was in straits. Then she thrust out her money at him. “Mr. Moreen desired me to give you this on account.”

“I’m much obliged to Mr. Moreen, but we *have* no account.”

“You won’t take it?”

“That leaves me more free,” said Pemberton.

“To poison my darling’s mind?” groaned Mrs. Moreen.

“Oh your darling’s mind—!” the young man laughed.

She fixed him a moment, and he thought she was going to break out tormentedly, pleadingly: “For God’s sake, tell me what *is* in it!” But she checked this impulse—another was

stronger. She pocketed the money—the crudity of the alternative was comical—and swept out of the room with the desperate concession: “You may tell him any horror you like!”

CHAPTER VI

A couple of days after this, during which he had failed to profit by so free a permission, he had been for a quarter of an hour walking with his charge in silence when the boy became sociable again with the remark: “I’ll tell you how I know it; I know it through Zénobie.”

“Zénobie? Who in the world is *she*?”

“A nurse I used to have—ever so many years ago. A charming woman. I liked her awfully, and she liked me.”

“There’s no accounting for tastes. What is it you know through her?”

“Why what their idea is. She went away because they didn’t fork out. She did like me awfully, and she stayed two years. She told me all about it—that at last she could never get her wages. As soon as they saw how much she liked me they stopped giving her anything. They thought she’d stay for nothing—just *because*, don’t you know?” And Morgan had a queer little conscious lucid look. “She did stay ever so long—as long as she could. She was only a poor girl. She used to send money to her mother. At last she couldn’t afford it any longer, and went away in a fearful rage one night—I mean of course in a rage against *them*. She cried over me tremendously, she hugged me nearly to death. She told me all about it,” the boy repeated. “She told me it was their idea. So I guessed, ever so long ago, that they have had the same idea with you.”

“Zénobie was very sharp,” said Pemberton. “And she made you so.”

“Oh that wasn’t Zénobie; that was nature. And experience!” Morgan laughed.

“Well, Zénobie was a part of your experience.”

“Certainly I was a part of hers, poor dear!” the boy wisely sighed. “And I’m part of yours.”

“A very important part. But I don’t see how you know that I’ve been treated like Zénobie.”

“Do you take me for the biggest dunce you’ve known?” Morgan asked. “Haven’t I been conscious of what we’ve been through together?”

“What we’ve been through?”

“Our privations—our dark days.”

“Oh our days have been bright enough.”

Morgan went on in silence for a moment. Then he said: “My dear chap, you’re a hero!”

“Well, you’re another!” Pemberton retorted.

“No I’m not, but I ain’t a baby. I won’t stand it any longer. You must get some occupation that pays. I’m ashamed, I’m ashamed!” quavered the boy with a ring of passion, like some high silver note from a small cathedral cloister, that deeply touched his friend.

“We ought to go off and live somewhere together,” the young man said.

“I’ll go like a shot if you’ll take me.”

“I’d get some work that would keep us both afloat,” Pemberton continued.

“So would I. Why shouldn’t I work? I ain’t such a beastly little muff as that comes to.”

“The difficulty is that your parents wouldn’t hear of it. They’d never part with you; they worship the ground you tread on. Don’t you see the proof of it?” Pemberton developed. “They don’t dislike me; they wish me no harm; they’re very amiable people; but they’re perfectly ready to expose me to any awkwardness in life for your sake.”

The silence in which Morgan received his fond sophistry struck Pemberton somehow as expressive. After a moment the child repeated: “You are a hero!” Then he added: “They leave me with you altogether. You’ve all the responsibility. They put me off on you from morning till night. Why then should they object to my taking up with you completely? I’d help you.”

“They’re not particularly keen about my being helped, and they delight in thinking of you as *theirs*. They’re tremendously proud of you.”

“I’m not proud of *them*. But you know that,” Morgan returned.

“Except for the little matter we speak of they’re charming people,” said Pemberton, not taking up the point made for his intelligence, but wondering greatly at the boy’s own, and especially at this fresh reminder of something he had been conscious of from the first—the strangest thing in his friend’s large little composition, a temper, a sensibility, even a private ideal, which made him as privately disown the stuff his people were made of. Morgan had in secret a small loftiness which made him acute about betrayed meanness; as well as a critical sense for the manners immediately surrounding him that was quite without precedent in a juvenile nature, especially when one noted that it had not made this nature “old-fashioned,” as the word is of children—quaint or wizened or offensive. It was as if he had been a little gentleman and had paid the penalty by discovering that he was the only such person in his family. This comparison didn’t make him vain, but it could make him melancholy and a trifle austere. While Pemberton guessed at these dim young things, shadows of shadows, he was partly drawn on and partly checked, as for a scruple, by the charm of attempting to sound the little cool shallows that were so quickly growing deeper. When he tried to figure to himself the morning twilight of childhood, so as to deal with it safely, he saw it was never fixed, never arrested, that ignorance, at the instant he touched it, was already flushing faintly into knowledge, that there was nothing that at a given moment you could say an intelligent child didn’t know. It seemed to him that he himself knew too much to imagine Morgan’s simplicity and too little to disembroil his tangle.

The boy paid no heed to his last remark; he only went on: “I’d have spoken to them about their idea, as I call it, long ago, if I hadn’t been sure what they’d say.”

“And what would they say?”

“Just what they said about what poor Zénobie told me—that it was a horrid dreadful story, that they had paid her every penny they owed her.”

“Well, perhaps they had,” said Pemberton.

“Perhaps they’ve paid you!”

“Let us pretend they have, and n’en parlons plus.”

“They accused her of lying and cheating”—Morgan stuck to historic truth. “That’s why I don’t want to speak to them.”

“Lest they should accuse me, too?” To this Morgan made no answer, and his companion, looking down at him—the boy turned away his eyes, which had filled—saw what he couldn’t have trusted himself to utter. “You’re right. Don’t worry them,” Pemberton pursued. “Except for that, they *are* charming people.”

“Except for *their* lying and *their* cheating?”

“I say—I say!” cried Pemberton, imitating a little tone of the lad’s which was itself an imitation.

“We must be frank, at the last; we *must* come to an understanding,” said Morgan with the importance of the small boy who lets himself think he is arranging great affairs—almost playing at shipwreck or at Indians. “I know all about everything.”

“I dare say your father has his reasons,” Pemberton replied, but too vaguely, as he was aware.

“For lying and cheating?”

“For saving and managing and turning his means to the best account. He has plenty to do with his money. You’re an expensive family.”

“Yes, I’m very expensive,” Morgan concurred in a manner that made his preceptor burst out laughing.

“He’s saving for *you*,” said Pemberton. “They think of you in everything they do.”

“He might, while he’s about it, save a little—” The boy paused, and his friend waited to hear what. Then Morgan brought out oddly: “A little reputation.”

“Oh there’s plenty of that. That’s all right!”

“Enough of it for the people they know, no doubt. The people they know are awful.”

“Do you mean the princes? We mustn’t abuse the princes.”

“Why not? They haven’t married Paula—they haven’t married Amy. They only clean out Ulick.”

“You *do* know everything!” Pemberton declared.

“No, I don’t, after all. I don’t know what they live on, or how they live, or *why* they live! What have they got and how did they get it? Are they rich, are they poor, or have they a modeste aisance? Why are they always chiveying me about—living one year like ambassadors and the next like paupers? Who are they, any way, and what are they? I’ve thought of all that—I’ve thought of a lot of things. They’re so beastly worldly. That’s what I hate most—oh, I’ve *seen* it! All they care about is to make an appearance and to pass for something or other. What the dickens do they want to pass for? What *do* they, Mr. Pemberton?”

“You pause for a reply,” said Pemberton, treating the question as a joke, yet wondering too and greatly struck with his mate’s intense if imperfect vision. “I haven’t the least idea.”

“And what good does it do? Haven’t I seen the way people treat them—the ‘nice’ people, the ones they want to know? They’ll take anything from them—they’ll lie down and be trampled on. The nice ones hate that—they just sicken them. You’re the only really nice person we know.”

“Are you sure? They don’t lie down for me!”

“Well, you shan’t lie down for them. You’ve got to go—that’s what you’ve got to do,” said Morgan.

“And what will become of you?”

“Oh I’m growing up. I shall get off before long. I’ll see you later.”

“You had better let me finish you,” Pemberton urged, lending himself to the child’s strange superiority.

Morgan stopped in their walk, looking up at him. He had to look up much less than a couple of years before—he had grown, in his loose leanness, so long and high. “Finish me?” he echoed.

“There are such a lot of jolly things we can do together yet. I want to turn you out—I want you to do me credit.”

Morgan continued to look at him. “To give you credit—do you mean?”

“My dear fellow, you’re too clever to live.”

“That’s just what I’m afraid you think. No, no; it isn’t fair—I can’t endure it. We’ll separate next week. The sooner it’s over the sooner to sleep.”

“If I hear of anything—any other chance—I promise to go,” Pemberton said.

Morgan consented to consider this. “But you’ll be honest,” he demanded; “you won’t pretend you haven’t heard?”

“I’m much more likely to pretend I have.”

“But what can you hear of, this way, stuck in a hole with us? You ought to be on the spot, to go to England—you ought to go to America.”

“One would think you were *my* tutor!” said Pemberton.

Morgan walked on and after a little had begun again: “Well, now that you know I know and that we look at the facts and keep nothing back—it’s much more comfortable, isn’t it?”

“My dear boy, it’s so amusing, so interesting, that it will surely be quite impossible for me to forego such hours as these.”

This made Morgan stop once more. “You *do* keep something back. Oh you’re not straight—I am!”

“How am I not straight?”

“Oh you’ve got your idea!”

“My idea?”

“Why that I probably shan’t make old—make older—bones, and that you can stick it out till I’m removed.”

“You *are* too clever to live!” Pemberton repeated.

“I call it a mean idea,” Morgan pursued. “But I shall punish you by the way I hang on.”

“Look out or I’ll poison you!” Pemberton laughed.

“I’m stronger and better every year. Haven’t you noticed that there hasn’t been a doctor near me since you came?”

“*I’m* your doctor,” said the young man, taking his arm and drawing him tenderly on again.

Morgan proceeded and after a few steps gave a sigh of mingled weariness and relief. “Ah now that we look at the facts it’s all right!”

CHAPTER VII

They looked at the facts a good deal after this and one of the first consequences of their doing so was that Pemberton stuck it out, in his friend's parlance, for the purpose. Morgan made the facts so vivid and so droll, and at the same time so bald and so ugly, that there was fascination in talking them over with him, just as there would have been heartlessness in leaving him alone with them. Now that the pair had such perceptions in common it was useless for them to pretend they didn't judge such people; but the very judgement and the exchange of perceptions created another tie. Morgan had never been so interesting as now that he himself was made plainer by the sidelight of these confidences. What came out in it most was the small fine passion of his pride. He had plenty of that, Pemberton felt—so much that one might perhaps wisely wish for it some early bruises. He would have liked his people to have a spirit and had waked up to the sense of their perpetually eating humble-pie. His mother would consume any amount, and his father would consume even more than his mother. He had a theory that Ulick had wriggled out of an "affair" at Nice: there had once been a flurry at home, a regular panic, after which they all went to bed and took medicine, not to be accounted for on any other supposition. Morgan had a romantic imagination, led by poetry and history, and he would have liked those who "bore his name"—as he used to say to Pemberton with the humour that made his queer delicacies manly—to carry themselves with an air. But their one idea was to get in with people who didn't want them and to take snubs as it they were honourable scars. Why people didn't want them more he didn't know—that was people's own affair; after all they weren't superficially repulsive, they were a hundred times cleverer than most of the dreary grandees, the "poor swells" they rushed about Europe to catch up with. "After all they *are* amusing—they are!" he used to pronounce with the wisdom of the ages. To which Pemberton always replied: "Amusing—the great Moreen troupe? Why they're altogether delightful; and if it weren't for the hitch that you and I (feeble performers!) make in the ensemble they'd carry everything before them."

What the boy couldn't get over was the fact that this particular blight seemed, in a tradition of self-respect, so undeserved and so arbitrary. No doubt people had a right to take the line they liked; but why should his people have liked the line of pushing and toadying and lying and cheating? What had their forefathers—all decent folk, so far as he knew—done to them, or what had he done to them? Who had poisoned their blood with the fifth-rate social ideal, the fixed idea of making smart acquaintances and getting into the monde chic, especially when it was foredoomed to failure and exposure? They showed so what they were after; that was what made the people they wanted not want *them*. And never a wince for dignity, never a throb of shame at looking each other in the face, never any independence or resentment or disgust. If his father or his brother would only knock some one down once or twice a year! Clever as they were they never guessed the impression they made. They were good-natured, yes—as good-natured as Jews at the doors of clothing-shops! But was that the model one wanted one's family to follow? Morgan had dim memories of an old grandfather, the maternal, in New York, whom he had been taken across the ocean at the age of five to see: a gentleman with a high neck-cloth and a good deal of pronunciation, who wore a dress-coat in the morning, which made one wonder what he wore in the evening, and had, or was supposed to have "property" and something to do with the Bible Society. It couldn't have been but that he was a good type. Pemberton himself remembered Mrs. Clancy, a widowed sister of Mr. Moreen's, who was as irritating as a moral tale and had paid a fortnight's visit to the family at Nice shortly after he came to live with them. She was "pure and refined," as Amy said over the banjo, and had the air of not knowing what they meant when they talked, and of keeping something rather important back. Pemberton judged that what she kept back was an approval of many of their ways; therefore it was to be supposed that she too was of a good type, and that Mr. and Mrs. Moreen and Ulick and Paula and Amy might easily have been of a better one if they would.

But that they wouldn't was more and more perceptible from day to day. They continued to "chivey," as Morgan called it, and in due time became aware of a variety of reasons for proceeding to Venice. They mentioned a great many of them—they were always strikingly frank and had the brightest friendly chatter, at the late foreign breakfast in especial, before the ladies had made up their faces, when they leaned their arms on the table, had something to follow the demitasse, and, in the heat of familiar discussion as to what they "really ought" to do, fell inevitably into the languages in which they could tutoyer. Even Pemberton liked them then; he could endure even Ulick when he heard him give his little flat voice for the "sweet sea-city." That was what made him have a sneaking kindness for them—that they were so out of the workaday world and kept him so out of it. The summer had waned when, with cries of ecstasy, they all passed out on the balcony that overhung the Grand Canal. The sunsets then were splendid and the Dorringtons had arrived. The Dorringtons were the only reason they hadn't talked of at breakfast; but the reasons they didn't talk of at breakfast always came out in the end. The Dorringtons on the other hand came out very little; or else when they did they stayed—as was natural—for hours, during which periods Mrs. Moreen and the girls sometimes called at their hotel (to see if they had returned) as many as three times running. The gondola was for the ladies, as in Venice too there were "days," which Mrs. Moreen knew in their order an hour after she arrived. She immediately took one herself, to which the Dorringtons never came, though on a certain occasion when Pemberton and his pupil were together at St. Mark's—where, taking the best walks they had ever had and haunting a hundred churches, they spent a great deal of time—they saw the old lord turn up with Mr. Moreen and Ulick, who showed him the dim basilica as if it belonged to them. Pemberton noted how much less, among its curiosities, Lord Dorrington carried himself as a man of the world; wondering too whether, for such services, his companions took a fee from him. The autumn at any rate waned, the Dorringtons departed, and Lord Verschoyle, the eldest son, had proposed neither for Amy nor for Paula.

One sad November day, while the wind roared round the old palace and the rain lashed the lagoon, Pemberton, for exercise and even somewhat for warmth—the Moreens were horribly frugal about fires; it was a cause of suffering to their inmate—walked up and down the big bare sala with his pupil. The scagliola floor was cold, the high battered casements shook in the storm, and the stately decay of the place was unrelieved by a particle of furniture. Pemberton's spirits were low, and it came over him that the fortune of the Moreens was now even lower. A blast of desolation, a portent of disgrace and disaster, seemed to draw through the comfortless hall. Mr. Moreen and Ulick were in the Piazza, looking out for something, strolling drearily, in mackintoshes, under the arcades; but still, in spite of mackintoshes, unmistakable men of the world. Paula and Amy were in bed—it might have been thought they were staying there to keep warm. Pemberton looked askance at the boy at his side, to see to what extent he was conscious of these dark omens. But Morgan, luckily for him, was now mainly conscious of growing taller and stronger and indeed of being in his fifteenth year. This fact was intensely interesting to him and the basis of a private theory—which, however, he had imparted to his tutor—that in a little while he should stand on his own feet. He considered that the situation would change—that in short he should be "finished," grown up, producible in the world of affairs and ready to prove himself of sterling ability. Sharply as he was capable at times of analysing, as he called it, his life, there were happy hours when he remained, as he also called it—and as the name, really, of their right ideal—"jolly" superficial; the proof of which was his fundamental assumption that he should presently go to Oxford, to Pemberton's college, and, aided and abetted by Pemberton, do the most wonderful things. It depressed the young man to see how little in such a project he took account of ways and means: in other connexions he mostly kept to the measure. Pemberton tried to imagine the Moreens at Oxford and fortunately failed; yet unless they were to adopt it

as a residence there would be no *modus vivendi* for Morgan. How could he live without an allowance, and where was the allowance to come from? He, Pemberton, might live on Morgan; but how could Morgan live on *him*? What was to become of him anyhow? Somehow the fact that he was a big boy now, with better prospects of health, made the question of his future more difficult. So long as he was markedly frail the great consideration he inspired seemed enough of an answer to it. But at the bottom of Pemberton's heart was the recognition of his probably being strong enough to live and not yet strong enough to struggle or to thrive. Morgan himself at any rate was in the first flush of the rosier consciousness of adolescence, so that the beating of the tempest seemed to him after all but the voice of life and the challenge of fate. He had on his shabby little overcoat, with the collar up, but was enjoying his walk.

It was interrupted at last by the appearance of his mother at the end of the sala. She beckoned him to come to her, and while Pemberton saw him, complaisant, pass down the long vista and over the damp false marble, he wondered what was in the air. Mrs. Moreen said a word to the boy and made him go into the room she had quitted. Then, having closed the door after him, she directed her steps swiftly to Pemberton. There was something in the air, but his wildest flight of fancy wouldn't have suggested what it proved to be. She signified that she had made a pretext to get Morgan out of the way, and then she enquired—without hesitation—if the young man could favour her with the loan of three louis. While, before bursting into a laugh, he stared at her with surprise, she declared that she was awfully pressed for the money; she was desperate for it—it would save her life.

“Dear lady, c'est trop fort!” Pemberton laughed in the manner and with the borrowed grace of idiom that marked the best colloquial, the best anecdotic, moments of his friends themselves. “Where in the world do you suppose I should get three louis, du train dont vous allez?”

“I thought you worked—wrote things. Don't they pay you?”

“Not a penny.”

“Are you such a fool as to work for nothing?”

“You ought surely to know that.”

Mrs. Moreen stared, then she coloured a little. Pemberton saw she had quite forgotten the terms—if “terms” they could be called—that he had ended by accepting from herself; they had burdened her memory as little as her conscience. “Oh yes, I see what you mean—you've been very nice about that; but why drag it in so often?” She had been perfectly urbane with him ever since the rough scene of explanation in his room the morning he made her accept *his* “terms”—the necessity of his making his case known to Morgan. She had felt no resentment after seeing there was no danger Morgan would take the matter up with her. Indeed, attributing this immunity to the good taste of his influence with the boy, she had once said to Pemberton “My dear fellow, it's an immense comfort you're a gentleman.” She repeated this in substance now. “Of course you're a gentleman—that's a bother the less!” Pemberton reminded her that he had not “dragged in” anything that wasn't already in as much as his foot was in his shoe; and she also repeated her prayer that, somewhere and somehow, he would find her sixty francs. He took the liberty of hinting that if he could find them it wouldn't be to lend them to *her*—as to which he consciously did himself injustice, knowing that if he had them he would certainly put them at her disposal. He accused himself, at bottom and not unveraciously, of a fantastic, a demoralised sympathy with her. If misery made strange bedfellows it also made strange sympathies. It was moreover a part of the abasement of living with such people that one had to make vulgar retorts, quite out of one's

own tradition of good manners. “Morgan, Morgan, to what pass have I come for you?” he groaned while Mrs. Moreen floated voluminously down the sala again to liberate the boy, wailing as she went that everything was too odious.

Before their young friend was liberated there came a thump at the door communicating with the staircase, followed by the apparition of a dripping youth who poked in his head. Pemberton recognised him as the bearer of a telegram and recognised the telegram as addressed to himself. Morgan came back as, after glancing at the signature—that of a relative in London—he was reading the words: “Found a jolly job for you, engagement to coach opulent youth on own terms. Come at once.” The answer happily was paid and the messenger waited. Morgan, who had drawn near, waited too and looked hard at Pemberton; and Pemberton, after a moment, having met his look, handed him the telegram. It was really by wise looks—they knew each other so well now—that, while the telegraph-boy, in his waterproof cape, made a great puddle on the floor, the thing was settled between them. Pemberton wrote the answer with a pencil against the frescoed wall, and the messenger departed. When he had gone the young man explained himself.

“I’ll make a tremendous charge; I’ll earn a lot of money in a short time, and we’ll live on it.”

“Well, I hope the opulent youth will be a dismal dunce—he probably will—” Morgan parenthesised—“and keep you a long time a-hammering of it in.”

“Of course the longer he keeps me the more we shall have for our old age.”

“But suppose *they* don’t pay you!” Morgan awfully suggested.

“Oh there are not two such—!” But Pemberton pulled up; he had been on the point of using too invidious a term. Instead of this he said “Two such fatalities.”

Morgan flushed—the tears came to his eyes. “Dites toujours two such rascally crews!” Then in a different tone he added: “Happy opulent youth!”

“Not if he’s a dismal dunce.”

“Oh they’re happier then. But you can’t have everything, can you?” the boy smiled.

Pemberton held him fast, hands on his shoulders—he had never loved him so. “What will become of you, what will you do?” He thought of Mrs. Moreen, desperate for sixty francs.

“I shall become an homme fait.” And then as if he recognised all the bearings of Pemberton’s allusion: “I shall get on with them better when you’re not here.”

“Ah don’t say that—it sounds as if I set you against them!”

“You do—the sight of you. It’s all right; you know what I mean. I shall be beautiful. I’ll take their affairs in hand; I’ll marry my sisters.”

“You’ll marry yourself!” joked Pemberton; as high, rather tense pleasantry would evidently be the right, or the safest, tone for their separation.

It was, however, not purely in this strain that Morgan suddenly asked: “But I say—how will you get to your jolly job? You’ll have to telegraph to the opulent youth for money to come on.”

Pemberton bethought himself. “They won’t like that, will they?”

“Oh look out for them!”

Then Pemberton brought out his remedy. “I’ll go to the American Consul; I’ll borrow some money of him—just for the few days, on the strength of the telegram.”

Morgan was hilarious. “Show him the telegram—then collar the money and stay!”

Pemberton entered into the joke sufficiently to reply that for Morgan he was really capable of that; but the boy, growing more serious, and to prove he hadn't meant what he said, not only hurried him off to the Consulate—since he was to start that evening, as he had wired to his friend—but made sure of their affair by going with him. They splashed through the tortuous perforations and over the humpbacked bridges, and they passed through the Piazza, where they saw Mr. Moreen and Ulick go into a jeweller's shop. The Consul proved accommodating—Pemberton said it wasn't the letter, but Morgan's grand air—and on their way back they went into Saint Mark's for a hushed ten minutes. Later they took up and kept up the fun of it to the very end; and it seemed to Pemberton a part of that fun that Mrs. Moreen, who was very angry when he had announced her his intention, should charge him, grotesquely and vulgarly and in reference to the loan she had vainly endeavoured to effect, with bolting lest they should “get something out” of him. On the other hand he had to do Mr. Moreen and Ulick the justice to recognise that when on coming in they heard the cruel news they took it like perfect men of the world.

CHAPTER VIII

When he got at work with the opulent youth, who was to be taken in hand for Balliol, he found himself unable to say if this aspirant had really such poor parts or if the appearance were only begotten of his own long association with an intensely living little mind. From Morgan he heard half a dozen times: the boy wrote charming young letters, a patchwork of tongues, with indulgent postscripts in the family Volapuk and, in little squares and rounds and crannies of the text, the drollest illustrations—letters that he was divided between the impulse to show his present charge as a vain, a wasted incentive, and the sense of something in them that publicity would profane. The opulent youth went up in due course and failed to pass; but it seemed to add to the presumption that brilliancy was not expected of him all at once that his parents, condoning the lapse, which they good-naturedly treated as little as possible as if it were Pemberton's, should have sounded the rally again, begged the young coach to renew the siege.

The young coach was now in a position to lend Mrs. Moreen three louis, and he sent her a post-office order even for a larger amount. In return for this favour he received a frantic scribbled line from her: “Implore you to come back instantly—Morgan dreadfully ill.” They were on there rebound, once more in Paris—often as Pemberton had seen them depressed he had never seen them crushed—and communication was therefore rapid. He wrote to the boy to ascertain the state of his health, but awaited the answer in vain. He accordingly, after three days, took an abrupt leave of the opulent youth and, crossing the Channel, alighted at the small hotel, in the quarter of the Champs Elysées, of which Mrs. Moreen had given him the address. A deep if dumb dissatisfaction with this lady and her companions bore him company: they couldn't be vulgarly honest, but they could live at hotels, in velvety entresols, amid a smell of burnt pastilles, surrounded by the most expensive city in Europe. When he had left them in Venice it was with an irrepressible suspicion that something was going to happen; but the only thing that could have taken place was again their masterly retreat. “How is he? where is he?” he asked of Mrs. Moreen; but before she could speak these questions were answered by the pressure round hid neck of a pair of arms, in shrunken sleeves, which still were perfectly capable of an effusive young foreign squeeze.

“Dreadfully ill—I don't see it!” the young man cried. And then to Morgan: “Why on earth didn't you relieve me? Why didn't you answer my letter?”

Mrs. Moreen declared that when she wrote he was very bad, and Pemberton learned at the same time from the boy that he had answered every letter he had received. This led to the clear inference that Pemberton's note had been kept from him so that the game practised should not be interfered with. Mrs. Moreen was prepared to see the fact exposed, as Pemberton saw the moment he faced her that she was prepared for a good many other things. She was prepared above all to maintain that she had acted from a sense of duty, that she was enchanted she had got him over, whatever they might say, and that it was useless of him to pretend he didn't know in all his bones that his place at such a time was with Morgan. He had taken the boy away from them and now had no right to abandon him. He had created for himself the gravest responsibilities and must at least abide by what he had done.

"Taken him away from you?" Pemberton exclaimed indignantly.

"Do it—do it for pity's sake; that's just what I want. I can't stand *this*—and such scenes. They're awful frauds—poor dears!" These words broke from Morgan, who had intermitted his embrace, in a key which made Pemberton turn quickly to him and see that he had suddenly seated himself, was breathing in great pain, and was very pale.

"*Now* do you say he's not in a state, my precious pet?" shouted his mother, dropping on her knees before him with clasped hands, but touching him no more than if he had been a gilded idol. "It will pass—it's only for an instant; but don't say such dreadful things!"

"I'm all right—all right," Morgan panted to Pemberton, whom he sat looking up at with a strange smile, his hands resting on either side of the sofa.

"Now do you pretend I've been dishonest, that I've deceived?" Mrs. Moreen flashed at Pemberton as she got up.

"It isn't *he* says it, it's I!" the boy returned, apparently easier, but sinking back against the wall; while his restored friend, who had sat down beside him, took his hand and bent over him.

"Darling child, one does what one can; there are so many things to consider," urged Mrs. Moreen. "It's his *place*—his only place. You see *you* think it is now."

"Take me away—take me away," Morgan went on, smiling to Pemberton with his white face.

"Where shall I take you, and how—oh *how*, my boy?" the young man stammered, thinking of the rude way in which his friends in London held that, for his convenience, with no assurance of prompt return, he had thrown them over; of the just resentment with which they would already have called in a successor, and of the scant help to finding fresh employment that resided for him in the grossness of his having failed to pass his pupil.

"Oh we'll settle that. You used to talk about it," said Morgan. "If we can only go all the rest's a detail."

"Talk about it as much as you like, but don't think you can attempt it. Mr. Moreen would never consent—it would be so *very* hand-to-mouth," Pemberton's hostess beautifully explained to him. Then to Morgan she made it clearer: "It would destroy our peace, it would break our hearts. Now that he's back it will be all the same again. You'll have your life, your work and your freedom, and we'll all be happy as we used to be. You'll bloom and grow perfectly well, and we won't have any more silly experiments, will we? They're too absurd. It's Mr. Pemberton's place—every one in his place. You in yours, your papa in his, me in mine—*n'est-ce pas, chéri?* We'll all forget how foolish we've been and have lovely times."

She continued to talk and to surge vaguely about the little draped stuffy salon while Pemberton sat with the boy, whose colour gradually came back; and she mixed up her reasons, hinting that there were going to be changes, that the other children might scatter (who knew?—Paula had her ideas) and that then it might be fancied how much the poor old parent-birds would want the little nestling. Morgan looked at Pemberton, who wouldn't let him move; and Pemberton knew exactly how he felt at hearing himself called a little nestling. He admitted that he had had one or two bad days, but he protested afresh against the wrong of his mother's having made them the ground of an appeal to poor Pemberton. Poor Pemberton could laugh now, apart from the comicality of Mrs. Moreen's mustering so much philosophy for her defence—she seemed to shake it out of her agitated petticoats, which knocked over the light gilt chairs—so little did their young companion, *marked*, unmistakably marked at the best, strike him as qualified to repudiate any advantage.

He himself was in for it at any rate. He should have Morgan on his hands again indefinitely; though indeed he saw the lad had a private theory to produce which would be intended to smooth this down. He was obliged to him for it in advance; but the suggested amendment didn't keep his heart rather from sinking, any more than it prevented him from accepting the prospect on the spot, with some confidence moreover that he should do so even better if he could have a little supper. Mrs. Moreen threw out more hints about the changes that were to be looked for, but she was such a mixture of smiles and shudders—she confessed she was very nervous—that he couldn't tell if she were in high feather or only in hysterics. If the family was really at last going to pieces why shouldn't she recognise the necessity of pitching Morgan into some sort of lifeboat? This presumption was fostered by the fact that they were established in luxurious quarters in the capital of pleasure; that was exactly where they naturally *would* be established in view of going to pieces. Moreover didn't she mention that Mr. Moreen and the others were enjoying themselves at the opera with Mr. Granger, and wasn't *that* also precisely where one would look for them on the eve of a smash? Pemberton gathered that Mr. Granger was a rich vacant American—a big bill with a flourishy heading and no items; so that one of Paula's "ideas" was probably that this time she hadn't missed fire—by which straight shot indeed she would have shattered the general cohesion. And if the cohesion was to crumble what would become of poor Pemberton? He felt quite enough bound up with them to figure to his alarm as a dislodged block in the edifice.

It was Morgan who eventually asked if no supper had been ordered for him; sitting with him below, later, at the dim delayed meal, in the presence of a great deal of corded green plush, a plate of ornamental biscuit and an aloofness marked on the part of the waiter. Mrs. Moreen had explained that they had been obliged to secure a room for the visitor out of the house; and Morgan's consolation—he offered it while Pemberton reflected on the nastiness of lukewarm sauces—proved to be, largely, that his circumstance would facilitate their escape. He talked of their escape—recurring to it often afterwards—as if they were making up a "boy's book" together. But he likewise expressed his sense that there was something in the air, that the Moreens couldn't keep it up much longer. In point of fact, as Pemberton was to see, they kept it up for five or six months. All the while, however, Morgan's contention was designed to cheer him. Mr. Moreen and Ulick, whom he had met the day after his return, accepted that return like perfect men of the world. If Paula and Amy treated it even with less formality an allowance was to be made for them, inasmuch as Mr. Granger hadn't come to the opera after all. He had only placed his box at their service, with a bouquet for each of the party; there was even one apiece, embittering the thought of his profusion, for Mr. Moreen and Ulick. "They're all like that," was Morgan's comment; "at the very last, just when we think we've landed them they're back in the deep sea!"

Morgan's comments in these days were more and more free; they even included a large recognition of the extraordinary tenderness with which he had been treated while Pemberton was away. Oh yes, they couldn't do enough to be nice to him, to show him they had him on their mind and make up for his loss. That was just what made the whole thing so sad and caused him to rejoice after all in Pemberton's return—he had to keep thinking of their affection less, had less sense of obligation. Pemberton laughed out at this last reason, and Morgan blushed and said: "Well, dash it, you know what I mean." Pemberton knew perfectly what he meant; but there were a good many things that—dash it too!—it didn't make any clearer. This episode of his second sojourn in Paris stretched itself out wearily, with their resumed readings and wanderings and maunderings, their potterings on the quays, their hauntings of the museums, their occasional lingerings in the Palais Royal when the first sharp weather came on and there was a comfort in warm emanations, before Chevet's wonderful succulent window. Morgan wanted to hear all about the opulent youth—he took an immense interest in him. Some of the details of his opulence—Pemberton could spare him none of them—evidently fed the boy's appreciation of all his friend had given up to come back to him; but in addition to the greater reciprocity established by that heroism he had always his little brooding theory, in which there was a frivolous gaiety too, that their long probation was drawing to a close. Morgan's conviction that the Moreens couldn't go on much longer kept pace with the unexpended impetus with which, from month to month, they did go on. Three weeks after Pemberton had rejoined them they went on to another hotel, a dingier one than the first; but Morgan rejoiced that his tutor had at least still not sacrificed the advantage of a room outside. He clung to the romantic utility of this when the day, or rather the night, should arrive for their escape.

For the first time, in this complicated connexion, our friend felt his collar gall him. It was, as he had said to Mrs. Moreen in Venice, *trop fort*—everything was *trop fort*. He could neither really throw off his blighting burden nor find in it the benefit of a pacified conscience or of a rewarded affection. He had spent all the money accruing to him in England, and he saw his youth going and that he was getting nothing back for it. It was all very well of Morgan to count it for reparation that he should now settle on him permanently—there was an irritating flaw in such a view. He saw what the boy had in his mind; the conception that as his friend had had the generosity to come back he must show his gratitude by giving him his life. But the poor friend didn't desire the gift—what could he do with Morgan's dreadful little life? Of course at the same time that Pemberton was irritated he remembered the reason, which was very honourable to Morgan and which dwelt simply in his making one so forget that he was no more than a patched urchin. If one dealt with him on a different basis one's misadventures were one's own fault. So Pemberton waited in a queer confusion of yearning and alarm for the catastrophe which was held to hang over the house of Moreen, of which he certainly at moments felt the symptoms brush his cheek and as to which he wondered much in what form it would find its liveliest effect.

Perhaps it would take the form of sudden dispersal—a frightened *saive qui peut*, a scuttling into selfish corners. Certainly they were less elastic than of yore; they were evidently looking for something they didn't find. The Dorringtons hadn't re-appeared, the princes had scattered; wasn't that the beginning of the end? Mrs. Moreen had lost her reckoning of the famous "days"; her social calendar was blurred—it had turned its face to the wall. Pemberton suspected that the great, the cruel discomfiture had been the unspeakable behaviour of Mr. Granger, who seemed not to know what he wanted, or, what was much worse, what they wanted. He kept sending flowers, as if to bestrew the path of his retreat, which was never the path of a return. Flowers were all very well, but—Pemberton could complete the proposition. It was now positively conspicuous that in the long run the Moreens were a

social failure; so that the young man was almost grateful the run had not been short. Mr. Moreen indeed was still occasionally able to get away on business and, what was more surprising, was likewise able to get back. Ulick had no club but you couldn't have discovered it from his appearance, which was as much as ever that of a person looking at life from the window of such an institution; therefore Pemberton was doubly surprised at an answer he once heard him make his mother in the desperate tone of a man familiar with the worst privations. Her question Pemberton had not quite caught; it appeared to be an appeal for a suggestion as to whom they might get to take Amy. "Let the Devil take her!" Ulick snapped; so that Pemberton could see that they had not only lost their amiability but had ceased to believe in themselves. He could also see that if Mrs. Moreen was trying to get people to take her children she might be regarded as closing the hatches for the storm. But Morgan would be the last she would part with.

One winter afternoon—it was a Sunday—he and the boy walked far together in the Bois de Boulogne. The evening was so splendid, the cold lemon-coloured sunset so clear, the stream of carriages and pedestrians so amusing and the fascination of Paris so great, that they stayed out later than usual and became aware that they should have to hurry home to arrive in time for dinner. They hurried accordingly, arm-in-arm, good-humoured and hungry, agreeing that there was nothing like Paris after all and that after everything too that had come and gone they were not yet sated with innocent pleasures. When they reached the hotel they found that, though scandalously late, they were in time for all the dinner they were likely to sit down to. Confusion reigned in the apartments of the Moreens—very shabby ones this time, but the best in the house—and before the interrupted service of the table, with objects displaced almost as if there had been a scuffle and a great wine-stain from an overturned bottle, Pemberton couldn't blink the fact that there had been a scene of the last proprietary firmness. The storm had come—they were all seeking refuge. The hatches were down, Paula and Amy were invisible—they had never tried the most casual art upon Pemberton, but he felt they had enough of an eye to him not to wish to meet him as young ladies whose frocks had been confiscated—and Ulick appeared to have jumped overboard. The host and his staff, in a word, had ceased to "go on" at the pace of their guests, and the air of embarrassed detention, thanks to a pile of gaping trunks in the passage, was strangely commingled with the air of indignant withdrawal. When Morgan took all this in—and he took it in very quickly—he coloured to the roots of his hair. He had walked from his infancy among difficulties and dangers, but he had never seen a public exposure. Pemberton noticed in a second glance at him that the tears had rushed into his eyes and that they were tears of a new and untasted bitterness. He wondered an instant, for the boy's sake, whether he might successfully pretend not to understand. Not successfully, he felt, as Mr. and Mrs. Moreen, dinnerless by their extinguished hearth, rose before him in their little dishonoured salon, casting about with glassy eyes for the nearest port in such a storm. They were not prostrate but were horribly white, and Mrs. Moreen had evidently been crying. Pemberton quickly learned however that her grief was not for the loss of her dinner, much as she usually enjoyed it, but the fruit of a blow that struck even deeper, as she made all haste to explain. He would see for himself, so far as that went, how the great change had come, the dreadful bolt had fallen, and how they would now all have to turn themselves about. Therefore cruel as it was to them to part with their darling she must look to him to carry a little further the influence he had so fortunately acquired with the boy—to induce his young charge to follow him into some modest retreat. They depended on him—that was the fact—to take their delightful child temporarily under his protection; it would leave Mr. Moreen and herself so much more free to give the proper attention (too little, alas! had been given) to the readjustment of their affairs.

“We trust you—we feel we *can*,” said Mrs. Moreen, slowly rubbing her plump white hands and looking with compunction hard at Morgan, whose chin, not to take liberties, her husband stroked with a paternal forefinger.

“Oh yes—we feel that we *can*. We trust Mr. Pemberton fully, Morgan,” Mr. Moreen pursued.

Pemberton wondered again if he might pretend not to understand; but everything good gave way to the intensity of Morgan’s understanding. “Do you mean he may take me to live with him for ever and ever?” cried the boy. “May take me away, away, anywhere he likes?”

“For ever and ever? *Comme vous-y-allez!*” Mr. Moreen laughed indulgently. “For as long as Mr. Pemberton may be so good.”

“We’ve struggled, we’ve suffered,” his wife went on; “but you’ve made him so your own that we’ve already been through the worst of the sacrifice.”

Morgan had turned away from his father—he stood looking at Pemberton with a light in his face. His sense of shame for their common humiliated state had dropped; the case had another side—the thing was to clutch at *that*. He had a moment of boyish joy, scarcely mitigated by the reflexion that with this unexpected consecration of his hope—too sudden and too violent; the turn taken was away from a *good* boy’s book—the “escape” was left on their hands. The boyish joy was there an instant, and Pemberton was almost scared at the rush of gratitude and affection that broke through his first abasement. When he stammered “My dear fellow, what do you say to *that*?” how could one not say something enthusiastic? But there was more need for courage at something else that immediately followed and that made the lad sit down quietly on the nearest chair. He had turned quite livid and had raised his hand to his left side. They were all three looking at him, but Mrs. Moreen suddenly bounded forward. “Ah his darling little heart!” she broke out; and this time, on her knees before him and without respect for the idol, she caught him ardently in her arms. “You walked him too far, you hurried him too fast!” she hurled over her shoulder at Pemberton. Her son made no protest, and the next instant, still holding him, she sprang up with her face convulsed and with the terrified cry “Help, help! he’s going, he’s gone!” Pemberton saw with equal horror, by Morgan’s own stricken face, that he was beyond their wildest recall. He pulled him half out of his mother’s hands, and for a moment, while they held him together, they looked all their dismay into each other’s eyes, “He couldn’t stand it with his weak organ,” said Pemberton—“the shock, the whole scene, the violent emotion.”

“But I thought he *wanted* to go to you!”, wailed Mrs. Moreen.

“I *told* you he didn’t, my dear,” her husband made answer. Mr. Moreen was trembling all over and was in his way as deeply affected as his wife. But after the very first he took his bereavement as a man of the world.

Brooksmith

We are scattered now, the friends of the late Mr. Oliver Offord; but whenever we chance to meet I think we are conscious of a certain esoteric respect for each other. “Yes, you too have been in Arcadia,” we seem not too grumpily to allow. When I pass the house in Mansfield Street I remember that Arcadia was there. I don’t know who has it now, and don’t want to know; it’s enough to be so sure that if I should ring the bell there would be no such luck for me as that Brooksmith should open the door. Mr. Offord, the most agreeable, the most attaching of bachelors, was a retired diplomatist, living on his pension and on something of his own over and above; a good deal confined, by his infirmities, to his fireside and delighted to be found there any afternoon in the year, from five o’clock on, by such visitors as Brooksmith allowed to come up. Brooksmith was his butler and his most intimate friend, to whom we all stood, or I should say sat, in the same relation in which the subject of the sovereign finds himself to the prime minister. By having been for years, in foreign lands, the most delightful Englishman any one had ever known, Mr. Offord had in my opinion rendered signal service to his country. But I suppose he had been too much liked—liked even by those who didn’t like IT—so that as people of that sort never get titles or dotations for the horrid things they’ve *NOT* done, his principal reward was simply that we went to see him.

Oh we went perpetually, and it was not our fault if he was not overwhelmed with this particular honour. Any visitor who came once came again; to come merely once was a slight nobody, I’m sure, had ever put upon him. His circle therefore was essentially composed of habitués, who were habitués for each other as well as for him, as those of a happy salon should be. I remember vividly every element of the place, down to the intensely Londonish look of the grey opposite houses, in the gap of the white curtains of the high windows, and the exact spot where, on a particular afternoon, I put down my tea-cup for Brooksmith, lingering an instant, to gather it up as if he were plucking a flower. Mr. Offord’s drawing-room was indeed Brooksmith’s garden, his pruned and tended human parterre, and if we all flourished there and grew well in our places it was largely owing to his supervision.

Many persons have heard much, though most have doubtless seen little, of the famous institution of the salon, and many are born to the depression of knowing that this finest flower of social life refuses to bloom where the English tongue is spoken. The explanation is usually that our women have not the skill to cultivate it—the art to direct through a smiling land, between suggestive shores, a sinuous stream of talk. My affectionate, my pious memory of Mr. Offord contradicts this induction only, I fear, more insidiously to confirm it. The sallow and slightly smoked drawing-room in which he spent so large a portion of the last years of his life certainly deserved the distinguished name; but on the other hand it couldn’t be said at all to owe its stamp to any intervention throwing into relief the fact that there was no Mrs. Offord. The dear man had indeed, at the most, been capable of one of those sacrifices to which women are deemed peculiarly apt: he had recognised—under the influence, in some degree, it is true, of physical infirmity—that if you wish people to find you at home you must manage not to be out. He had in short accepted the truth which many dabblers in the social art are slow to learn, that you must really, as they say, take a line, and that the only way as yet discovered of being at home is to stay at home. Finally his own fireside had become a summary of his habits. Why should he ever have left it?—since this would have been leaving what was notoriously pleasantest in London, the compact charmed cluster (thinning away indeed into casual couples) round the fine old last-century chimney-piece which, with the exception of the remarkable collection of miniatures, was the best thing the place contained.

Mr. Offord wasn't rich; he had nothing but his pension and the use for life of the somewhat superannuated house.

When I'm reminded by some opposed discomfort of the present hour how perfectly we were all handled there, I ask myself once more what had been the secret of such perfection. One had taken it for granted at the time, for anything that is supremely good produces more acceptance than surprise. I felt we were all happy, but I didn't consider how our happiness was managed. And yet there were questions to be asked, questions that strike me as singularly obvious now that there's nobody to answer them. Mr. Offord had solved the insoluble; he had, without feminine help—save in the sense that ladies were dying to come to him and that he saved the lives of several—established a salon; but I might have guessed that there was a method in his madness, a law in his success. He hadn't hit it off by a mere fluke. There was an art in it all, and how was the art so hidden? Who indeed if it came to that was the occult artist? Launching this inquiry the other day I had already got hold of the tail of my reply. I was helped by the very wonder of some of the conditions that came back to me—those that used to seem as natural as sunshine in a fine climate.

How was it for instance that we never were a crowd, never either too many or too few, always the right people *with* the right people—there must really have been no wrong people at all—always coming and going, never sticking fast nor overstaying, yet never popping in or out with an indecorous familiarity? How was it that we all sat where we wanted and moved when we wanted and met whom we wanted and escaped whom we wanted; joining, according to the accident of inclination, the general circle or falling in with a single talker on a convenient sofa? Why were all the sofas so convenient, the accidents so happy, the talkers so ready, the listeners so willing, the subjects presented to you in a rotation as quickly foreordained as the courses at dinner? A dearth of topics would have been as unheard of as a lapse in the service. These speculations couldn't fail to lead me to the fundamental truth that Brooksmith had been somehow at the bottom of the mystery. If he hadn't established the salon at least he had carried it on. Brooksmith in short was the artist!

We felt this covertly at the time, without formulating it, and were conscious, as an ordered and prosperous community, of his even-handed justice, all untainted with flunkeyism. He had none of that vulgarity—his touch was infinitely fine. The delicacy of it was clear to me on the first occasion my eyes rested, as they were so often to rest again, on the domestic revealed, in the turbid light of the street, by the opening of the house-door. I saw on the spot that though he had plenty of school he carried it without arrogance—he had remained articulate and human. *L'Ecole Anglaise* Mr. Offord used laughingly to call him when, later on, it happened more than once that we had some conversation about him. But I remember accusing Mr. Offord of not doing him quite ideal justice. That he wasn't one of the giants of the school, however, was admitted by my old friend, who really understood him perfectly and was devoted to him, as I shall show; which doubtless poor Brooksmith had himself felt, to his cost, when his value in the market was originally determined. The utility of his class in general is estimated by the foot and the inch, and poor Brooksmith had only about five feet three to put into circulation. He acknowledged the inadequacy of this provision, and I'm sure was penetrated with the everlasting fitness of the relation between service and stature. If HE had been Mr. Offord he certainly would have found Brooksmith wanting, and indeed the laxity of his employer on this score was one of many things he had had to condone and to which he had at last indulgently adapted himself.

I remember the old man's saying to me: "Oh my servants, if they can live with me a fortnight they can live with me for ever. But it's the first fortnight that tries 'em." It was in the first fortnight for instance that Brooksmith had had to learn that he was exposed to being

addressed as “my dear fellow” and “my poor child.” Strange and deep must such a probation have been to him, and he doubtless emerged from it tempered and purified. This was written to a certain extent in his appearance; in his spare brisk little person, in his cloistered white face and extraordinarily polished hair, which told of responsibility, looked as if it were kept up to the same high standard as the plate; in his small clear anxious eyes, even in the permitted, though not exactly encouraged, tuft on his chin. “He thinks me rather mad, but I’ve broken him in, and now he likes the place, he likes the company,” said the old man. I embraced this fully after I had become aware that Brooksmith’s main characteristic was a deep and shy refinement, though I remember I was rather puzzled when, on another occasion, Mr. Offord remarked: “What he likes is the talk—mingling in the conversation.” I was conscious I had never seen Brooksmith permit himself this freedom, but I guessed in a moment that what Mr. Offord alluded to was a participation more intense than any speech could have represented—that of being perpetually present on a hundred legitimate pretexts, errands, necessities, and breathing the very atmosphere of criticism, the famous criticism of life. “Quite an education, sir, isn’t it, sir?” he said to me one day at the foot of the stairs when he was letting me out; and I’ve always remembered the words and the tone as the first sign of the quickening drama of poor Brooksmith’s fate. It was indeed an education, but to what was this sensitive young man of thirty-five, of the servile class, being educated?

Practically and inevitably, for the time, to companionship, to the perpetual, the even exaggerated reference and appeal of a person brought to dependence by his time of life and his infirmities and always addicted moreover—this was the exaggeration—to the art of giving you pleasure by letting you do things for him. There were certain things Mr. Offord was capable of pretending he liked you to do even when he didn’t—this, I mean, if he thought *you* liked them. If it happened that you didn’t either—which was rare, yet might be—of course there were cross-purposes; but Brooksmith was there to prevent their going very far. This was precisely the way he acted as moderator; he averted misunderstandings or cleared them up. He had been capable, strange as it may appear, of acquiring for this purpose an insight into the French tongue, which was often used at Mr. Offord’s; for besides being habitual to most of the foreigners, and they were many, who haunted the place or arrived with letters—letters often requiring a little worried consideration, of which Brooksmith always had cognisance—it had really become the primary language of the master of the house. I don’t know if all the malentendus were in French, but almost all the explanations were, and this didn’t a bit prevent Brooksmith’s following them. I know Mr. Offord used to read passages to him from Montaigne and Saint-Simon, for he read perpetually when alone—when *they* were alone, that is—and Brooksmith was always about. Perhaps you’ll say no wonder Mr. Offord’s butler regarded him as “rather mad.” However, if I’m not sure what he thought about Montaigne I’m convinced he admired Saint-Simon. A certain feeling for letters must have rubbed off on him from the mere handling of his master’s books, which he was always carrying to and fro and putting back in their places.

I often noticed that if an anecdote or a quotation, much more a lively discussion, was going forward, he would, if busy with the fire or the curtains, the lamp or the tea, find a pretext for remaining in the room till the point should be reached. If his purpose was to catch it you weren’t discreet, you were in fact scarce human, to call him off, and I shall never forget a look, a hard stony stare—I caught it in its passage—which, one day when there were a good many people in the room, he fastened upon the footman who was helping him in the service and who, in an undertone, had asked him some irrelevant question. It was the only manifestation of harshness I ever observed on Brooksmith’s part, and I at first wondered what was the matter. Then I became conscious that Mr. Offord was relating a very curious anecdote, never before perhaps made so public, and imparted to the narrator by an eye-

witness of the fact, bearing on Lord Byron's life in Italy. Nothing would induce me to reproduce it here, but Brooksmith had been in danger of losing it. If I ever should venture to reproduce it I shall feel how much I lose in not having my fellow auditor to refer to.

The first day Mr Offord's door was closed was therefore a dark date in contemporary history. It was raining hard and my umbrella was wet, but Brooksmith received it from me exactly as if this were a preliminary for going upstairs. I observed however that instead of putting it away he held it poised and trickling over the rug, and I then became aware that he was looking at me with deep acknowledging eyes—his air of universal responsibility. I immediately understood—there was scarce need of question and answer as they passed between us. When I took in that our good friend had given up as never before, though only for the occasion, I exclaimed dolefully: "What a difference it will make—and to how many people!"

"I shall be one of them, sir!" said Brooksmith; and that was the beginning of the end.

Mr. Offord came down again, but the spell was broken, the great sign being that the conversation was for the first time not directed. It wandered and stumbled, a little frightened, like a lost child—it had let go the nurse's hand. "The worst of it is that now we shall talk about my health—*c'est la fin de tout*," Mr. Offord said when he reappeared; and then I recognised what a note of change that would be—for he had never tolerated anything so provincial. We "ran" to each other's health as little as to the daily weather. The talk became ours, in a word—not his; and as ours, even when HE talked, it could only be inferior. In this form it was a distress to Brooksmith, whose attention now wandered from it altogether: he had so much closer a vision of his master's intimate conditions than our superficialities represented. There were better hours, and he was more in and out of the room, but I could see he was conscious of the decline, almost of the collapse, of our great institution. He seemed to wish to take counsel with me about it, to feel responsible for its going on in some form or other. When for the second period—the first had lasted several days—he had to tell me that his employer didn't receive, I half expected to hear him say after a moment "Do you think I ought to, sir, in his place?"—as he might have asked me, with the return of autumn, if I thought he had better light the drawing-room fire.

He had a resigned philosophic sense of what his guests—our guests, as I came to regard them in our colloquies—would expect. His feeling was that he wouldn't absolutely have approved of himself as a substitute for Mr. Offord; but he was so saturated with the religion of habit that he would have made, for our friends, the necessary sacrifice to the divinity. He would take them on a little further, till they could look about them. I think I saw him also mentally confronted with the opportunity to deal—for once in his life—with some of his own dumb preferences, his limitations of sympathy, *weeding* a little in prospect and returning to a purer tradition. It was not unknown to me that he considered that toward the end of our host's career a certain laxity of selection had crept in.

At last it came to be the case that we all found the closed door more often than the open one; but even when it was closed Brooksmith managed a crack for me to squeeze through; so that practically I never turned away without having paid a visit. The difference simply came to be that the visit was to Brooksmith. It took place in the hall, at the familiar foot of the stairs, and we didn't sit down, at least Brooksmith didn't; moreover it was devoted wholly to one topic and always had the air of being already over—beginning, so to say, at the end. But it was always interesting—it always gave me something to think about. It's true that the subject of my meditation was ever the same—ever "It's all very well, but what *will* become of Brooksmith?" Even my private answer to this question left me still unsatisfied. No doubt Mr. Offord would provide for him, but *what* would he provide?—that was the great point. He

couldn't provide society; and society had become a necessity of Brooksmith's nature. I must add that he never showed a symptom of what I may call sordid solicitude—anxiety on his own account. He was rather livid and intensely grave, as befitted a man before whose eyes the “shade of that which once was great” was passing away. He had the solemnity of a person winding up, under depressing circumstances, a long-established and celebrated business; he was a kind of social executor or liquidator. But his manner seemed to testify exclusively to the uncertainty of *our* future. I couldn't in those days have afforded it—I lived in two rooms in Jermyn Street and didn't “keep a man”; but even if my income had permitted I shouldn't have ventured to say to Brooksmith (emulating Mr. Offord) “My dear fellow, I'll take you on.” The whole tone of our intercourse was so much more an implication that it was I who should now want a lift. Indeed there was a tacit assurance in Brooksmith's whole attitude that he should have me on his mind.

One of the most assiduous members of our circle had been Lady Kenyon, and I remember his telling me one day that her ladyship had in spite of her own infirmities, lately much aggravated, been in person to inquire. In answer to this I remarked that she would feel it more than any one. Brooksmith had a pause before saying in a certain tone—there's no reproducing some of his tones—“I'll go and see her.” I went to see her myself and learned he had waited on her; but when I said to her, in the form of a joke but with a core of earnest, that when all was over some of us ought to combine, to club together, and set Brooksmith up on his own account, she replied a trifle disappointingly: “Do you mean in a public-house?” I looked at her in a way that I think Brooksmith himself would have approved, and then I answered: “Yes, the Offord Arms.” What I had meant of course was that for the love of art itself we ought to look to it that such a peculiar faculty and so much acquired experience shouldn't be wasted. I really think that if we had caused a few black-edged cards to be struck off and circulated—“Mr. Brooksmith will continue to receive on the old premises from four to seven; business carried on as usual during the alterations”—the greater number of us would have rallied.

Several times he took me upstairs—always by his own proposal—and our dear old friend, in bed (in a curious flowered and brocaded casaque which made him, especially as his head was tied up in a handkerchief to match, look, to my imagination, like the dying Voltaire) held for ten minutes a sadly shrunken little salon. I felt indeed each time as if I were attending the last coucher of some social sovereign. He was royally whimsical about his sufferings and not at all concerned—quite as if the Constitution provided for the case about his successor. He glided over *our* sufferings charmingly, and none of his jokes—it was a gallant abstention, some of them would have been so easy—were at our expense. Now and again, I confess, there was one at Brooksmith's, but so pathetically sociable as to make the excellent man look at me in a way that seemed to say: “Do exchange a glance with me, or I shan't be able to stand it.” What he wasn't able to stand was not what Mr. Offord said about him, but what he wasn't able to say in return. His idea of conversation for himself was giving you the convenience of speaking to him; and when he went to “see” Lady Kenyon for instance it was to carry her the tribute of his receptive silence. Where would the speech of his betters have been if proper service had been a manifestation of sound? In that case the fundamental difference would have had to be shown by their dumbness, and many of them, poor things, were dumb enough without that provision. Brooksmith took an unflinching interest in the preservation of the fundamental difference; it was the thing he had most on his conscience.

What had become of it however when Mr. Offord passed away like any inferior person—was relegated to eternal stillness after the manner of a butler above-stairs? His aspect on the event—for the several successive days—may be imagined, and the multiplication by funereal observance of the things he didn't say. When everything was over—it was late the same

day—I knocked at the door of the house of mourning as I so often had done before. I could never call on Mr. Offord again, but I had come literally to call on Brooksmith. I wanted to ask him if there was anything I could do for him, tainted with vagueness as this inquiry could only be. My presumptuous dream of taking him into my own service had died away: my service wasn't worth his being taken into. My offer could only be to help him to find another place, and yet there was an indelicacy, as it were, in taking for granted that his thoughts would immediately be fixed on another. I had a hope that he would be able to give his life a different form—though certainly not the form, the frequent result of such bereavements, of his setting up a little shop. That would have been dreadful; for I should have wished to forward any enterprise he might embark in, yet how could I have brought myself to go and pay him shillings and take back coppers, over a counter? My visit then was simply an intended compliment. He took it as such, gratefully and with all the tact in the world. He knew I really couldn't help him and that I knew he knew I couldn't; but we discussed the situation—with a good deal of elegant generality—at the foot of the stairs, in the hall already dismantled, where I had so often discussed other situations with him. The executors were in possession, as was still more apparent when he made me pass for a few minutes into the dining-room, where various objects were muffled up for removal.

Two definite facts, however, he had to communicate; one being that he was to leave the house for ever that night (servants, for some mysterious reason, seem always to depart by night), and the other—he mentioned it only at the last and with hesitation—that he was already aware his late master had left him a legacy of eighty pounds. “I'm very glad,” I said, and Brooksmith was of the same mind: “It was so like him to think of me.” This was all that passed between us on the subject, and I know nothing of his judgement of Mr. Offord's memento. Eighty pounds are always eighty pounds, and no one has ever left ME an equal sum; but, all the same, for Brooksmith, I was disappointed. I don't know what I had expected, but it was almost a shock. Eighty pounds might stock a small shop—a *very* small shop; but, I repeat, I couldn't bear to think of that. I asked my friend if he had been able to save a little, and he replied: “No, sir; I've had to do things.” I didn't inquire what things they might have been; they were his own affair, and I took his word for them as assentingly as if he had had the greatness of an ancient house to keep up; especially as there was something in his manner that seemed to convey a prospect of further sacrifice.

“I shall have to turn round a bit, sir—I shall have to look about me,” he said; and then he added indulgently, magnanimously: “If you should happen to hear of anything for me—”

I couldn't let him finish; this was, in its essence, too much in the really grand manner. It would be a help to my getting him off my mind to be able to pretend I *could* find the right place, and that help he wished to give me, for it was doubtless painful to him to see me in so false a position. I interposed with a few words to the effect of how well aware I was that wherever he should go, whatever he should do, he would miss our old friend terribly—miss him even more than I should, having been with him so much more. This led him to make the speech that has remained with me as the very text of the whole episode.

“Oh sir, it's sad for *you*, very sad indeed, and for a great many gentlemen and ladies; that it is, sir. But for me, sir, it is, if I may say so, still graver even than that: it's just the loss of something that was everything. For me, sir,” he went on with rising tears, “he was just *all*, if you know what I mean, sir. You have others, sir, I daresay—not that I would have you understand me to speak of them as in any way tantamount. But you have the pleasures of society, sir; if it's only in talking about him, sir, as I daresay you do freely—for all his blest memory has to fear from it—with gentlemen and ladies who have had the same honour. That's not for me, sir, and I've to keep my associations to myself. Mr. Offord was MY

society, and now, you see, I just haven't any. You go back to conversation, sir, after all, and I go back to my place," Brooksmith stammered, without exaggerated irony or dramatic bitterness, but with a flat unstudied veracity and his hand on the knob of the street-door. He turned it to let me out and then he added: "I just go downstairs, sir, again, and I stay there."

"My poor child," I replied in my emotion, quite as Mr. Offord used to speak, "my dear fellow, leave it to me: WE'LL look after you, we'll all do something for you."

"Ah if you could give me some one *like* him! But there ain't two such in the world," Brooksmith said as we parted.

He had given me his address—the place where he would be to be heard of. For a long time I had no occasion to make use of the information: he proved on trial so very difficult a case. The people who knew him and had known Mr. Offord didn't want to take him, and yet I couldn't bear to try to thrust him among strangers—strangers to his past when not to his present. I spoke to many of our old friends about him and found them all governed by the odd mixture of feelings of which I myself was conscious—as well as disposed, further, to entertain a suspicion that he was "spoiled," with which, I then would have nothing to do. In plain terms a certain embarrassment, a sensible awkwardness when they thought of it, attached to the idea of using him as a menial: they had met him so often in society. Many of them would have asked him, and did ask him, or rather did ask me to ask him, to come and see them, but a mere visiting-list was not what I wanted for him. He was too short for people who were very particular; nevertheless I heard of an opening in a diplomatic household which led me to write him a note, though I was looking much less for something grand than for something human. Five days later I heard from him. The secretary's wife had decided, after keeping him waiting till then, that she couldn't take a servant out of a house in which there hadn't been a lady. The note had a P.S.: "It's a good job there wasn't, sir, such a lady as some."

A week later he came to see me and told me he was "suited," committed to some highly respectable people—they were something quite immense in the City—who lived on the Bayswater side of the Park. "I daresay it will be rather poor, sir," he admitted; "but I've seen the fireworks, haven't I, sir?—it can't be fireworks *every* night. After Mansfield Street there ain't much choice." There was a certain amount, however, it seemed; for the following year, calling one day on a country cousin, a lady of a certain age who was spending a fortnight in town with some friends of her own, a family unknown to me and resident in Chester Square, the door of the house was opened, to my surprise and gratification, by Brooksmith in person. When I came out I had some conversation with him from which I gathered that he had found the large City people too dull for endurance, and I guessed, though he didn't say it, that he had found them vulgar as well. I don't know what judgement he would have passed on his actual patrons if my relative hadn't been their friend; but in view of that connexion he abstained from comment.

None was necessary, however, for before the lady in question brought her visit to a close they honoured me with an invitation to dinner, which I accepted. There was a largeish party on the occasion, but I confess I thought of Brooksmith rather more than of the seated company. They required no depth of attention—they were all referable to usual irredeemable inevitable types. It was the world of cheerful commonplace and conscious gentility and prosperous density, a full-fed material insular world, a world of hideous florid plate and ponderous order and thin conversation. There wasn't a word said about Byron, or even about a minor bard then much in view. Nothing would have induced me to look at Brooksmith in the course of the repast, and I felt sure that not even my overturning the wine would have induced him to meet my eye. We were in intellectual sympathy—we felt, as regards each other, a degree of

social responsibility. In short we had been in Arcadia together, and we had both come to *this*! No wonder we were ashamed to be confronted. When he had helped on my overcoat, as I was going away, we parted, for the first time since the earliest days of Mansfield Street, in silence. I thought he looked lean and wasted, and I guessed that his new place wasn't more "human" than his previous one. There was plenty of beef and beer, but there was no reciprocity. The question for him to have asked before accepting the position wouldn't have been "How many footmen are kept?" but "How much imagination?"

The next time I went to the house—I confess it wasn't very soon—I encountered his successor, a personage who evidently enjoyed the good fortune of never having quitted his natural level. Could any be higher? he seemed to ask—over the heads of three footmen and even of some visitors. He made me feel as if Brooksmith were dead; but I didn't dare to inquire—I couldn't have borne his "I haven't the least idea, sir." I despatched a note to the address that worthy had given me after Mr. Offord's death, but I received no answer. Six months later however I was favoured with a visit from an elderly dreary dingy person who introduced herself to me as Mr. Brooksmith's aunt and from whom I learned that he was out of place and out of health and had allowed her to come and say to me that if I could spare half an hour to look in at him he would take it as a rare honour.

I went the next day—his messenger had given me a new address—and found my friend lodged in a short sordid street in Marylebone, one of those corners of London that wear the last expression of sickly meanness. The room into which I was shown was above the small establishment of a dyer and cleaner who had inflated kid gloves and discoloured shawls in his shop-front. There was a great deal of grimy infant life up and down the place, and there was a hot moist smell within, as of the "boiling" of dirty linen. Brooksmith sat with a blanket over his legs at a clean little window where, from behind stiff bluish-white curtains, he could look across at a huckster's and a tinsmith's and a small greasy public-house. He had passed through an illness and was convalescent, and his mother, as well as his aunt, was in attendance on him. I liked the nearer relative, who was bland and intensely humble, but I had my doubts of the remoter, whom I connected perhaps unjustly with the opposite public-house—she seemed somehow greasy with the same grease—and whose furtive eye followed every movement of my hand as to see if it weren't going into my pocket. It didn't take this direction—I couldn't, unsolicited, put myself at that sort of ease with Brooksmith. Several times the door of the room opened and mysterious old women peeped in and shuffled back again. I don't know who they were; poor Brooksmith seemed encompassed with vague prying beery females.

He was vague himself, and evidently weak, and much embarrassed, and not an allusion was made between us to Mansfield Street. The vision of the salon of which he had been an ornament hovered before me however, by contrast, sufficiently. He assured me he was really getting better, and his mother remarked that he would come round if he could only get his spirits up. The aunt echoed this opinion, and I became more sure that in her own case she knew where to go for such a purpose. I'm afraid I was rather weak with my old friend, for I neglected the opportunity, so exceptionally good, to rebuke the levity which had led him to throw up honourable positions—fine stiff steady berths in Bayswater and Belgravia, with morning prayers, as I knew, attached to one of them. Very likely his reasons had been profane and sentimental; he didn't want morning prayers, he wanted to be somebody's dear fellow; but I couldn't be the person to rebuke him. He shuffled these episodes out of sight—I saw he had no wish to discuss them. I noted further, strangely enough, that it would probably be a questionable pleasure for him to see me again: he doubted now even of my power to condone his aberrations. He didn't wish to have to explain; and his behaviour was likely in future to need explanation. When I bade him farewell he looked at me a moment with eyes

that said everything: "How can I talk about those exquisite years in this place, before these people, with the old women poking their heads in? It was very good of you to come to see me; it wasn't my idea—*she* brought you. We've said everything; it's over; you'll lose all patience with me, and I'd rather you shouldn't see the rest." I sent him some money in a letter the next day, but I saw the rest only in the light of a barren sequel.

A whole year after my visit to him I became aware once, in dining out, that Brooksmith was one of the several servants who hovered behind our chairs. He hadn't opened the door of the house to me, nor had I recognised him in the array of retainers in the hall. This time I tried to catch his eye, but he never gave me a chance, and when he handed me a dish I could only be careful to thank him audibly. Indeed I partook of two *entrées* of which I had my doubts, subsequently converted into certainties, in order not to snub him. He looked well enough in health, but much older, and wore in an exceptionally marked degree the glazed and expressionless mask of the British domestic *de race*. I saw with dismay that if I hadn't known him I should have taken him, on the showing of his countenance, for an extravagant illustration of irresponsible servile gloom. I said to myself that he had become a reactionary, gone over to the Philistines, thrown himself into religion, the religion of his "place," like a foreign lady *sur le retour*. I divined moreover that he was only engaged for the evening—he had become a mere waiter, had joined the band of the white-waistcoated who "go out." There was something pathetic in this fact—it was a terrible vulgarisation of Brooksmith. It was the mercenary prose of butlerhood; he had given up the struggle for the poetry. If reciprocity was what he had missed where was the reciprocity now? Only in the bottoms of the wine-glasses and the five shillings—or whatever they get—clapped into his hand by the permanent man. However, I supposed he had taken up a precarious branch of his profession because it after all sent him less downstairs. His relations with London society were more superficial, but they were of course more various. As I went away on this occasion I looked out for him eagerly among the four or five attendants whose perpendicular persons, fluting the walls of London passages, are supposed to lubricate the process of departure; but he was not on duty. I asked one of the others if he were not in the house, and received the prompt answer: "Just left, sir. Anything I can do for you, sir?" I wanted to say "Please give him my kind regards"; but I abstained—I didn't want to compromise him; and I never came across him again.

Often and often, in dining out, I looked for him, sometimes accepting invitations on purpose to multiply the chances of my meeting him. But always in vain; so that as I met many other members of the casual class over and over again I at last adopted the theory that he always procured a list of expected guests beforehand and kept away from the banquets which he thus learned I was to grace. At last I gave up hope, and one day at the end of three years I received another visit from his aunt. She was drearier and dingier, almost squalid, and she was in great tribulation and want. Her sister, Mrs. Brooksmith, had been dead a year, and three months later her nephew had disappeared. He had always looked after her a bit since her troubles; I never knew what her troubles had been—and now she hadn't so much as a petticoat to pawn. She had also a niece, to whom she had been everything before her troubles, but the niece had treated her most shameful. These were details; the great and romantic fact was Brooksmith's final evasion of his fate. He had gone out to wait one evening as usual, in a white waistcoat she had done up for him with her own hands—being due at a large party up Kensington way. But he had never come home again and had never arrived at the large party, nor at any party that any one could make out. No trace of him had come to light—no gleam of the white waistcoat had pierced the obscurity of his doom. This news was a sharp shock to me, for I had my ideas about his real destination. His aged relative had promptly, as she said, guessed the worst. Somehow, and somewhere he had got out of the way altogether, and now I trust that, with characteristic deliberation, he is changing the plates of the immortal gods. As my

depressing visitant also said, he never *had* got his spirits up. I was fortunately able to dismiss her with her own somewhat improved. But the dim ghost of poor Brooksmith is one of those that I see. He had indeed been spoiled.

The Marriages

I

“Won’t you stay a little longer?” the hostess asked while she held the girl’s hand and smiled. “It’s too early for every one to go—it’s too absurd.” Mrs. Churchley inclined her head to one side and looked gracious; she flourished about her face, in a vaguely protecting sheltering way, an enormous fan of red feathers. Everything in her composition, for Adela Chart, was enormous. She had big eyes, big teeth, big shoulders, big hands, big rings and bracelets, big jewels of every sort and many of them. The train of her crimson dress was longer than any other; her house was huge; her drawing-room, especially now that the company had left it, looked vast, and it offered to the girl’s eyes a collection of the largest sofas and chairs, pictures, mirrors, clocks, that she had ever beheld. Was Mrs. Churchley’s fortune also large, to account for so many immensities? Of this Adela could know nothing, but it struck her, while she smiled sweetly back at their entertainer, that she had better try to find out. Mrs. Churchley had at least a high-hung carriage drawn by the tallest horses, and in the Row she was to be seen perched on a mighty hunter. She was high and extensive herself, though not exactly fat; her bones were big, her limbs were long, and her loud hurrying voice resembled the bell of a steamboat. While she spoke to his daughter she had the air of hiding from Colonel Chart, a little shyly, behind the wide ostrich fan. But Colonel Chart was not a man to be either ignored or eluded.

“Of course every one’s going on to something else,” he said. “I believe there are a lot of things to-night.”

“And where are *you* going?” Mrs. Churchley asked, dropping her fan and turning her bright hard eyes on the Colonel.

“Oh I don’t do that sort of thing!”—he used a tone of familiar resentment that fell with a certain effect on his daughter’s ear. She saw in it that he thought Mrs. Churchley might have done him a little more justice. But what made the honest soul suppose her a person to look to for a perception of fine shades? Indeed the shade was one it might have been a little difficult to seize—the difference between “going on” and coming to a dinner of twenty people. The pair were in mourning; the second year had maintained it for Adela, but the Colonel hadn’t objected to dining with Mrs. Churchley, any more than he had objected at Easter to going down to the Millwards’, where he had met her and where the girl had her reasons for believing him to have known he should meet her. Adela wasn’t clear about the occasion of their original meeting, to which a certain mystery attached. In Mrs. Churchley’s exclamation now there was the fullest concurrence in Colonel Chart’s idea; she didn’t say “Ah yes, dear friend, I understand!” but this was the note of sympathy she plainly wished to sound. It immediately made Adela say to her “Surely you must be going on somewhere yourself.”

“Yes, you must have a lot of places,” the Colonel concurred, while his view of her shining raiment had an invidious directness. Adela could read the tacit implication: “You’re not in sorrow, in desolation.”

Mrs. Churchley turned away from her at this and just waited before answering. The red fan was up again, and this time it sheltered her from Adela. “I’ll give everything up—for *you*,” were the words that issued from behind it. “*Do* stay a little. I always think this is such a nice hour. One can really talk,” Mrs. Churchley went on. The Colonel laughed; he said it wasn’t fair. But their hostess pressed his daughter. “Do sit down; it’s the only time to have any

talk.” The girl saw her father sit down, but she wandered away, turning her back and pretending to look at a picture. She was so far from agreeing with Mrs. Churchley that it was an hour she particularly disliked. She was conscious of the queerness, the shyness, in London, of the gregarious flight of guests after a dinner, the general *sauve qui peut* and panic fear of being left with the host and hostess. But personally she always felt the contagion, always conformed to the rush. Besides, she knew herself turn red now, flushed with a conviction that had come over her and that she wished not to show.

Her father sat down on one of the big sofas with Mrs. Churchley; fortunately he was also a person with a presence that could hold its own. Adela didn't care to sit and watch them while they made love, as she crudely imaged it, and she cared still less to join in their strange commerce. She wandered further away, went into another of the bright “handsome,” rather nude rooms—they were like women dressed for a ball—where the displaced chairs, at awkward angles to each other, seemed to retain the attitudes of bored talkers. Her heart beat as she had seldom known it, but she continued to make a pretence of looking at the pictures on the walls and the ornaments on the tables, while she hoped that, as she preferred it, it would be also the course her father would like best. She hoped “awfully,” as she would have said, that he wouldn't think her rude. She was a person of courage, and he was a kind, an intensely good-natured man; nevertheless she went in some fear of him. At home it had always been a religion with them to be nice to the people he liked. How, in the old days, her mother, her incomparable mother, so clever, so unerring, so perfect, how in the precious days her mother had practised that art! Oh her mother, her irrecoverable mother! One of the pictures she was looking at swam before her eyes. Mrs. Churchley, in the natural course, would have begun immediately to climb staircases. Adela could see the high bony shoulders and the long crimson tail and the universal coruscating nod wriggle their horribly practical way through the rest of the night. Therefore she *must* have had her reasons for detaining them. There were mothers who thought every one wanted to marry their eldest son, and the girl sought to be clear as to whether she herself belonged to the class of daughters who thought every one wanted to marry their father. Her companions left her alone; and though she didn't want to be near them it angered her that Mrs. Churchley didn't call her. That proved she was conscious of the situation. She would have called her, only Colonel Chart had perhaps dreadfully murmured “Don't, love, don't.” This proved he also was conscious. The time was really not long—ten minutes at the most elapsed—when he cried out gaily, pleasantly, as if with a small jocular reproach, “I say, Adela, we must release this dear lady!” He spoke of course as if it had been Adela's fault that they lingered. When they took leave she gave Mrs. Churchley, without intention and without defiance, but from the simple sincerity of her pain, a longer look into the eyes than she had ever given her before. Mrs. Churchley's onyx pupils reflected the question as distant dark windows reflect the sunset; they seemed to say: “Yes, I *am*, if that's what you want to know!”

What made the case worse, what made the girl more sure, was the silence preserved by her companion in the brougham on their way home. They rolled along in the June darkness from Prince's Gate to Seymour Street, each looking out of a window in conscious prudence; watching but not seeing the hurry of the London night, the flash of lamps, the quick roll on the wood of hansoms and other broughams. Adela had expected her father would say something about Mrs. Churchley; but when he said nothing it affected her, very oddly, still more as if he had spoken. In Seymour Street he asked the footman if Mr. Godfrey had come in, to which the servant replied that he had come in early and gone straight to his room. Adela had gathered as much, without saying so, from a lighted window on the second floor; but she contributed no remark to the question. At the foot of the stairs her father halted as if he had something on his mind; but what it amounted to seemed only the dry “Good-

night” with which he presently ascended. It was the first time since her mother’s death that he had bidden her good-night without kissing her. They were a kissing family, and after that dire event the habit had taken a fresh spring. She had left behind her such a general passion of regret that in kissing each other they felt themselves a little to be kissing her. Now, as, standing in the hall, with the stiff watching footman—she could have said to him angrily “Go away!”—planted near her, she looked with unspeakable pain at her father’s back while he mounted, the effect was of his having withheld from another and a still more slighted cheek the touch of his lips.

He was going to his room, and after a moment she heard his door close. Then she said to the servant “Shut up the house”—she tried to do everything her mother had done, to be a little of what she had been, conscious only of falling woefully short—and took her own way upstairs. After she had reached her room she waited, listening, shaken by the apprehension that she should hear her father come out again and go up to Godfrey. He would go up to tell him, to have it over without delay, precisely because it would be so difficult. She asked herself indeed why he should tell Godfrey when he hadn’t taken the occasion—their drive home being an occasion—to tell herself. However, she wanted no announcing, no telling; there was such a horrible clearness in her mind that what she now waited for was only to be sure her father wouldn’t proceed as she had imagined. At the end of the minutes she saw this particular danger was over, upon which she came out and made her own way to her brother. Exactly what she wanted to say to him first, if their parent counted on the boy’s greater indulgence, and before he could say anything, was: “Don’t forgive him; don’t, don’t!”

He was to go up for an examination, poor lad, and during these weeks his lamp burned till the small hours. It was for the Foreign Office, and there was to be some frightful number of competitors; but Adela had great hopes of him—she believed so in his talents and saw with pity how hard he worked. This would have made her spare him, not trouble his night, his scanty rest, if anything less dreadful had been at stake. It was a blessing however that one could count on his coolness, young as he was—his bright good-looking discretion, the thing that already made him half a man of the world. Moreover he was the one who would care most. If Basil was the eldest son—he had as a matter of course gone into the army and was in India, on the staff, by good luck, of a governor-general—it was exactly this that would make him comparatively indifferent. His life was elsewhere, and his father and he had been in a measure military comrades, so that he would be deterred by a certain delicacy from protesting; he wouldn’t have liked any such protest in an affair of *his*. Beatrice and Muriel would care, but they were too young to speak, and this was just why her own responsibility was so great.

Godfrey was in working-gear—shirt and trousers and slippers and a beautiful silk jacket. His room felt hot, though a window was open to the summer night; the lamp on the table shed its studious light over a formidable heap of text-books and papers, the bed moreover showing how he had flung himself down to think out a problem. As soon as she got in she began. “Father’s going to marry Mrs. Churchley, you know.”

She saw his poor pink face turn pale. “How do you know?”

“I’ve seen with my eyes. We’ve been dining there—we’ve just come home. He’s in love with her. She’s in love with *him*. They’ll arrange it.”

“Oh I say!” Godfrey exclaimed, incredulous.

“He will, he will, he will!” cried the girl; and with it she burst into tears.

Godfrey, who had a cigarette in his hand, lighted it at one of the candles on the mantelpiece as if he were embarrassed. As Adela, who had dropped into his armchair, continued to sob, he said after a moment: "He oughtn't to—he oughtn't to."

"Oh think of mamma—think of mamma!" she wailed almost louder than was safe.

"Yes, he ought to think of mamma." With which Godfrey looked at the tip of his cigarette.

"To such a woman as that—after *her!*"

"Dear old mamma!" said Godfrey while he smoked.

Adela rose again, drying her eyes. "It's like an insult to her; it's as if he denied her." Now that she spoke of it she felt herself rise to a height. "He rubs out at a stroke all the years of their happiness."

"They were awfully happy," Godfrey agreed.

"Think what she was—think how no one else will ever again be like her!" the girl went on.

"I suppose he's not very happy now," her brother vaguely contributed.

"Of course he isn't, any more than you and I are; and it's dreadful of him to want to be."

"Well, don't make yourself miserable till you're sure," the young man said.

But Adela showed him confidently that she *was* sure, from the way the pair had behaved together and from her father's attitude on the drive home. If Godfrey had been there he would have seen everything; it couldn't be explained, but he would have felt. When he asked at what moment the girl had first had her suspicion she replied that it had all come at once, that evening; or that at least she had had no conscious fear till then. There had been signs for two or three weeks, but she hadn't understood them—ever since the day Mrs. Churchley had dined in Seymour Street. Adela had on that occasion thought it odd her father should have wished to invite her, given the quiet way they were living; she was a person they knew so little. He had said something about her having been very civil to him, and that evening, already, she had guessed that he must have frequented their portentous guest herself more than there had been signs of. To-night it had come to her clearly that he would have called on her every day since the time of her dining with them; every afternoon about the hour he was ostensibly at his club. Mrs. Churchley *was* his club—she was for all the world just like one. At this Godfrey laughed; he wanted to know what his sister knew about clubs. She was slightly disappointed in his laugh, even wounded by it, but she knew perfectly what she meant: she meant that Mrs. Churchley was public and florid, promiscuous and mannish.

"Oh I daresay she's all right," he said as if he wanted to get on with his work. He looked at the clock on the mantel-shelf; he would have to put in another hour.

"All right to come and take darling mamma's place—to sit where *she* used to sit, to lay her horrible hands on *her* things?" Adela was appalled—all the more that she hadn't expected it—at her brother's apparent acceptance of such a prospect.

He coloured; there was something in her passionate piety that scorched him. She glared at him with tragic eyes—he might have profaned an altar. "Oh I mean that nothing will come of it."

"Not if we do our duty," said Adela. And then as he looked as if he hadn't an idea of what that could be: "You must speak to him—tell him how we feel; that we shall never forgive him, that we can't endure it."

“He’ll think I’m cheeky,” her brother returned, looking down at his papers with his back to her and his hands in his pockets.

“Cheeky to plead for *her* memory?”

“He’ll say it’s none of my business.”

“Then you believe he’ll do it?” cried the girl.

“Not a bit. Go to bed!”

“I’ll speak to him”—she had turned as pale as a young priestess.

“Don’t cry out till you’re hurt; wait till he speaks to *you*.”

“He won’t, he won’t!” she declared. “He’ll do it without telling us.”

Her brother had faced round to her again; he started a little at this, and again, at one of the candles, lighted his cigarette, which had gone out. She looked at him a moment; then he said something that surprised her. “Is Mrs. Churchley very rich?”

“I haven’t the least idea. What on earth has that to do with it?”

Godfrey puffed his cigarette. “Does she live as if she were?”

“She has a lot of hideous showy things.”

“Well, we must keep our eyes open,” he concluded. “And now you *must* let me get on.” He kissed his visitor as if to make up for dismissing her, or for his failure to take fire; and she held him a moment, burying her head on his shoulder.

A wave of emotion surged through her, and again she quavered out: “Ah why did she leave us? Why did she leave us?”

“Yes, why indeed?” the young man sighed, disengaging himself with a movement of oppression.

II

Adela was so far right as that by the end of the week, though she remained certain, her father had still not made the announcement she dreaded. What convinced her was the sense of her changed relations with him—of there being between them something unexpressed, something she was aware of as she would have been of an open wound. When she spoke of this to Godfrey he said the change was of her own making—also that she was cruelly unjust to the governor. She suffered even more from her brother’s unexpected perversity; she had had so different a theory about him that her disappointment was almost an humiliation and she needed all her fortitude to pitch her faith lower. She wondered what had happened to him and why he so failed her. She would have trusted him to feel right about anything, above all about such a question. Their worship of their mother’s memory, their recognition of her sacred place in their past, her exquisite influence in their father’s life, his fortune, his career, in the whole history of the family and welfare of the house—accomplished clever gentle good beautiful and capable as she had been, a woman whose quiet distinction was universally admired, so that on her death one of the Princesses, the most august of her friends, had written Adela such a note about her as princesses were understood very seldom to write: their hushed tenderness over all this was like a religion, and was also an attributive honour, to fall away from which was a form of treachery. This wasn’t the way people usually felt in London, she knew; but strenuous ardent observant girl as she was, with secretaries of sentiment and dim originalities of attitude, she had already made up her mind that London was no treasure-house of delicacies. Remembrance there was hammered thin—to be faithful was to

make society gape. The patient dead were sacrificed; they had no shrines, for people were literally ashamed of mourning. When they had hustled all sensibility out of their lives they invented the fiction that they felt too much to utter. Adela said nothing to her sisters; this reticence was part of the virtue it was her idea to practise for them. *She* was to be their mother, a direct deputy and representative. Before the vision of that other woman parading in such a character she felt capable of ingenuities, of deep diplomacies. The essence of these indeed was just tremulously to watch her father. Five days after they had dined together at Mrs. Churchley's he asked her if she had been to see that lady.

"No indeed, why should I?" Adela knew that he knew she hadn't been, since Mrs. Churchley would have told him.

"Don't you call on people after you dine with them?" said Colonel Chart.

"Yes, in the course of time. I don't rush off within the week."

Her father looked at her, and his eyes were colder than she had ever seen them, which was probably, she reflected, just the way hers appeared to himself. "Then you'll please rush off to-morrow. She's to dine with us on the 12th, and I shall expect your sisters to come down."

Adela stared. "To a dinner-party?"

"It's not to be a dinner-party. I want them to know Mrs. Churchley."

"Is there to be nobody else?"

"Godfrey of course. A family party," he said with an assurance before which she turned cold.

The girl asked her brother that evening if *that* wasn't tantamount to an announcement. He looked at her queerly and then said: "*I've* been to see her."

"What on earth did you do that for?"

"Father told me he wished it."

"Then he *has* told you?"

"Told me what?" Godfrey asked while her heart sank with the sense of his making difficulties for her.

"That they're engaged, of course. What else can all this mean?"

"He didn't tell me that, but I like her."

"*Like* her!" the girl shrieked.

"She's very kind, very good."

"To thrust herself upon us when we hate her? Is that what you call kind? Is that what you call decent?"

"Oh *I* don't hate her"—and he turned away as if she bored him.

She called the next day on Mrs. Churchley, designing to break out somehow, to plead, to appeal—"Oh spare us! have mercy on us! let him alone! go away!" But that wasn't easy when they were face to face. Mrs. Churchley had every intention of getting, as she would have said—she was perpetually using the expression—into touch; but her good intentions were as depressing as a tailor's misfits. She could never understand that they had no place for her vulgar charity, that their life was filled with a fragrance of perfection for which she had no sense fine enough. She was as undomestic as a shop-front and as out of tune as a parrot. She would either make them live in the streets or bring the streets into their life—it

was the same thing. She had evidently never read a book, and she used intonations that Adela had never heard, as if she had been an Australian or an American. She understood everything in a vulgar sense; speaking of Godfrey's visit to her and praising him according to her idea, saying horrid things about him—that he was awfully good-looking, a perfect gentleman, the kind she liked. How could her father, who was after all in everything else such a dear, listen to a woman, or endure her, who thought she pleased him when she called the son of his dead wife a perfect gentleman? What would he have been, pray? Much she knew about what any of them were! When she told Adela she wanted her to like her the girl thought for an instant her opportunity had come—the chance to plead with her and beg her off. But she presented such an impenetrable surface that it would have been like giving a message to a varnished door. She wasn't a woman, said Adela; she was an address.

When she dined in Seymour Street the "children," as the girl called the others, including Godfrey, liked her. Beatrice and Muriel stared shyly and silently at the wonders of her apparel (she was brutally over-dressed) without of course guessing the danger that tainted the air. They supposed her in their innocence to be amusing, and they didn't know, any more than she did herself, how she patronised them. When she was upstairs with them after dinner Adela could see her look round the room at the things she meant to alter—their mother's things, not a bit like her own and not good enough for her. After a quarter of an hour of this our young lady felt sure she was deciding that Seymour Street wouldn't do at all, the dear old home that had done for their mother those twenty years. Was she plotting to transport them all to her horrible Prince's Gate? Of one thing at any rate Adela was certain: her father, at that moment alone in the dining-room with Godfrey, pretending to drink another glass of wine to make time, was coming to the point, was telling the news. When they reappeared they both, to her eyes, looked unnatural: the news had been told.

She had it from Godfrey before Mrs. Churchley left the house, when, after a brief interval, he followed her out of the drawing-room on her taking her sisters to bed. She was waiting for him at the door of her room. Her father was then alone with his *fiancée*—the word was grotesque to Adela; it was already as if the place were her home.

"What did you say to him?" our young woman asked when her brother had told her.

"I said nothing." Then he added, colouring—the expression of her face was such—"There was nothing to say."

"Is that how it strikes you?"—and she stared at the lamp.

"He asked me to speak to her," Godfrey went on.

"In what hideous sense?"

"To tell her I was glad."

"And did you?" Adela panted.

"I don't know. I said something. She kissed me."

"Oh how *could* you?" shuddered the girl, who covered her face with her hands.

"He says she's very rich," her brother returned.

"Is that why you kissed her?"

"I didn't kiss her. Good-night." And the young man, turning his back, went out.

When he had gone Adela locked herself in as with the fear she should be overtaken or invaded, and during a sleepless feverish memorable night she took counsel of her uncompromising spirit. She saw things as they were, in all the indignity of life. The levity,

the mockery, the infidelity, the ugliness, lay as plain as a map before her; it was a world of gross practical jokes, a world *pour rire*; but she cried about it all the same. The morning dawned early, or rather it seemed to her there had been no night, nothing but a sickly creeping day. But by the time she heard the house stirring again she had determined what to do. When she came down to the breakfast-room her father was already in his place with newspapers and letters; and she expected the first words he would utter to be a rebuke to her for having disappeared the night before without taking leave of Mrs. Churchley. Then she saw he wished to be intensely kind, to make every allowance, to conciliate and console her. He knew she had heard from Godfrey, and he got up and kissed her. He told her as quickly as possible, to have it over, stammering a little, with an "I've a piece of news for you that will probably shock you," yet looking even exaggeratedly grave and rather pompous, to inspire the respect he didn't deserve. When he kissed her she melted, she burst into tears. He held her against him, kissing her again and again, saying tenderly "Yes, yes, I know, I know." But he didn't know else he couldn't have done it. Beatrice and Muriel came in, frightened when they saw her crying, and still more scared when she turned to them with words and an air that were terrible in their comfortable little lives: "Papa's going to be married; he's going to marry Mrs. Churchley!" After staring a moment and seeing their father look as strange, on his side, as Adela, though in a different way, the children also began to cry, so that when the servants arrived with tea and boiled eggs these functionaries were greatly embarrassed with their burden, not knowing whether to come in or hang back. They all scraped together a decorum, and as soon as the things had been put on table the Colonel banished the men with a glance. Then he made a little affectionate speech to Beatrice and Muriel, in which he described Mrs. Churchley as the kindest, the most delightful of women, only wanting to make them happy, only wanting to make *him* happy, and convinced that he would be if they were and that they would be if he was.

"What do such words mean?" Adela asked herself. She declared privately that they meant nothing, but she was silent, and every one was silent, on account of the advent of Miss Flynn the governess, before whom Colonel Chart preferred not to discuss the situation. Adela recognised on the spot that if things were to go as he wished his children would practically never again be alone with him. He would spend all his time with Mrs. Churchley till they were married, and then Mrs. Churchley would spend all her time with him. Adela was ashamed of him, and that was horrible—all the more that every one else would be, all his other friends, every one who had known her mother. But the public dishonour to that high memory shouldn't be enacted; he shouldn't do as he wished.

After breakfast her father remarked to her that it would give him pleasure if in a day or two she would take her sisters to see their friend, and she replied that he should be obeyed. He held her hand a moment, looking at her with an argument in his eyes which presently hardened into sternness. He wanted to know that she forgave him, but also wanted to assure her that he expected her to mind what she did, to go straight. She turned away her eyes; she was indeed ashamed of him.

She waited three days and then conveyed her sisters to the *repaire*, as she would have been ready to term it, of the lioness. That queen of beasts was surrounded with callers, as Adela knew she would be; it was her "day" and the occasion the girl preferred. Before this she had spent all her time with her companions, talking to them about their mother, playing on their memory of her, making them cry and making them laugh, reminding them of blest hours of their early childhood, telling them anecdotes of her own. None the less she confided to them that she believed there was no harm at all in Mrs. Churchley, and that when the time should come she would probably take them out immensely. She saw with smothered irritation that they enjoyed their visit at Prince's Gate; they had never been at anything so "grown-up," nor

seen so many smart bonnets and brilliant complexions. Moreover they were considered with interest, quite as if, being minor elements, yet perceptible ones, of Mrs. Churchley's new life, they had been described in advance and were the heroines of the occasion. There were so many ladies present that this personage didn't talk to them much; she only called them her "chicks" and asked them to hand about tea-cups and bread and butter. All of which was highly agreeable and indeed intensely exciting to Beatrice and Muriel, who had little round red spots in *their* cheeks when they came away. Adela quivered with the sense that her mother's children were now Mrs. Churchley's "chicks" and a part of the furniture of Mrs. Churchley's dreadful consciousness.

It was one thing to have made up her mind, however; it was another thing to make her attempt. It was when she learned from Godfrey that the day was fixed, the 20th of July, only six weeks removed, that she felt the importance of prompt action. She learned everything from Godfrey now, having decided it would be hypocrisy to question her father. Even her silence was hypocritical, but she couldn't weep and wail. Her father showed extreme tact; taking no notice of her detachment, treating it as a moment of *bouderie* he was bound to allow her and that would pout itself away. She debated much as to whether she should take Godfrey into her confidence; she would have done so without hesitation if he hadn't disappointed her. He was so little what she might have expected, and so perversely preoccupied that she could explain it only by the high pressure at which he was living, his anxiety about his "exam." He was in a fidget, in a fever, putting on a spurt to come in first; sceptical moreover about his success and cynical about everything else. He appeared to agree to the general axiom that they didn't want a strange woman thrust into their life, but he found Mrs. Churchley "very jolly as a person to know." He had been to see her by himself—he had been to see her three times. He in fact gave it out that he would make the most of her now; he should probably be so little in Seymour Street after these days. What Adela at last determined to give him was her assurance that the marriage would never take place. When he asked what she meant and who was to prevent it she replied that the interesting couple would abandon the idea of themselves, or that Mrs. Churchley at least would after a week or two back out of it.

"That will be really horrid then," Godfrey pronounced. "The only respectable thing, at the point they've come to, is to put it through. Charming for poor Dad to have the air of being 'chucked'!"

This made her hesitate two days more, but she found answers more valid than any objections. The many-voiced answer to everything—it was like the autumn wind round the house—was the affront that fell back on her mother. Her mother was dead but it killed her again. So one morning at eleven o'clock, when she knew her father was writing letters, she went out quietly and, stopping the first hansom she met, drove to Prince's Gate. Mrs. Churchley was at home, and she was shown into the drawing-room with the request that she would wait five minutes. She waited without the sense of breaking down at the last, and the impulse to run away, which were what she had expected to have. In the cab and at the door her heart had beat terribly, but now suddenly, with the game really to play, she found herself lucid and calm. It was a joy to her to feel later that this was the way Mrs. Churchley found her: not confused, not stammering nor prevaricating, only a little amazed at her own courage, conscious of the immense responsibility of her step and wonderfully older than her years. Her hostess sounded her at first with suspicious eyes, but eventually, to Adela's surprise, burst into tears. At this the girl herself cried, and with the secret happiness of believing they were saved. Mrs. Churchley said she would think over what she had been told, and she promised her young friend, freely enough and very firmly, not to betray the secret of the latter's step to the Colonel. They were saved—they were saved: the words sung

themselves in the girl's soul as she came downstairs. When the door opened for her she saw her brother on the step, and they looked at each other in surprise, each finding it on the part of the other an odd hour for Prince's Gate. Godfrey remarked that Mrs. Churchley would have enough of the family, and Adela answered that she would perhaps have too much. None the less the young man went in while his sister took her way home.

III

She saw nothing of him for nearly a week; he had more and more his own times and hours, adjusted to his tremendous responsibilities, and he spent whole days at his crammer's. When she knocked at his door late in the evening he was regularly not in his room. It was known in the house how much he was worried; he was horribly nervous about his ordeal. It was to begin on the 23rd of June, and his father was as worried as himself. The wedding had been arranged in relation to this; they wished poor Godfrey's fate settled first, though they felt the nuptials would be darkened if it shouldn't be settled right.

Ten days after that performance of her private undertaking Adela began to sniff, as it were, a difference in the general air; but as yet she was afraid to exult. It wasn't in truth a difference for the better, so that there might be still a great tension. Her father, since the announcement of his intended marriage, had been visibly pleased with himself, but that pleasure now appeared to have undergone a check. She had the impression known to the passengers on a great steamer when, in the middle of the night, they feel the engines stop. As this impression may easily sharpen to the sense that something serious has happened, so the girl asked herself what had actually occurred. She had expected something serious; but it was as if she couldn't keep still in her cabin—she wanted to go up and see. On the 20th, just before breakfast, her maid brought her a message from her brother. Mr. Godfrey would be obliged if she would speak to him in his room. She went straight up to him, dreading to find him ill, broken down on the eve of his formidable week. This was not the case however—he rather seemed already at work, to have been at work since dawn. But he was very white and his eyes had a strange and new expression. Her beautiful young brother looked older; he looked haggard and hard. He met her there as if he had been waiting for her, and he said at once: "Please tell me this, Adela—what was the purpose of your visit the other morning to Mrs. Churchley, the day I met you at her door?"

She stared—she cast about. "The purpose? What's the matter? Why do you ask?"

"They've put it off—they've put it off a month."

"Ah thank God!" said Adela.

"Why the devil do you thank God?" Godfrey asked with a strange impatience.

She gave a strained intense smile. "You know I think it all wrong."

He stood looking at her up and down. "What did you do there? How did you interfere?"

"Who told you I interfered?" she returned with a deep flush.

"You said something—you did something. I knew you had done it when I saw you come out."

"What I did was my own business."

"Damn your own business!" cried the young man.

She had never in her life been so spoken to, and in advance, had she been given the choice, would have said that she'd rather die than be so handled by Godfrey. But her spirit was high, and for a moment she was as angry as if she had been cut with a whip. She escaped the blow

but felt the insult. “And *your* business then?” she asked. “I wondered what that was when I saw *you*.”

He stood a moment longer scowling at her; then with the exclamation “You’ve made a pretty mess!” he turned away from her and sat down to his books.

They had put it off, as he said; her father was dry and stiff and official about it. “I suppose I had better let you know we’ve thought it best to postpone our marriage till the end of the summer—Mrs. Churchley has so many arrangements to make”: he was not more expansive than that. She neither knew nor greatly cared whether she but vainly imagined or correctly observed him to watch her obliquely for some measure of her receipt of these words. She flattered herself that, thanks to Godfrey’s forewarning, cruel as the form of it had been, she was able to repress any crude sign of elation. She had a perfectly good conscience, for she could now judge what odious elements Mrs. Churchley, whom she had not seen since the morning in Prince’s Gate, had already introduced into their dealings. She gathered without difficulty that her father hadn’t concurred in the postponement, for he was more restless than before, more absent and distinctly irritable. There was naturally still the question of how much of this condition was to be attributed to his solicitude about Godfrey. That young man took occasion to say a horrible thing to his sister: “If I don’t pass it will be your fault.” These were dreadful days for the girl, and she asked herself how she could have borne them if the hovering spirit of her mother hadn’t been at her side. Fortunately she always felt it there, sustaining, commending, sanctifying. Suddenly her father announced to her that he wished her to go immediately, with her sisters, down to Brinton, where there was always part of a household and where for a few weeks they would manage well enough. The only explanation he gave of this desire was that he wanted them out of the way. “Out of the way of what?” she queried, since there were to be for the time no preparations in Seymour Street. She was willing to take it for out of the way of his nerves.

She never needed urging however to go to Brinton, the dearest old house in the world, where the happiest days of her young life had been spent and the silent nearness of her mother always seemed greatest. She was happy again, with Beatrice and Muriel and Miss Flynn, with the air of summer and the haunted rooms and her mother’s garden and the talking oaks and the nightingales. She wrote briefly to her father, giving him, as he had requested, an account of things; and he wrote back that since she was so contented—she didn’t recognise having told him that—she had better not return to town at all. The fag-end of the London season would be unimportant to her, and he was getting on very well. He mentioned that Godfrey had passed his tests, but, as she knew, there would be a tiresome wait before news of results. The poor chap was going abroad for a month with young Sherard—he had earned a little rest and a little fun. He went abroad without a word to Adela, but in his beautiful little hand he took a chaffing leave of Beatrice. The child showed her sister the letter, of which she was very proud and which contained no message for any one else. This was the worst bitterness of the whole crisis for that somebody—its placing in so strange a light the creature in the world whom, after her mother, she had loved best.

Colonel Chart had said he would “run down” while his children were at Brinton, but they heard no more about it. He only wrote two or three times to Miss Flynn on matters in regard to which Adela was surprised he shouldn’t have communicated with herself. Muriel accomplished an upright little letter to Mrs. Churchley—her eldest sister neither fostered nor discouraged the performance—to which Mrs. Churchley replied, after a fortnight, in a meagre and, as Adela thought, illiterate fashion, making no allusion to the approach of any closer tie. Evidently the situation had changed; the question of the marriage was dropped, at any rate for the time. This idea gave our young woman a singular and almost intoxicating sense

of power; she felt as if she were riding a great wave of confidence. She had decided and acted—the greatest could do no more than that. The grand thing was to see one's results, and what else was she doing? These results were in big rich conspicuous lives; the stage was large on which she moved her figures. Such a vision was exciting, and as they had the use of a couple of ponies at Brinton she worked off her excitement by a long gallop. A day or two after this however came news of which the effect was to rekindle it. Godfrey had come back, the list had been published, he had passed first. These happy tidings proceeded from the young man himself; he announced them by a telegram to Beatrice, who had never in her life before received such a missive and was proportionately inflated. Adela reflected that she herself ought to have felt snubbed, but she was too happy. They were free again, they were themselves, the nightmare of the previous weeks was blown away, the unity and dignity of her father's life restored, and, to round off her sense of success, Godfrey had achieved his first step toward high distinction. She wrote him the next day as frankly and affectionately as if there had been no estrangement between them, and besides telling him how she rejoiced in his triumph begged him in charity to let them know exactly how the case stood with regard to Mrs. Churchley.

Late in the summer afternoon she walked through the park to the village with her letter, posted it and came back. Suddenly, at one of the turns of the avenue, half-way to the house, she saw a young man hover there as if awaiting her—a young man who proved to be Godfrey on his pedestrian progress over from the station. He had seen her as he took his short cut, and if he had come down to Brinton it wasn't apparently to avoid her. There was nevertheless none of the joy of his triumph in his face as he came a very few steps to meet her; and although, stiffly enough, he let her kiss him and say "I'm so glad—I'm so glad!" she felt this tolerance as not quite the mere calm of the rising diplomatist. He turned toward the house with her and walked on a short distance while she uttered the hope that he had come to stay some days.

"Only till to-morrow morning. They're sending me straight to Madrid. I came down to say good-bye; there's a fellow bringing my bags."

"To Madrid? How awfully nice! And it's awfully nice of you to have come," she said as she passed her hand into his arm.

The movement made him stop, and, stopping, he turned on her in a flash a face of something more than, suspicion—of passionate reprobation. "What I really came for—you might as well know without more delay—is to ask you a question."

"A question?"—she echoed it with a beating heart.

They stood there under the old trees in the lingering light, and, young and fine and fair as they both were, formed a complete superficial harmony with the peaceful English scene. A near view, however, would have shown that Godfrey Chart hadn't taken so much trouble only to skim the surface. He looked deep into his sister's eyes. "What was it you said that morning to Mrs. Churchley?"

She fixed them on the ground a moment, but at last met his own again. "If she has told you, why do you ask?"

"She has told me nothing. I've seen for myself."

"What have you seen?"

"She has broken it off. Everything's over. Father's in the depths."

"In the depths?" the girl quavered.

“Did you think it would make him jolly?” he went on.

She had to choose what to say. “He’ll get over it. He’ll be glad.”

“That remains to be seen. You interfered, you invented something, you got round her. I insist on knowing what you did.”

Adela felt that if it was a question of obstinacy there was something within her she could count on; in spite of which, while she stood looking down again a moment, she said to herself “I could be dumb and dogged if I chose, but I scorn to be.” She wasn’t ashamed of what she had done, but she wanted to be clear. “Are you absolutely certain it’s broken off?”

“He is, and she is; so that’s as good.”

“What reason has she given?”

“None at all—or half a dozen; it’s the same thing. She has changed her mind—she mistook her feelings—she can’t part with her independence. Moreover he has too many children.”

“Did he tell you this?” the girl asked.

“Mrs. Churchley told me. She has gone abroad for a year.”

“And she didn’t tell you what I said to her?”

Godfrey showed an impatience. “Why should I take this trouble if she had?”

“You might have taken it to make me suffer,” said Adela. “That appears to be what you want to do.”

“No, I leave that to you—it’s the good turn you’ve done me!” cried the young man with hot tears in his eyes.

She stared, aghast with the perception that there was some dreadful thing she didn’t know; but he walked on, dropping the question angrily and turning his back to her as if he couldn’t trust himself. She read his disgust in his averted face, in the way he squared his shoulders and smote the ground with his stick, and she hurried after him and presently overtook him. She kept by him for a moment in silence; then she broke out: “What do you mean? What in the world have I done to you?”

“She would have helped me. She was all ready to help me,” Godfrey portentously said.

“Helped you in what?” She wondered what he meant; if he had made debts that he was afraid to confess to his father and—of all horrible things—had been looking to Mrs. Churchley to pay. She turned red with the mere apprehension of this and, on the heels of her guess, exulted again at having perhaps averted such a shame.

“Can’t you just see I’m in trouble? Where are your eyes, your senses, your sympathy, that you talk so much about? Haven’t you seen these six months that I’ve a curst worry in my life?”

She seized his arm, made him stop, stood looking up at him like a frightened little girl. “What’s the matter, Godfrey?—what *is* the matter?”

“You’ve gone against me so—I could strangle you!” he growled. This image added nothing to her dread; her dread was that he had done some wrong, was stained with some guilt. She uttered it to him with clasped hands, begging him to tell her the worst; but, still more passionately, he cut her short with his own cry: “In God’s name, satisfy me! What infernal thing did you do?”

“It wasn’t infernal—it was right. I told her mamma had been wretched,” said Adela.

“Wretched? You told her such a lie?”

“It was the only way, and she believed me.”

“Wretched how?—wretched when?—wretched where?” the young man stammered.

“I told her papa had made her so, and that *she* ought to know it. I told her the question troubled me unspeakably, but that I had made up my mind it was my duty to initiate her.” Adela paused, the light of bravado in her face, as if, though struck while the words came with the monstrosity of what she had done, she was incapable of abating a jot of it. “I notified her that he had faults and peculiarities that made mamma’s life a long worry—a martyrdom that she hid wonderfully from the world, but that we saw and that I had often pitied. I told her what they were, these faults and peculiarities; I put the dots on the i’s. I said it wasn’t fair to let another person marry him without a warning. I warned her; I satisfied my conscience. She could do as she liked. My responsibility was over.”

Godfrey gazed at her; he listened with parted lips, incredulous and appalled. “You invented such a tissue of falsities and calumnies, and you talk about your conscience? You stand there in your senses and proclaim your crime?”

“I’d have committed any crime that would have rescued us.”

“You insult and blacken and ruin your own father?” Godfrey kept on.

“He’ll never know it; she took a vow she wouldn’t tell him.”

“Ah I’ll be damned if *I* won’t tell him!” he rang out.

Adela felt sick at this, but she flamed up to resent the treachery, as it struck her, of such a menace. “I did right—I did right!” she vehemently declared “I went down on my knees to pray for guidance, and I saved mamma’s memory from outrage. But if I hadn’t, if I hadn’t”—she faltered an instant—“I’m not worse than you, and I’m not so bad, for you’ve done something that you’re ashamed to tell me.”

He had taken out his watch; he looked at it with quick intensity, as if not hearing nor heeding her. Then, his calculating eyes raised, he fixed her long enough to exclaim with unsurpassable horror and contempt: “You raving maniac!” He turned away from her; he bounded down the avenue in the direction from which they had come, and, while she watched him, strode away, across the grass, toward the short cut to the station.

IV

His bags, by the time she got home, had been brought to the house, but Beatrice and Muriel, immediately informed of this, waited for their brother in vain. Their sister said nothing to them of her having seen him, and she accepted after a little, with a calmness that surprised herself, the idea that he had returned to town to denounce her. She believed this would make no difference now—she had done what she had done. She had somehow a stiff faith in Mrs. Churchley. Once that so considerable mass had received its impetus it wouldn’t, it couldn’t pull up. It represented a heavy-footed person, incapable of further agility. Adela recognised too how well it might have come over her that there were too many children. Lastly the girl fortified herself with the reflexion, grotesque in the conditions and conducing to prove her sense of humour not high, that her father was after all not a man to be played with. It seemed to her at any rate that if she *had* baffled his unholy purpose she could bear anything—bear imprisonment and bread and water, bear lashes and torture, bear even his lifelong reproach. What she could bear least was the wonder of the inconvenience she had inflicted on Godfrey. She had time to turn this over, very vainly, for a succession of days—days more numerous than she had expected, which passed without bringing her from London any

summons to come up and take her punishment. She sounded the possible, she compared the degrees of the probable; feeling however that as a cloistered girl she was poorly equipped for speculation. She tried to imagine the calamitous things young men might do, and could only feel that such things would naturally be connected either with borrowed money or with bad women. She became conscious that after all she knew almost nothing about either of those interests. The worst woman she knew was Mrs. Churchley herself. Meanwhile there was no reverberation from Seymour Street—only a sultry silence.

At Brinton she spent hours in her mother's garden, where she had grown up, where she considered that she was training for old age, since she meant not to depend on whist. She loved the place as, had she been a good Catholic, she would have loved the smell of her parish church; and indeed there was in her passion for flowers something of the respect of a religion. They seemed to her the only things in the world that really respected themselves, unless one made an exception for Nutkins, who had been in command all through her mother's time, with whom she had had a real friendship and who had been affected by their pure example. He was the person left in the world with whom on the whole she could speak most intimately of the dead. They never had to name her together—they only said "she"; and Nutkins freely conceded that she had taught him everything he knew. When Beatrice and Muriel said "she" they referred to Mrs. Churchley. Adela had reason to believe she should never marry, and that some day she should have about a thousand a year. This made her see in the far future a little garden of her own, under a hill, full of rare and exquisite things, where she would spend most of her old age on her knees with an apron and stout gloves, with a pair of shears and a trowel, steeped in the comfort of being thought mad.

One morning ten days after her scene with Godfrey, on coming back into the house shortly before lunch, she was met by Miss Flynn with the notification that a lady in the drawing-room had been waiting for her for some minutes. "A lady" suggested immediately Mrs. Churchley. It came over Adela that the form in which her penalty was to descend would be a personal explanation with that misdirected woman. The lady had given no name, and Miss Flynn hadn't seen Mrs. Churchley; nevertheless the governess was certain Adela's surmise was wrong.

"Is she big and dreadful?" the girl asked.

Miss Flynn, who was circumspection itself, took her time. "She's dreadful, but she's not big." She added that she wasn't sure she ought to let Adela go in alone; but this young lady took herself throughout for a heroine, and it wasn't in a heroine to shrink from any encounter. Wasn't she every instant in transcendent contact with her mother? The visitor might have no connexion whatever with the drama of her father's frustrated marriage; but everything to-day for Adela was part of that.

Miss Flynn's description had prepared her for a considerable shock, but she wasn't agitated by her first glimpse of the person who awaited her. A youngish well-dressed woman stood there, and silence was between them while they looked at each other. Before either had spoken however Adela began to see what Miss Flynn had intended. In the light of the drawing-room window the lady was five-and-thirty years of age and had vivid yellow hair. She also had a blue cloth suit with brass buttons, a stick-up collar like a gentleman's, a necktie arranged in a sailor's knot, a golden pin in the shape of a little lawn-tennis racket, and pearl-grey gloves with big black stitchings. Adela's second impression was that she was an actress, and her third that no such person had ever before crossed that threshold.

"I'll tell you what I've come for," said the apparition. "I've come to ask you to intercede." She wasn't an actress; an actress would have had a nicer voice.

“To intercede?” Adela was too bewildered to ask her to sit down.

“With your father, you know. He doesn’t know, but he’ll have to.” Her “have” sounded like “‘ave.” She explained, with many more such sounds, that she was Mrs. Godfrey, that they had been married seven mortal months. If Godfrey was going abroad she must go with him, and the only way she could go with him would be for his father to do something. He was afraid of his father—that was clear; he was afraid even to tell him. What she had come down for was to see some other member of the family face to face—“fice to fice,” Mrs. Godfrey called it—and try if he couldn’t be approached by another side. If no one else would act then she would just have to act herself. The Colonel would have to do something—that was the only way out of it.

What really happened Adela never quite understood; what seemed to be happening was that the room went round and round. Through the blur of perception accompanying this effect the sharp stabs of her visitor’s revelation came to her like the words heard by a patient “going off” under ether. She afterwards denied passionately even to herself that she had done anything so abject as to faint; but there was a lapse in her consciousness on the score of Miss Flynn’s intervention. This intervention had evidently been active, for when they talked the matter over, later in the day, with bated breath and infinite dissimulation for the school-room quarter, the governess had more lurid truths, and still more, to impart than to receive. She was at any rate under the impression that she had athletically contended, in the drawing-room, with the yellow hair—this after removing Adela from the scene and before inducing Mrs. Godfrey to withdraw. Miss Flynn had never known a more thrilling day, for all the rest of it too was pervaded with agitations and conversations, precautions and alarms. It was given out to Beatrice and Muriel that their sister had been taken suddenly ill, and the governess ministered to her in her room. Indeed Adela had never found herself less at ease, for this time she had received a blow that she couldn’t return. There was nothing to do but to take it, to endure the humiliation of her wound.

At first she declined to take it—having, as might appear, the much more attractive resource of regarding her visitant as a mere masquerading person, an impudent impostor. On the face of the matter moreover it wasn’t fair to believe till one heard; and to hear in such a case was to hear Godfrey himself. Whatever she had tried to imagine about him she hadn’t arrived at anything so belittling as an idiotic secret marriage with a dyed and painted hag. Adela repeated this last word as if it gave her comfort; and indeed where everything was so bad fifteen years of seniority made the case little worse. Miss Flynn was portentous, for Miss Flynn had had it out with the wretch. She had cross-questioned her and had not broken her down. This was the most uplifted hour of Miss Flynn’s life; for whereas she usually had to content herself with being humbly and gloomily in the right she could now be magnanimously and showily so. Her only perplexity was as to what she ought to do—write to Colonel Chart or go up to town to see him. She bloomed with alternatives—she resembled some dull garden-path which under a copious downpour has begun to flaunt with colour. Toward evening Adela was obliged to recognise that her brother’s worry, of which he had spoken to her, had appeared bad enough to consist even of a low wife, and to remember that, so far from its being inconceivable a young man in his position should clandestinely take one, she had been present, years before, during her mother’s lifetime, when Lady Molesley declared gaily, over a cup of tea, that this was precisely what she expected of her eldest son. The next morning it was the worst possibilities that seemed clearest; the only thing left with a tatter of dusky comfort being the ambiguity of Godfrey’s charge that her own action had “done” for him. That was a matter by itself, and she racked her brains for a connecting link between Mrs. Churchley and Mrs. Godfrey. At last she made up her mind

that they were related by blood; very likely, though differing in fortune, they were cousins or even sisters. But even then what did the wretched boy mean?

Arrested by the unnatural fascination of opportunity, Miss Flynn received before lunch a telegram from Colonel Chart—an order for dinner and a vehicle; he and Godfrey were to arrive at six o'clock. Adela had plenty of occupation for the interval, since she was pitying her father when she wasn't rejoicing that her mother had gone too soon to know. She flattered herself she made out the providential reason of that cruelty now. She found time however still to wonder for what purpose, given the situation, Godfrey was to be brought down. She wasn't unconscious indeed that she had little general knowledge of what usually was done with young men in that predicament. One talked about the situation, but the situation was an abyss. She felt this still more when she found, on her father's arrival, that nothing apparently was to happen as she had taken for granted it would. There was an inviolable hush over the whole affair, but no tragedy, no publicity, nothing ugly. The tragedy had been in town—the faces of the two men spoke of it in spite of their other perfunctory aspects; and at present there was only a family dinner, with Beatrice and Muriel and the governess—with almost a company tone too, the result of the desire to avoid publicity. Adela admired her father; she knew what he was feeling if Mrs. Godfrey had been at him, and yet she saw him positively gallant. He was mildly austere, or rather even—what was it?—august; just as, coldly equivocal, he never looked at his son, so that at moments he struck her as almost sick with sadness. Godfrey was equally inscrutable and therefore wholly different from what he had been as he stood before her in the park. If he was to start on his career (with such a wife!—wouldn't she utterly blight it?) he was already professional enough to know how to wear a mask.

Before they rose from table she felt herself wholly bewildered, so little were such large causes traceable in their effects. She had nerved herself for a great ordeal, but the air was as sweet as an anodyne. It was perfectly plain to her that her father was deadly sore—as pathetic as a person betrayed. He was broken, but he showed no resentment; there was a weight on his heart, but he had lightened it by dressing as immaculately as usual for dinner. She asked herself what immensity of a row there could have been in town to have left his anger so spent. He went through everything, even to sitting with his son after dinner. When they came out together he invited Beatrice and Muriel to the billiard-room, and as Miss Flynn discreetly withdrew Adela was left alone with Godfrey, who was completely changed and not now in the least of a rage. He was broken too, but not so pathetic as his father. He was only very correct and apologetic he said to his sister: "I'm awfully sorry *you* were annoyed—it was something I never dreamed of."

She couldn't think immediately what he meant; then she grasped the reference to her extraordinary invader. She was uncertain, however, what tone to take; perhaps his father had arranged with him that they were to make the best of it. But she spoke her own despair in the way she murmured "Oh Godfrey, Godfrey, is it true?"

"I've been the most unutterable donkey—you can say what you like to me. You can't say anything worse than I've said to myself."

"My brother, my brother!"—his words made her wail it out. He hushed her with a movement and she asked: "What has father said?"

He looked very high over her head. "He'll give her six hundred a year."

"Ah the angel!"—it was too splendid.

"On condition"—Godfrey scarce blinked—"she never comes near me. She has solemnly promised, and she'll probably leave me alone to get the money. If she doesn't—in

diplomacy—I'm lost." He had been turning his eyes vaguely about, this way and that, to avoid meeting hers; but after another instant he gave up the effort and she had the miserable confession of his glance. "I've been living in hell."

"My brother, my brother!" she yearningly repeated.

"I'm not an idiot; yet for her I've behaved like one. Don't ask me—you mustn't know. It was all done in a day, and since then fancy my condition; fancy my work in such a torment; fancy my coming through at all."

"Thank God you passed!" she cried. "You were wonderful!"

"I'd have shot myself if I hadn't been. I had an awful day yesterday with the governor; it was late at night before it was over. I leave England next week. He brought me down here for it to look well—so that the children shan't know."

"*He's* wonderful too!" Adela murmured.

"Wonderful too!" Godfrey echoed.

"Did *she* tell him?" the girl went on.

"She came straight to Seymour Street from here. She saw him alone first; then he called me in. *That* luxury lasted about an hour."

"Poor, poor father!" Adela moaned at this; on which her brother remained silent. Then after he had alluded to it as the scene he had lived in terror of all through his cramming, and she had sighed forth again her pity and admiration for such a mixture of anxieties and such a triumph of talent, she pursued: "Have you told him?"

"Told him what?"

"What you said you would—what *I* did."

Godfrey turned away as if at present he had very little interest in that inferior tribulation. "I was angry with you, but I cooled off. I held my tongue."

She clasped her hands. "You thought of mamma!"

"Oh don't speak of mamma!" he cried as in rueful tenderness.

It was indeed not a happy moment, and she murmured: "No; if you *had* thought of her—!"

This made Godfrey face her again with a small flare in his eyes. "Oh *then* it didn't prevent. I thought that woman really good. I believed in her."

"Is she *very* bad?"

"I shall never mention her to you again," he returned with dignity.

"You may believe *I* won't speak of her! So father doesn't know?" the girl added.

"Doesn't know what?"

"That I said what I did to Mrs. Churchley."

He had a momentary pause. "I don't think so, but you must find out for yourself."

"I shall find out," said Adela. "But what had Mrs. Churchley to do with it?"

"With *my* misery? I told her. I had to tell some one."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

He appeared—though but after an instant—to know exactly why. “Oh you take things so beastly hard—you make such rows.” Adela covered her face with her hands and he went on: “What I wanted was comfort—not to be lashed up. I thought I should go mad. I wanted Mrs. Churchley to break it to father, to intercede for me and help him to meet it. She was awfully kind to me, she listened and she understood; she could fancy how it had happened. Without her I shouldn’t have pulled through. She liked me, you know,” he further explained, and as if it were quite worth mentioning—all the more that it was pleasant to him. “She said she’d do what she could for me. She was full of sympathy and resource. I really leaned on her. But when *you* cut in of course it spoiled everything. That’s why I was so furious with you. She couldn’t do anything then.”

Adela dropped her hands, staring; she felt she had walked in darkness. “So that he had to meet it alone?”

“*Dame!*” said Godfrey, who had got up his French tremendously.

Muriel came to the door to say papa wished the two others to join them, and the next day Godfrey returned to town. His father remained at Brinton, without an intermission, the rest of the summer and the whole of the autumn, and Adela had a chance to find out, as she had said, whether he knew she had interfered. But in spite of her chance she never found out. He knew Mrs. Churchley had thrown him over and he knew his daughter rejoiced in it, but he appeared not to have divined the relation between the two facts. It was strange that one of the matters he was clearest about—Adela’s secret triumph—should have been just the thing which from this time on justified less and less such a confidence. She was too sorry for him to be consistently glad. She watched his attempts to wind himself up on the subject of shorthorns and drainage, and she favoured to the utmost of her ability his intermittent disposition to make a figure in orchids. She wondered whether they mightn’t have a few people at Brinton; but when she mentioned the idea he asked what in the world there would be to attract them. It was a confoundedly stupid house, he remarked—with all respect to *her* cleverness. Beatrice and Muriel were mystified; the prospect of going out immensely had faded so utterly away. They were apparently not to go out at all. Colonel Chart was aimless and bored; he paced up and down and went back to smoking, which was bad for him, and looked drearily out of windows as if on the bare chance that something might arrive. Did he expect Mrs. Churchley to arrive, did he expect her to relent on finding she couldn’t live without him? It was Adela’s belief that she gave no sign. But the girl thought it really remarkable of her not to have betrayed her ingenious young visitor. Adela’s judgement of human nature was perhaps harsh, but she believed that most women, given the various facts, wouldn’t have been so forbearing. This lady’s conception of the point of honour placed her there in a finer and purer light than had at all originally promised to shine about her.

She meanwhile herself could well judge how heavy her father found the burden of Godfrey’s folly and how he was incommoded at having to pay the horrible woman six hundred a year. Doubtless he was having dreadful letters from her; doubtless she threatened them all with hideous exposure. If the matter should be bruited Godfrey’s prospects would collapse on the spot. He thought Madrid very charming and curious, but Mrs. Godfrey was in England, so that his father had to face the music. Adela took a dolorous comfort in her mother’s being out of that—it would have killed her; but this didn’t blind her to the fact that the comfort for her father would perhaps have been greater if he had had some one to talk to about his trouble. He never dreamed of doing so to her, and she felt she couldn’t ask him. In the family life he wanted utter silence about it. Early in the winter he went abroad for ten weeks, leaving her with her sisters in the country, where it was not to be denied that at this time existence had very little savour. She half expected her sister-in-law would again

descend on her; but the fear wasn't justified, and the quietude of the awful creature seemed really to vibrate with the ring of gold-pieces. There were sure to be extras. Adela winced at the extras. Colonel Chart went to Paris and to Monte Carlo and then to Madrid to see his boy. His daughter had the vision of his perhaps meeting Mrs. Churchley somewhere, since, if she had gone for a year, she would still be on the Continent. If he should meet her perhaps the affair would come on again: she caught herself musing over this. But he brought back no such appearance, and, seeing him after an interval, she was struck afresh with his jilted and wasted air. She didn't like it—she resented it. A little more and she would have said that that was no way to treat so faithful a man.

They all went up to town in March, and on one of the first days of April she saw Mrs. Churchley in the Park. She herself remained apparently invisible to that lady—she herself and Beatrice and Muriel, who sat with her in their mother's old bottle-green landau. Mrs. Churchley, perched higher than ever, rode by without a recognition; but this didn't prevent Adela's going to her before the month was over. As on her great previous occasion she went in the morning, and she again had the good fortune to be admitted. This time, however, her visit was shorter, and a week after making it—the week was a desolation—she addressed to her brother at Madrid a letter containing these words: "I could endure it no longer—I confessed and retracted; I explained to her as well as I could the falsity of what I said to her ten months ago and the benighted purity of my motives for saying it. I besought her to regard it as unsaid, to forgive me, not to despise me too much, to take pity on poor *perfect* papa and come back to him. She was more good-natured than you might have expected—indeed she laughed extravagantly. She had never believed me—it was too absurd; she had only, at the time, disliked me. She found me utterly false—she was very frank with me about this—and she told papa she really thought me horrid. She said she could never live with such a girl, and as I would certainly never marry I must be sent away—in short she quite loathed me. Papa defended me, he refused to sacrifice me, and this led practically to their rupture. Papa gave her up, as it were, for *me*. Fancy the angel, and fancy what I must try to be to him for the rest of his life! Mrs. Churchley can never come back—she's going to marry Lord Dovedale."

The Chaperon

I.

An old lady, in a high drawing-room, had had her chair moved close to the fire, where she sat knitting and warming her knees. She was dressed in deep mourning; her face had a faded nobleness, tempered, however, by the somewhat illiberal compression assumed by her lips in obedience to something that was passing in her mind. She was far from the lamp, but though her eyes were fixed upon her active needles she was not looking at them. What she really saw was quite another train of affairs. The room was spacious and dim; the thick London fog had oozed into it even through its superior defences. It was full of dusky, massive, valuable things. The old lady sat motionless save for the regularity of her clicking needles, which seemed as personal to her and as expressive as prolonged fingers. If she was thinking something out, she was thinking it thoroughly.

When she looked up, on the entrance of a girl of twenty, it might have been guessed that the appearance of this young lady was not an interruption of her meditation, but rather a contribution to it. The young lady, who was charming to behold, was also in deep mourning, which had a freshness, if mourning can be fresh, an air of having been lately put on. She went straight to the bell beside the chimney-piece and pulled it, while in her other hand she held a sealed and directed letter. Her companion glanced in silence at the letter; then she looked still harder at her work. The girl hovered near the fireplace, without speaking, and after a due, a dignified interval the butler appeared in response to the bell. The time had been sufficient to make the silence between the ladies seem long. The younger one asked the butler to see that her letter should be posted; and after he had gone out she moved vaguely about the room, as if to give her grandmother—for such was the elder personage—a chance to begin a colloquy of which she herself preferred not to strike the first note. As equally with herself her companion was on the face of it capable of holding out, the tension, though it was already late in the evening, might have lasted long. But the old lady after a little appeared to recognise, a trifle ungraciously, the girl's superior resources.

“Have you written to your mother?”

“Yes, but only a few lines, to tell her I shall come and see her in the morning.”

“Is that all you've got to say?” asked the grandmother.

“I don't quite know what you want me to say.”

“I want you to say that you've made up your mind.”

“Yes, I've done that, granny.”

“You intend to respect your father's wishes?”

“It depends upon what you mean by respecting them. I do justice to the feelings by which they were dictated.”

“What do you mean by justice?” the old lady retorted.

The girl was silent a moment; then she said: “You'll see my idea of it.”

“I see it already! You'll go and live with her.”

“I shall talk the situation over with her to-morrow and tell her that I think that will be best.”

“Best for her, no doubt!”

“What’s best for her is best for me.”

“And for your brother and sister?” As the girl made no reply to this her grandmother went on: “What’s best for them is that you should acknowledge some responsibility in regard to them and, considering how young they are, try and do something for them.”

“They must do as I’ve done—they must act for themselves. They have their means now, and they’re free.”

“Free? They’re mere children.”

“Let me remind you that Eric is older than I.”

“He doesn’t like his mother,” said the old lady, as if that were an answer.

“I never said he did. And she adores him.”

“Oh, your mother’s adorations!”

“Don’t abuse her now,” the girl rejoined, after a pause.

The old lady forbore to abuse her, but she made up for it the next moment by saying: “It will be dreadful for Edith.”

“What will be dreadful?”

“Your desertion of her.”

“The desertion’s on her side.”

“Her consideration for her father does her honour.”

“Of course I’m a brute, *n’en parlons plus*,” said the girl. “We must go our respective ways,” she added, in a tone of extreme wisdom and philosophy.

Her grandmother straightened out her knitting and began to roll it up. “Be so good as to ring for my maid,” she said, after a minute. The young lady rang, and there was another wait and another conscious hush. Before the maid came her mistress remarked: “Of course then you’ll not come to *me*, you know.”

“What do you mean by ‘coming’ to you?”

“I can’t receive you on that footing.”

“She’ll not come *with* me, if you mean that.”

“I don’t mean that,” said the old lady, getting up as her maid came in. This attendant took her work from her, gave her an arm and helped her out of the room, while Rose Tramore, standing before the fire and looking into it, faced the idea that her grandmother’s door would now under all circumstances be closed to her. She lost no time however in brooding over this anomaly: it only added energy to her determination to act. All she could do to-night was to go to bed, for she felt utterly weary. She had been living, in imagination, in a prospective struggle, and it had left her as exhausted as a real fight. Moreover this was the culmination of a crisis, of weeks of suspense, of a long, hard strain. Her father had been laid in his grave five days before, and that morning his will had been read. In the afternoon she had got Edith off to St. Leonard’s with their aunt Julia, and then she had had a wretched talk with Eric. Lastly, she had made up her mind to act in opposition to the formidable will, to a clause which embodied if not exactly a provision, a recommendation singularly emphatic. She went to bed and slept the sleep of the just.

“Oh, my dear, how charming! I must take another house!” It was in these words that her mother responded to the announcement Rose had just formally made and with which she had vaguely expected to produce a certain dignity of effect. In the way of emotion there was apparently no effect at all, and the girl was wise enough to know that this was not simply on account of the general line of non-allusion taken by the extremely pretty woman before her, who looked like her elder sister. Mrs. Tramore had never manifested, to her daughter, the slightest consciousness that her position was peculiar; but the recollection of something more than that fine policy was required to explain such a failure, to appreciate Rose’s sacrifice. It was simply a fresh reminder that she had never appreciated anything, that she was nothing but a tinted and stippled surface. Her situation was peculiar indeed. She had been the heroine of a scandal which had grown dim only because, in the eyes of the London world, it paled in the lurid light of the contemporaneous. That attention had been fixed on it for several days, fifteen years before; there had been a high relish of the vivid evidence as to his wife’s misconduct with which, in the divorce-court, Charles Tramore had judged well to regale a cynical public. The case was pronounced awfully bad, and he obtained his decree. The folly of the wife had been inconceivable, in spite of other examples: she had quitted her children, she had followed the “other fellow” abroad. The other fellow hadn’t married her, not having had time: he had lost his life in the Mediterranean by the capsizing of a boat, before the prohibitory term had expired.

Mrs. Tramore had striven to extract from this accident something of the austerity of widowhood; but her mourning only made her deviation more public, she was a widow whose husband was awkwardly alive. She had not prowled about the Continent on the classic lines; she had come back to London to take her chance. But London would give her no chance, would have nothing to say to her; as many persons had remarked, you could never tell how London would behave. It would not receive Mrs. Tramore again on any terms, and when she was spoken of, which now was not often, it was inveterately said of her that she went nowhere. Apparently she had not the qualities for which London compounds; though in the cases in which it does compound you may often wonder what these qualities are. She had not at any rate been successful: her lover was dead, her husband was liked and her children were pitied, for in payment for a topic London will parenthetically pity. It was thought interesting and magnanimous that Charles Tramore had not married again. The disadvantage to his children of the miserable story was thus left uncorrected, and this, rather oddly, was counted as *his* sacrifice. His mother, whose arrangements were elaborate, looked after them a great deal, and they enjoyed a mixture of laxity and discipline under the roof of their aunt, Miss Tramore, who was independent, having, for reasons that the two ladies had exhaustively discussed, determined to lead her own life. She had set up a home at St. Leonard’s, and that contracted shore had played a considerable part in the upbringing of the little Tramores. They knew about their mother, as the phrase was, but they didn’t know her; which was naturally deemed more pathetic for them than for her. She had a house in Chester Square and an income and a victoria—it served all purposes, as she never went out in the evening—and flowers on her window-sills, and a remarkable appearance of youth. The income was supposed to be in part the result of a bequest from the man for whose sake she had committed the error of her life, and in the appearance of youth there was a slightly impertinent implication that it was a sort of afterglow of the same connection.

Her children, as they grew older, fortunately showed signs of some individuality of disposition. Edith, the second girl, clung to her aunt Julia; Eric, the son, clung frantically to polo; while Rose, the elder daughter, appeared to cling mainly to herself. Collectively, of course, they clung to their father, whose attitude in the family group, however, was casual and intermittent. He was charming and vague; he was like a clever actor who often didn’t

come to rehearsal. Fortune, which but for that one stroke had been generous to him, had provided him with deputies and trouble-takers, as well as with whimsical opinions, and a reputation for excellent taste, and whist at his club, and perpetual cigars on morocco sofas, and a beautiful absence of purpose. Nature had thrown in a remarkably fine hand, which he sometimes passed over his children's heads when they were glossy from the nursery brush. On Rose's eighteenth birthday he said to her that she might go to see her mother, on condition that her visits should be limited to an hour each time and to four in the year. She was to go alone; the other children were not included in the arrangement. This was the result of a visit that he himself had paid his repudiated wife at her urgent request, their only encounter during the fifteen years. The girl knew as much as this from her aunt Julia, who was full of tell-tale secrecies. She availed herself eagerly of the license, and in course of the period that elapsed before her father's death she spent with Mrs. Tramore exactly eight hours by the watch. Her father, who was as inconsistent and disappointing as he was amiable, spoke to her of her mother only once afterwards. This occasion had been the sequel of her first visit, and he had made no use of it to ask what she thought of the personality in Chester Square or how she liked it. He had only said "Did she take you out?" and when Rose answered "Yes, she put me straight into a carriage and drove me up and down Bond Street," had rejoined sharply "See that that never occurs again." It never did, but once was enough, every one they knew having happened to be in Bond Street at that particular hour.

After this the periodical interview took place in private, in Mrs. Tramore's beautiful little wasted drawing-room. Rose knew that, rare as these occasions were, her mother would not have kept her "all to herself" had there been anybody she could have shown her to. But in the poor lady's social void there was no one; she had after all her own correctness and she consistently preferred isolation to inferior contacts. So her daughter was subjected only to the maternal; it was not necessary to be definite in qualifying that. The girl had by this time a collection of ideas, gathered by impenetrable processes; she had tasted, in the ostracism of her ambiguous parent, of the acrid fruit of the tree of knowledge. She not only had an approximate vision of what every one had done, but she had a private judgment for each case. She had a particular vision of her father, which did not interfere with his being dear to her, but which was directly concerned in her resolution, after his death, to do the special thing he had expressed the wish she should not do. In the general estimate her grandmother and her grandmother's money had their place, and the strong probability that any enjoyment of the latter commodity would now be withheld from her. It included Edith's marked inclination to receive the law, and doubtless eventually a more substantial memento, from Miss Tramore, and opened the question whether her own course might not contribute to make her sister's appear heartless. The answer to this question however would depend on the success that might attend her own, which would very possibly be small. Eric's attitude was eminently simple; he didn't care to know people who didn't know *his* people. If his mother should ever get back into society perhaps he would take her up. Rose Tramore had decided to do what she could to bring this consummation about; and strangely enough—so mixed were her superstitions and her heresies—a large part of her motive lay in the value she attached to such a consecration.

Of her mother intrinsically she thought very little now, and if her eyes were fixed on a special achievement it was much more for the sake of that achievement and to satisfy a latent energy that was in her than because her heart was wrung by this sufferer. Her heart had not been wrung at all, though she had quite held it out for the experience. Her purpose was a pious game, but it was still essentially a game. Among the ideas I have mentioned she had her idea of triumph. She had caught the inevitable note, the pitch, on her very first visit to Chester Square. She had arrived there in intense excitement, and her excitement was left on her

hands in a manner that reminded her of a difficult air she had once heard sung at the opera when no one applauded the performer. That flatness had made her sick, and so did this, in another way. A part of her agitation proceeded from the fact that her aunt Julia had told her, in the manner of a burst of confidence, something she was not to repeat, that she was in appearance the very image of the lady in Chester Square. The motive that prompted this declaration was between aunt Julia and her conscience; but it was a great emotion to the girl to find her entertainer so beautiful. She was tall and exquisitely slim; she had hair more exactly to Rose Tramore's taste than any other she had ever seen, even to every detail in the way it was dressed, and a complexion and a figure of the kind that are always spoken of as "lovely." Her eyes were irresistible, and so were her clothes, though the clothes were perhaps a little more precisely the right thing than the eyes. Her appearance was marked to her daughter's sense by the highest distinction; though it may be mentioned that this had never been the opinion of all the world. It was a revelation to Rose that she herself might look a little like that. She knew however that aunt Julia had not seen her deposed sister-in-law for a long time, and she had a general impression that Mrs. Tramore was to-day a more complete production—for instance as regarded her air of youth—than she had ever been. There was no excitement on her side—that was all her visitor's; there was no emotion—that was excluded by the plan, to say nothing of conditions more primal. Rose had from the first a glimpse of her mother's plan. It was to mention nothing and imply nothing, neither to acknowledge, to explain nor to extenuate. She would leave everything to her child; with her child she was secure. She only wanted to get back into society; she would leave even that to her child, whom she treated not as a high-strung and heroic daughter, a creature of exaltation, of devotion, but as a new, charming, clever, useful friend, a little younger than herself. Already on that first day she had talked about dressmakers. Of course, poor thing, it was to be remembered that in her circumstances there were not many things she *could* talk about. "She wants to go out again; that's the only thing in the wide world she wants," Rose had promptly, compendiously said to herself. There had been a sequel to this observation, uttered, in intense engrossment, in her own room half an hour before she had, on the important evening, made known her decision to her grandmother: "Then I'll *take* her out!"

"She'll drag you down, she'll drag you down!" Julia Tramore permitted herself to remark to her niece, the next day, in a tone of feverish prophecy.

As the girl's own theory was that all the dragging there might be would be upward, and moreover administered by herself, she could look at her aunt with a cold and inscrutable eye.

"Very well, then, I shall be out of your sight, from the pinnacle you occupy, and I sha'n't trouble you."

"Do you reproach me for my disinterested exertions, for the way I've toiled over you, the way I've lived for you?" Miss Tramore demanded.

"Don't reproach *me* for being kind to my mother and I won't reproach you for anything."

"She'll keep you out of everything—she'll make you miss everything," Miss Tramore continued.

"Then she'll make me miss a great deal that's odious," said the girl.

"You're too young for such extravagances," her aunt declared.

"And yet Edith, who is younger than I, seems to be too old for them: how do you arrange that? My mother's society will make me older," Rose replied.

"Don't speak to me of your mother; you *have* no mother."

“Then if I’m an orphan I must settle things for myself.”

“Do you justify her, do you approve of her?” cried Miss Tramore, who was inferior to her niece in capacity for retort and whose limitations made the girl appear pert.

Rose looked at her a moment in silence; then she said, turning away: “I think she’s charming.”

“And do you propose to become charming in the same manner?”

“Her manner is perfect; it would be an excellent model. But I can’t discuss my mother with you.”

“You’ll have to discuss her with some other people!” Miss Tramore proclaimed, going out of the room.

Rose wondered whether this were a general or a particular vaticination. There was something her aunt might have meant by it, but her aunt rarely meant the best thing she might have meant. Miss Tramore had come up from St. Leonard’s in response to a telegram from her own parent, for an occasion like the present brought with it, for a few hours, a certain relaxation of their dissent. “Do what you can to stop her,” the old lady had said; but her daughter found that the most she could do was not much. They both had a baffled sense that Rose had thought the question out a good deal further than they; and this was particularly irritating to Mrs. Tramore, as consciously the cleverer of the two. A question thought out as far as *she* could think it had always appeared to her to have performed its human uses; she had never encountered a ghost emerging from that extinction. Their great contention was that Rose would cut herself off; and certainly if she wasn’t afraid of that she wasn’t afraid of anything. Julia Tramore could only tell her mother how little the girl was afraid. She was already prepared to leave the house, taking with her the possessions, or her share of them, that had accumulated there during her father’s illness. There had been a going and coming of her maid, a thumping about of boxes, an ordering of four-wheelers; it appeared to old Mrs. Tramore that something of the objectionableness, the indecency, of her granddaughter’s prospective connection had already gathered about the place. It was a violation of the decorum of bereavement which was still fresh there, and from the indignant gloom of the mistress of the house you might have inferred not so much that the daughter was about to depart as that the mother was about to arrive. There had been no conversation on the dreadful subject at luncheon; for at luncheon at Mrs. Tramore’s (her son never came to it) there were always, even after funerals and other miseries, stray guests of both sexes whose policy it was to be cheerful and superficial. Rose had sat down as if nothing had happened—nothing worse, that is, than her father’s death; but no one had spoken of anything that any one else was thinking of.

Before she left the house a servant brought her a message from her grandmother—the old lady desired to see her in the drawing-room. She had on her bonnet, and she went down as if she were about to step into her cab. Mrs. Tramore sat there with her eternal knitting, from which she forebore even to raise her eyes as, after a silence that seemed to express the fulness of her reprobation, while Rose stood motionless, she began: “I wonder if you really understand what you’re doing.”

“I think so. I’m not so stupid.”

“I never thought you were; but I don’t know what to make of you now. You’re giving up everything.”

The girl was tempted to inquire whether her grandmother called herself “everything”; but she checked this question, answering instead that she knew she was giving up much.

“You’re taking a step of which you will feel the effect to the end of your days,” Mrs. Tramore went on.

“In a good conscience, I heartily hope,” said Rose.

“Your father’s conscience was good enough for his mother; it ought to be good enough for his daughter.”

Rose sat down—she could afford to—as if she wished to be very attentive and were still accessible to argument. But this demonstration only ushered in, after a moment, the surprising words “I don’t think papa had any conscience.”

“What in the name of all that’s unnatural do you mean?” Mrs. Tramore cried, over her glasses. “The dearest and best creature that ever lived!”

“He was kind, he had charming impulses, he was delightful. But he never reflected.”

Mrs. Tramore stared, as if at a language she had never heard, a farrago, a *galimatias*. Her life was made up of items, but she had never had to deal, intellectually, with a fine shade. Then while her needles, which had paused an instant, began to fly again, she rejoined: “Do you know what you are, my dear? You’re a dreadful little prig. Where do you pick up such talk?”

“Of course I don’t mean to judge between them,” Rose pursued. “I can only judge between my mother and myself. Papa couldn’t judge for me.” And with this she got up.

“One would think you were horrid. I never thought so before.”

“Thank you for that.”

“You’re embarking on a struggle with society,” continued Mrs. Tramore, indulging in an unusual flight of oratory. “Society will put you in your place.”

“Hasn’t it too many other things to do?” asked the girl.

This question had an ingenuity which led her grandmother to meet it with a merely provisional and somewhat sketchy answer. “Your ignorance would be melancholy if your behaviour were not so insane.”

“Oh, no; I know perfectly what she’ll do!” Rose replied, almost gaily. “She’ll drag me down.”

“She won’t even do that,” the old lady declared contradictiously. “She’ll keep you forever in the same dull hole.”

“I shall come and see *you*, granny, when I want something more lively.”

“You may come if you like, but you’ll come no further than the door. If you leave this house now you don’t enter it again.”

Rose hesitated a moment. “Do you really mean that?”

“You may judge whether I choose such a time to joke.”

“Good-bye, then,” said the girl.

“Good-bye.”

Rose quitted the room successfully enough; but on the other side of the door, on the landing, she sank into a chair and buried her face in her hands. She had burst into tears, and she sobbed there for a moment, trying hard to recover herself, so as to go downstairs without showing any traces of emotion, passing before the servants and again perhaps before aunt

Julia. Mrs. Tramore was too old to cry; she could only drop her knitting and, for a long time, sit with her head bowed and her eyes closed.

Rose had reckoned justly with her aunt Julia; there were no footmen, but this vigilant virgin was posted at the foot of the stairs. She offered no challenge however; she only said: "There's some one in the parlour who wants to see you." The girl demanded a name, but Miss Tramore only mouthed inaudibly and winked and waved. Rose instantly reflected that there was only one man in the world her aunt would look such deep things about. "Captain Jay?" her own eyes asked, while Miss Tramore's were those of a conspirator: they were, for a moment, the only embarrassed eyes Rose had encountered that day. They contributed to make aunt Julia's further response evasive, after her niece inquired if she had communicated in advance with this visitor. Miss Tramore merely said that he had been upstairs with her mother—hadn't she mentioned it?—and had been waiting for her. She thought herself acute in not putting the question of the girl's seeing him before her as a favour to him or to herself; she presented it as a duty, and wound up with the proposition: "It's not fair to him, it's not kind, not to let him speak to you before you go."

"What does he want to say?" Rose demanded.

"Go in and find out."

She really knew, for she had found out before; but after standing uncertain an instant she went in. "The parlour" was the name that had always been borne by a spacious sitting-room downstairs, an apartment occupied by her father during his frequent phases of residence in Hill Street—episodes increasingly frequent after his house in the country had, in consequence, as Rose perfectly knew, of his spending too much money, been disposed of at a sacrifice which he always characterised as horrid. He had been left with the place in Hertfordshire and his mother with the London house, on the general understanding that they would change about; but during the last years the community had grown more rigid, mainly at his mother's expense. The parlour was full of his memory and his habits and his things—his books and pictures and *bibelots*, objects that belonged now to Eric. Rose had sat in it for hours since his death; it was the place in which she could still be nearest to him. But she felt far from him as Captain Jay rose erect on her opening the door. This was a very different presence. He had not liked Captain Jay. She herself had, but not enough to make a great complication of her father's coldness. This afternoon however she foresaw complications. At the very outset for instance she was not pleased with his having arranged such a surprise for her with her grandmother and her aunt. It was probably aunt Julia who had sent for him; her grandmother wouldn't have done it. It placed him immediately on their side, and Rose was almost as disappointed at this as if she had not known it was quite where he would naturally be. He had never paid her a special visit, but if that was what he wished to do why shouldn't he have waited till she should be under her mother's roof? She knew the reason, but she had an angry prospect of enjoyment in making him express it. She liked him enough, after all, if it were measured by the idea of what she could make him do.

In Bertram Jay the elements were surprisingly mingled; you would have gone astray, in reading him, if you had counted on finding the complements of some of his qualities. He would not however have struck you in the least as incomplete, for in every case in which you didn't find the complement you would have found the contradiction. He was in the Royal Engineers, and was tall, lean and high-shouldered. He looked every inch a soldier, yet there were people who considered that he had missed his vocation in not becoming a parson. He took a public interest in the spiritual life of the army. Other persons still, on closer observation, would have felt that his most appropriate field was neither the army nor the church, but simply the world—the social, successful, worldly world. If he had a sword in one

hand and a Bible in the other he had a Court Guide concealed somewhere about his person. His profile was hard and handsome, his eyes were both cold and kind, his dark straight hair was imperturbably smooth and prematurely streaked with grey. There was nothing in existence that he didn't take seriously. He had a first-rate power of work and an ambition as minutely organised as a German plan of invasion. His only real recreation was to go to church, but he went to parties when he had time. If he was in love with Rose Tramore this was distracting to him only in the same sense as his religion, and it was included in that department of his extremely sub-divided life. His religion indeed was of an encroaching, annexing sort. Seen from in front he looked diffident and blank, but he was capable of exposing himself in a way (to speak only of the paths of peace) wholly inconsistent with shyness. He had a passion for instance for open-air speaking, but was not thought on the whole to excel in it unless he could help himself out with a hymn. In conversation he kept his eyes on you with a kind of colourless candour, as if he had not understood what you were saying and, in a fashion that made many people turn red, waited before answering. This was only because he was considering their remarks in more relations than they had intended. He had in his face no expression whatever save the one just mentioned, and was, in his profession, already very distinguished.

He had seen Rose Tramore for the first time on a Sunday of the previous March, at a house in the country at which she was staying with her father, and five weeks later he had made her, by letter, an offer of marriage. She showed her father the letter of course, and he told her that it would give him great pleasure that she should send Captain Jay about his business. "My dear child," he said, "we must really have some one who will be better fun than that." Rose had declined the honour, very considerately and kindly, but not simply because her father wished it. She didn't herself wish to detach this flower from the stem, though when the young man wrote again, to express the hope that he *might* hope—so long was he willing to wait—and ask if he might not still sometimes see her, she answered even more indulgently than at first. She had shown her father her former letter, but she didn't show him this one; she only told him what it contained, submitting to him also that of her correspondent. Captain Jay moreover wrote to Mr. Tramore, who replied sociably, but so vaguely that he almost neglected the subject under discussion—a communication that made poor Bertram ponder long. He could never get to the bottom of the superficial, and all the proprieties and conventions of life were profound to him. Fortunately for him old Mrs. Tramore liked him, he was satisfactory to her long-sightedness; so that a relation was established under cover of which he still occasionally presented himself in Hill Street—presented himself nominally to the mistress of the house. He had had scruples about the veracity of his visits, but he had disposed of them; he had scruples about so many things that he had had to invent a general way, to dig a central drain. Julia Tramore happened to meet him when she came up to town, and she took a view of him more benevolent than her usual estimate of people encouraged by her mother. The fear of agreeing with that lady was a motive, but there was a stronger one, in this particular case, in the fear of agreeing with her niece, who had rejected him. His situation might be held to have improved when Mr. Tramore was taken so gravely ill that with regard to his recovery those about him left their eyes to speak for their lips; and in the light of the poor gentleman's recent death it was doubtless better than it had ever been.

He was only a quarter of an hour with the girl, but this gave him time to take the measure of it. After he had spoken to her about her bereavement, very much as an especially mild missionary might have spoken to a beautiful Polynesian, he let her know that he had learned from her companions the very strong step she was about to take. This led to their spending together ten minutes which, to her mind, threw more light on his character than anything that

had ever passed between them. She had always felt with him as if she were standing on an edge, looking down into something decidedly deep. To-day the impression of the perpendicular shaft was there, but it was rather an abyss of confusion and disorder than the large bright space in which she had figured everything as ranged and pigeon-holed, presenting the appearance of the labelled shelves and drawers at a chemist's. He discussed without an invitation to discuss, he appealed without a right to appeal. He was nothing but a suitor tolerated after dismissal, but he took strangely for granted a participation in her affairs. He assumed all sorts of things that made her draw back. He implied that there was everything now to assist them in arriving at an agreement, since she had never informed him that he was positively objectionable; but that this symmetry would be spoiled if she should not be willing to take a little longer to think of certain consequences. She was greatly disconcerted when she saw what consequences he meant and at his reminding her of them. What on earth was the use of a lover if he was to speak only like one's grandmother and one's aunt? He struck her as much in love with her and as particularly careful at the same time as to what he might say. He never mentioned her mother; he only alluded, indirectly but earnestly, to the "step." He disapproved of it altogether, took an unexpectedly prudent, politic view of it. He evidently also believed that she would be dragged down; in other words that she would not be asked out. It was his idea that her mother would contaminate her, so that he should find himself interested in a young person discredited and virtually unmarriageable. All this was more obvious to him than the consideration that a daughter should be merciful. Where was his religion if he understood mercy so little, and where were his talent and his courage if he were so miserably afraid of trumpery social penalties? Rose's heart sank when she reflected that a man supposed to be first-rate hadn't guessed that rather than not do what she could for her mother she would give up all the Engineers in the world. She became aware that she probably would have been moved to place her hand in his on the spot if he had come to her saying "Your idea is the right one; put it through at every cost." She couldn't discuss this with him, though he impressed her as having too much at stake for her to treat him with mere disdain. She sickened at the revelation that a gentleman could see so much in mere vulgarities of opinion, and though she uttered as few words as possible, conversing only in sad smiles and headshakes and in intercepted movements toward the door, she happened, in some unguarded lapse from her reticence, to use the expression that she was disappointed in him. He caught at it and, seeming to drop his field-glass, pressed upon her with nearer, tenderer eyes.

"Can I be so happy as to believe, then, that you had thought of me with some confidence, with some faith?"

"If you didn't suppose so, what is the sense of this visit?" Rose asked.

"One can be faithful without reciprocity," said the young man. "I regard you in a light which makes me want to protect you even if I have nothing to gain by it."

"Yet you speak as if you thought you might keep me for yourself."

"For *yourself*. I don't want you to suffer."

"Nor to suffer yourself by my doing so," said Rose, looking down.

"Ah, if you would only marry me next month!" he broke out inconsequently.

"And give up going to mamma?" Rose waited to see if he would say "What need that matter? Can't your mother come to us?" But he said nothing of the sort; he only answered—

"She surely would be sorry to interfere with the exercise of any other affection which I might have the bliss of believing that you are now free, in however small a degree, to entertain."

Rose knew that her mother wouldn't be sorry at all; but she contented herself with rejoining, her hand on the door: "Good-bye. I sha'n't suffer. I'm not afraid."

"You don't know how terrible, how cruel, the world can be."

"Yes, I do know. I know everything!"

The declaration sprang from her lips in a tone which made him look at her as he had never looked before, as if he saw something new in her face, as if he had never yet known her. He hadn't displeased her so much but that she would like to give him that impression, and since she felt that she was doing so she lingered an instant for the purpose. It enabled her to see, further, that he turned red; then to become aware that a carriage had stopped at the door. Captain Jay's eyes, from where he stood, fell upon this arrival, and the nature of their glance made Rose step forward to look. Her mother sat there, brilliant, conspicuous, in the eternal victoria, and the footman was already sounding the knocker. It had been no part of the arrangement that she should come to fetch her; it had been out of the question—a stroke in such bad taste as would have put Rose in the wrong. The girl had never dreamed of it, but somehow, suddenly, perversely, she was glad of it now; she even hoped that her grandmother and her aunt were looking out upstairs.

"My mother has come for me. Good-bye," she repeated; but this time her visitor had got between her and the door.

"Listen to me before you go. I will give you a life's devotion," the young man pleaded. He really barred the way.

She wondered whether her grandmother had told him that if her flight were not prevented she would forfeit money. Then, vividly, it came over her that this would be what he was occupied with. "I shall never think of you—let me go!" she cried, with passion.

Captain Jay opened the door, but Rose didn't see his face, and in a moment she was out of the house. Aunt Julia, who was sure to have been hovering, had taken flight before the profanity of the knock.

"Heavens, dear, where did you get your mourning?" the lady in the victoria asked of her daughter as they drove away.

II.

Lady Maresfield had given her boy a push in his plump back and had said to him, "Go and speak to her now; it's your chance." She had for a long time wanted this scion to make himself audible to Rose Tramore, but the opportunity was not easy to come by. The case was complicated. Lady Maresfield had four daughters, of whom only one was married. It so happened moreover that this one, Mrs. Vaughan-Vesey, the only person in the world her mother was afraid of, was the most to be reckoned with. The Honourable Guy was in appearance all his mother's child, though he was really a simpler soul. He was large and pink; large, that is, as to everything but the eyes, which were diminishing points, and pink as to everything but the hair, which was comparable, faintly, to the hue of the richer rose. He had also, it must be conceded, very small neat teeth, which made his smile look like a young lady's. He had no wish to resemble any such person, but he was perpetually smiling, and he smiled more than ever as he approached Rose Tramore, who, looking altogether, to his mind, as a pretty girl should, and wearing a soft white opera-cloak over a softer black dress, leaned alone against the wall of the vestibule at Covent Garden while, a few paces off, an old gentleman engaged her mother in conversation. Madame Patti had been singing, and they were all waiting for their carriages. To their ears at present came a vociferation of names and a rattle of wheels. The air, through banging doors, entered in damp, warm gusts, heavy with

the stale, slightly sweet taste of the London season when the London season is overripe and spoiling.

Guy Mangler had only three minutes to reestablish an interrupted acquaintance with our young lady. He reminded her that he had danced with her the year before, and he mentioned that he knew her brother. His mother had lately been to see old Mrs. Tramore, but this he did not mention, not being aware of it. That visit had produced, on Lady Maresfield's part, a private crisis, engendered ideas. One of them was that the grandmother in Hill Street had really forgiven the wilful girl much more than she admitted. Another was that there would still be some money for Rose when the others should come into theirs. Still another was that the others would come into theirs at no distant date; the old lady was so visibly going to pieces. There were several more besides, as for instance that Rose had already fifteen hundred a year from her father. The figure had been betrayed in Hill Street; it was part of the proof of Mrs. Tramore's decrepitude. Then there was an equal amount that her mother had to dispose of and on which the girl could absolutely count, though of course it might involve much waiting, as the mother, a person of gross insensibility, evidently wouldn't die of cold-shouldering. Equally definite, to do it justice, was the conception that Rose was in truth remarkably good looking, and that what she had undertaken to do showed, and would show even should it fail, cleverness of the right sort. Cleverness of the right sort was exactly the quality that Lady Maresfield prefigured as indispensable in a young lady to whom she should marry her second son, over whose own deficiencies she flung the veil of a maternal theory that *his* cleverness was of a sort that was wrong. Those who knew him less well were content to wish that he might not conceal it for such a scruple. This enumeration of his mother's views does not exhaust the list, and it was in obedience to one too profound to be uttered even by the historian that, after a very brief delay, she decided to move across the crowded lobby. Her daughter Bessie was the only one with her; Maggie was dining with the Vaughan-Veseys, and Fanny was not of an age. Mrs. Tramore the younger showed only an admirable back—her face was to her old gentleman—and Bessie had drifted to some other people; so that it was comparatively easy for Lady Maresfield to say to Rose, in a moment: "My dear child, are you never coming to see us?"

"We shall be delighted to come if you'll ask us," Rose smiled.

Lady Maresfield had been prepared for the plural number, and she was a woman whom it took many plurals to disconcert. "I'm sure Guy is longing for another dance with you," she rejoined, with the most unblinking irrelevance.

"I'm afraid we're not dancing again quite yet," said Rose, glancing at her mother's exposed shoulders, but speaking as if they were muffled in crape.

Lady Maresfield leaned her head on one side and seemed almost wistful. "Not even at my sister's ball? She's to have something next week. She'll write to you."

Rose Tramore, on the spot, looking bright but vague, turned three or four things over in her mind. She remembered that the sister of her interlocutress was the proverbially rich Mrs. Bray, a bankersess or a brewersess or a buildersess, who had so big a house that she couldn't fill it unless she opened her doors, or her mouth, very wide. Rose had learnt more about London society during these lonely months with her mother than she had ever picked up in Hill Street. The younger Mrs. Tramore was a mine of *commérages*, and she had no need to go out to bring home the latest intelligence. At any rate Mrs. Bray might serve as the end of a wedge. "Oh, I dare say we might think of that," Rose said. "It would be very kind of your sister."

"Guy'll think of it, won't you, Guy?" asked Lady Maresfield.

“Rather!” Guy responded, with an intonation as fine as if he had learnt it at a music hall; while at the same moment the name of his mother’s carriage was bawled through the place. Mrs. Tramore had parted with her old gentleman; she turned again to her daughter. Nothing occurred but what always occurred, which was exactly this absence of everything—a universal lapse. She didn’t exist, even for a second, to any recognising eye. The people who looked at her—of course there were plenty of those—were only the people who didn’t exist for hers. Lady Maresfield surged away on her son’s arm.

It was this noble matron herself who wrote, the next day, inclosing a card of invitation from Mrs. Bray and expressing the hope that Rose would come and dine and let her ladyship take her. She should have only one of her own girls; Gwendolen Vesey was to take the other. Rose handed both the note and the card in silence to her mother; the latter exhibited only the name of Miss Tramore. “You had much better go, dear,” her mother said; in answer to which Miss Tramore slowly tore up the documents, looking with clear, meditative eyes out of the window. Her mother always said “You had better go”—there had been other incidents—and Rose had never even once taken account of the observation. She would make no first advances, only plenty of second ones, and, condoning no discrimination, would treat no omission as venial. She would keep all concessions till afterwards; then she would make them one by one. Fighting society was quite as hard as her grandmother had said it would be; but there was a tension in it which made the dreariness vibrate—the dreariness of such a winter as she had just passed. Her companion had cried at the end of it, and she had cried all through; only her tears had been private, while her mother’s had fallen once for all, at luncheon on the bleak Easter Monday—produced by the way a silent survey of the deadly square brought home to her that every creature but themselves was out of town and having tremendous fun. Rose felt that it was useless to attempt to explain simply by her mourning this severity of solitude; for if people didn’t go to parties (at least a few didn’t) for six months after their father died, this was the very time other people took for coming to see them. It was not too much to say that during this first winter of Rose’s period with her mother she had no communication whatever with the world. It had the effect of making her take to reading the new American books: she wanted to see how girls got on by themselves. She had never read so much before, and there was a legitimate indifference in it when topics failed with her mother. They often failed after the first days, and then, while she bent over instructive volumes, this lady, dressed as if for an impending function, sat on the sofa and watched her. Rose was not embarrassed by such an appearance, for she could reflect that, a little before, her companion had not even a girl who had taken refuge in queer researches to look at. She was moreover used to her mother’s attitude by this time. She had her own description of it: it was the attitude of waiting for the carriage. If they didn’t go out it was not that Mrs. Tramore was not ready in time, and Rose had even an alarmed prevision of their some day always arriving first. Mrs. Tramore’s conversation at such moments was abrupt, inconsequent and personal. She sat on the edge of sofas and chairs and glanced occasionally at the fit of her gloves (she was perpetually gloved, and the fit was a thing it was melancholy to see wasted), as people do who are expecting guests to dinner. Rose used almost to fancy herself at times a perfunctory husband on the other side of the fire.

What she was not yet used to—there was still a charm in it—was her mother’s extraordinary tact. During the years they lived together they never had a discussion; a circumstance all the more remarkable since if the girl had a reason for sparing her companion (that of being sorry for her) Mrs. Tramore had none for sparing her child. She only showed in doing so a happy instinct—the happiest thing about her. She took in perfection a course which represented everything and covered everything; she utterly abjured all authority. She testified to her abjuration in hourly ingenious, touching ways. In this manner nothing had to be talked over,

which was a mercy all round. The tears on Easter Monday were merely a nervous gust, to help show she was not a Christmas doll from the Burlington Arcade; and there was no lifting up of the repentant Magdalen, no uttered remorse for the former abandonment of children. Of the way she could treat her children her demeanour to this one was an example; it was an uninterrupted appeal to her eldest daughter for direction. She took the law from Rose in every circumstance, and if you had noticed these ladies without knowing their history you would have wondered what tie was fine enough to make maturity so respectful to youth. No mother was ever so filial as Mrs. Tramore, and there had never been such a difference of position between sisters. Not that the elder one fawned, which would have been fearful; she only renounced—whatever she had to renounce. If the amount was not much she at any rate made no scene over it. Her hand was so light that Rose said of her secretly, in vague glances at the past, “No wonder people liked her!” She never characterised the old element of interference with her mother’s respectability more definitely than as “people.” They were people, it was true, for whom gentleness must have been everything and who didn’t demand a variety of interests. The desire to “go out” was the one passion that even a closer acquaintance with her parent revealed to Rose Tramore. She marvelled at its strength, in the light of the poor lady’s history: there was comedy enough in this unquenchable flame on the part of a woman who had known such misery. She had drunk deep of every dishonour, but the bitter cup had left her with a taste for lighted candles, for squeezing up staircases and hooking herself to the human elbow. Rose had a vision of the future years in which this taste would grow with restored exercise—of her mother, in a long-tailed dress, jogging on and on and on, jogging further and further from her sins, through a century of the “Morning Post” and down the fashionable avenue of time. She herself would then be very old—she herself would be dead. Mrs. Tramore would cover a span of life for which such an allowance of sin was small. The girl could laugh indeed now at that theory of her being dragged down. If one thing were more present to her than another it was the very desolation of their propriety. As she glanced at her companion, it sometimes seemed to her that if she had been a bad woman she would have been worse than that. There were compensations for being “cut” which Mrs. Tramore too much neglected.

The lonely old lady in Hill Street—Rose thought of her that way now—was the one person to whom she was ready to say that she would come to her on any terms. She wrote this to her three times over, and she knocked still oftener at her door. But the old lady answered no letters; if Rose had remained in Hill Street it would have been her own function to answer them; and at the door, the butler, whom the girl had known for ten years, considered her, when he told her his mistress was not at home, quite as he might have considered a young person who had come about a place and of whose eligibility he took a negative view. That was Rose’s one pang, that she probably appeared rather heartless. Her aunt Julia had gone to Florence with Edith for the winter, on purpose to make her appear more so; for Miss Tramore was still the person most scandalised by her secession. Edith and she, doubtless, often talked over in Florence the destitution of the aged victim in Hill Street. Eric never came to see his sister, because, being full both of family and of personal feeling, he thought she really ought to have stayed with his grandmother. If she had had such an appurtenance all to herself she might have done what she liked with it; but he couldn’t forgive such a want of consideration for anything of his. There were moments when Rose would have been ready to take her hand from the plough and insist upon reintegration, if only the fierce voice of the old house had allowed people to look her up. But she read, ever so clearly, that her grandmother had made this a question of loyalty to seventy years of virtue. Mrs. Tramore’s forlornness didn’t prevent her drawing-room from being a very public place, in which Rose could hear certain words reverberate: “Leave her alone; it’s the only way to see how long she’ll hold out.” The old woman’s visitors were people who didn’t wish to quarrel, and the girl was conscious that

if they had not let her alone—that is if they had come to her from her grandmother—she might perhaps not have held out. She had no friends quite of her own; she had not been brought up to have them, and it would not have been easy in a house which two such persons as her father and his mother divided between them. Her father disapproved of crude intimacies, and all the intimacies of youth were crude. He had married at five-and-twenty and could testify to such a truth. Rose felt that she shared even Captain Jay with her grandmother; she had seen what *he* was worth. Moreover, she had spoken to him at that last moment in Hill Street in a way which, taken with her former refusal, made it impossible that he should come near her again. She hoped he went to see his protectress: he could be a kind of substitute and administer comfort.

It so happened, however, that the day after she threw Lady Maresfield's invitation into the wastepaper basket she received a visit from a certain Mrs. Donovan, whom she had occasionally seen in Hill Street. She vaguely knew this lady for a busybody, but she was in a situation which even busybodies might alleviate. Mrs. Donovan was poor, but honest—so scrupulously honest that she was perpetually returning visits she had never received. She was always clad in weather-beaten sealskin, and had an odd air of being prepared for the worst, which was borne out by her denying that she was Irish. She was of the English Donovans.

“Dear child, won't you go out with me?” she asked.

Rose looked at her a moment and then rang the bell. She spoke of something else, without answering the question, and when the servant came she said: “Please tell Mrs. Tramore that Mrs. Donovan has come to see her.”

“Oh, that'll be delightful; only you mustn't tell your grandmother!” the visitor exclaimed.

“Tell her what?”

“That I come to see your mamma.”

“You don't,” said Rose.

“Sure I hoped you'd introduce me!” cried Mrs. Donovan, compromising herself in her embarrassment.

“It's not necessary; you knew her once.”

“Indeed and I've known every one once,” the visitor confessed.

Mrs. Tramore, when she came in, was charming and exactly right; she greeted Mrs. Donovan as if she had met her the week before last, giving her daughter such a new illustration of her tact that Rose again had the idea that it was no wonder “people” had liked her. The girl grudged Mrs. Donovan so fresh a morsel as a description of her mother at home, rejoicing that she would be inconvenienced by having to keep the story out of Hill Street. Her mother went away before Mrs. Donovan departed, and Rose was touched by guessing her reason—the thought that since even this circuitous personage had been moved to come, the two might, if left together, invent some remedy. Rose waited to see what Mrs. Donovan had in fact invented.

“You won't come out with me then?”

“Come out with you?”

“My daughters are married. You know I'm a lone woman. It would be an immense pleasure to me to have so charming a creature as yourself to present to the world.”

“I go out with my mother,” said Rose, after a moment.

“Yes, but sometimes when she’s not inclined?”

“She goes everywhere she wants to go,” Rose continued, uttering the biggest fib of her life and only regretting it should be wasted on Mrs. Donovan.

“Ah, but do you go everywhere *you* want?” the lady asked sociably.

“One goes even to places one hates. Every one does that.”

“Oh, what I go through!” this social martyr cried. Then she laid a persuasive hand on the girl’s arm. “Let me show you at a few places first, and then we’ll see. I’ll bring them all here.”

“I don’t think I understand you,” replied Rose, though in Mrs. Donovan’s words she perfectly saw her own theory of the case reflected. For a quarter of a minute she asked herself whether she might not, after all, do so much evil that good might come. Mrs. Donovan would take her out the next day, and be thankful enough to annex such an attraction as a pretty girl. Various consequences would ensue and the long delay would be shortened; her mother’s drawing-room would resound with the clatter of teacups.

“Mrs. Bray’s having some big thing next week; come with me there and I’ll show you what I mane,” Mrs. Donovan pleaded.

“I see what you mane,” Rose answered, brushing away her temptation and getting up. “I’m much obliged to you.”

“You know you’re wrong, my dear,” said her interlocutress, with angry little eyes.

“I’m not going to Mrs. Bray’s.”

“I’ll get you a kyard; it’ll only cost me a penny stamp.”

“I’ve got one,” said the girl, smiling.

“Do you mean a penny stamp?” Mrs. Donovan, especially at departure, always observed all the forms of amity. “You can’t do it alone, my darling,” she declared.

“Shall they call you a cab?” Rose asked.

“I’ll pick one up. I choose my horse. You know you require your start,” her visitor went on.

“Excuse my mother,” was Rose’s only reply.

“Don’t mention it. Come to me when you need me. You’ll find me in the Red Book.”

“It’s awfully kind of you.”

Mrs. Donovan lingered a moment on the threshold. “Who will you *have* now, my child?” she appealed.

“I won’t have any one!” Rose turned away, blushing for her. “She came on speculation,” she said afterwards to Mrs. Tramore.

Her mother looked at her a moment in silence. “You can do it if you like, you know.”

Rose made no direct answer to this observation; she remarked instead: “See what our quiet life allows us to escape.”

“We don’t escape it. She has been here an hour.”

“Once in twenty years! We might meet her three times a day.”

“Oh, I’d take her with the rest!” sighed Mrs. Tramore; while her daughter recognised that what her companion wanted to do was just what Mrs. Donovan was doing. Mrs. Donovan’s life was her ideal.

On a Sunday, ten days later, Rose went to see one of her old governesses, of whom she had lost sight for some time and who had written to her that she was in London, unoccupied and ill. This was just the sort of relation into which she could throw herself now with inordinate zeal; the idea of it, however, not preventing a foretaste of the queer expression in the excellent lady’s face when she should mention with whom she was living. While she smiled at this picture she threw in another joke, asking herself if Miss Hack could be held in any degree to constitute the nucleus of a circle. She would come to see her, in any event—come the more the further she was dragged down. Sunday was always a difficult day with the two ladies—the afternoons made it so apparent that they were not frequented. Her mother, it is true, was comprised in the habits of two or three old gentlemen—she had for a long time avoided male friends of less than seventy—who disliked each other enough to make the room, when they were there at once, crack with pressure. Rose sat for a long time with Miss Hack, doing conscientious justice to the conception that there could be troubles in the world worse than her own; and when she came back her mother was alone, but with a story to tell of a long visit from Mr. Guy Mangler, who had waited and waited for her return. “He’s in love with you; he’s coming again on Tuesday,” Mrs. Tramore announced.

“Did he say so?”

“That he’s coming back on Tuesday?”

“No, that he’s in love with me.”

“He didn’t need, when he stayed two hours.”

“With you? It’s you he’s in love with, mamma!”

“That will do as well,” laughed Mrs. Tramore. “For all the use we shall make of him!” she added in a moment.

“We shall make great use of him. His mother sent him.”

“Oh, she’ll never come!”

“Then *he* sha’n’t,” said Rose. Yet he was admitted on the Tuesday, and after she had given him his tea Mrs. Tramore left the young people alone. Rose wished she hadn’t—she herself had another view. At any rate she disliked her mother’s view, which she had easily guessed. Mr. Mangler did nothing but say how charming he thought his hostess of the Sunday, and what a tremendously jolly visit he had had. He didn’t remark in so many words “I had no idea your mother was such a good sort”; but this was the spirit of his simple discourse. Rose liked it at first—a little of it gratified her; then she thought there was too much of it for good taste. She had to reflect that one does what one can and that Mr. Mangler probably thought he was delicate. He wished to convey that he desired to make up to her for the injustice of society. Why shouldn’t her mother receive gracefully, she asked (not audibly) and who had ever said she didn’t? Mr. Mangler had a great deal to say about the disappointment of his own parent over Miss Tramore’s not having come to dine with them the night of his aunt’s ball.

“Lady Maresfield knows why I didn’t come,” Rose answered at last.

“Ah, now, but *I* don’t, you know; can’t you tell *me*?” asked the young man.

“It doesn’t matter, if your mother’s clear about it.”

“Oh, but why make such an awful mystery of it, when I’m dying to know?”

He talked about this, he chaffed her about it for the rest of his visit: he had at last found a topic after his own heart. If her mother considered that he might be the emblem of their redemption he was an engine of the most primitive construction. He stayed and stayed; he struck Rose as on the point of bringing out something for which he had not quite, as he would have said, the cheek. Sometimes she thought he was going to begin: “By the way, my mother told me to propose to you.” At other moments he seemed charged with the admission: “I say, of course I really know what you’re trying to do for her,” nodding at the door: “therefore hadn’t we better speak of it frankly, so that I can help you with my mother, and more particularly with my sister Gwendolen, who’s the difficult one? The fact is, you see, they won’t do anything for nothing. If you’ll accept me they’ll call, but they won’t call without something ‘down.’” Mr. Mangler departed without their speaking frankly, and Rose Tramore had a hot hour during which she almost entertained, vindictively, the project of “accepting” the limpid youth until after she should have got her mother into circulation. The cream of the vision was that she might break with him later. She could read that this was what her mother would have liked, but the next time he came the door was closed to him, and the next and the next.

In August there was nothing to do but to go abroad, with the sense on Rose’s part that the battle was still all to fight; for a round of country visits was not in prospect, and English watering-places constituted one of the few subjects on which the girl had heard her mother express herself with disgust. Continental autumns had been indeed for years, one of the various forms of Mrs. Tramore’s atonement, but Rose could only infer that such fruit as they had borne was bitter. The stony stare of Belgravia could be practised at Homburg; and somehow it was inveterately only gentlemen who sat next to her at the *table d’hôte* at Cadenabbia. Gentlemen had never been of any use to Mrs. Tramore for getting back into society; they had only helped her effectually to get out of it. She once dropped, to her daughter, in a moralising mood, the remark that it was astonishing how many of them one could know without its doing one any good. Fifty of them—even very clever ones—represented a value inferior to that of one stupid woman. Rose wondered at the offhand way in which her mother could talk of fifty clever men; it seemed to her that the whole world couldn’t contain such a number. She had a sombre sense that mankind must be dull and mean. These cogitations took place in a cold hotel, in an eternal Swiss rain, and they had a flat echo in the transalpine valleys, as the lonely ladies went vaguely down to the Italian lakes and cities. Rose guided their course, at moments, with a kind of aimless ferocity; she moved abruptly, feeling vulgar and hating their life, though destitute of any definite vision of another life that would have been open to her. She had set herself a task and she clung to it; but she appeared to herself despicably idle. She had succeeded in not going to Homburg waters, where London was trying to wash away some of its stains; that would be too staring an advertisement of their situation. The main difference in situations to her now was the difference of being more or less pitied, at the best an intolerable danger; so that the places she preferred were the unsuspecting ones. She wanted to triumph with contempt, not with submission.

One morning in September, coming with her mother out of the marble church at Milan, she perceived that a gentleman who had just passed her on his way into the cathedral and whose face she had not noticed, had quickly raised his hat, with a suppressed ejaculation. She involuntarily glanced back; the gentleman had paused, again uncovering, and Captain Jay stood saluting her in the Italian sunshine. “Oh, good-morning!” she said, and walked on, pursuing her course; her mother was a little in front. She overtook her in a moment, with an unreasonable sense, like a gust of cold air, that men were worse than ever, for Captain Jay

had apparently moved into the church. Her mother turned as they met, and suddenly, as she looked back, an expression of peculiar sweetness came into this lady's eyes. It made Rose's take the same direction and rest a second time on Captain Jay, who was planted just where he had stood a minute before. He immediately came forward, asking Rose with great gravity if he might speak to her a moment, while Mrs. Tramore went her way again. He had the expression of a man who wished to say something very important; yet his next words were simple enough and consisted of the remark that he had not seen her for a year.

"Is it really so much as that?" asked Rose.

"Very nearly. I would have looked you up, but in the first place I have been very little in London, and in the second I believed it wouldn't have done any good."

"You should have put that first," said the girl. "It wouldn't have done any good."

He was silent over this a moment, in his customary deciphering way; but the view he took of it did not prevent him from inquiring, as she slowly followed her mother, if he mightn't walk with her now. She answered with a laugh that it wouldn't do any good but that he might do as he liked. He replied without the slightest manifestation of levity that it would do more good than if he didn't, and they strolled together, with Mrs. Tramore well before them, across the big, amusing piazza, where the front of the cathedral makes a sort of builded light. He asked a question or two and he explained his own presence: having a month's holiday, the first clear time for several years, he had just popped over the Alps. He inquired if Rose had recent news of the old lady in Hill Street, and it was the only tortuous thing she had ever heard him say.

"I have had no communication of any kind from her since I parted with you under her roof. Hasn't she mentioned that?" said Rose.

"I haven't seen her."

"I thought you were such great friends."

Bertram Jay hesitated a moment. "Well, not so much now."

"What has she done to you?" Rose demanded.

He fidgeted a little, as if he were thinking of something that made him unconscious of her question; then, with mild violence, he brought out the inquiry: "Miss Tramore, are you happy?"

She was startled by the words, for she on her side had been reflecting—reflecting that he had broken with her grandmother and that this pointed to a reason. It suggested at least that he wouldn't now be so much like a mouthpiece for that cold ancestral tone. She turned off his question—said it never was a fair one, as you gave yourself away however you answered it. When he repeated "You give yourself away?" as if he didn't understand, she remembered that he had not read the funny American books. This brought them to a silence, for she had enlightened him only by another laugh, and he was evidently preparing another question, which he wished carefully to disconnect from the former. Presently, just as they were coming near Mrs. Tramore, it arrived in the words "Is this lady your mother?" On Rose's assenting, with the addition that she was travelling with her, he said: "Will you be so kind as to introduce me to her?" They were so close to Mrs. Tramore that she probably heard, but she floated away with a single stroke of her paddle and an inattentive poise of her head. It was a striking exhibition of the famous tact, for Rose delayed to answer, which was exactly what might have made her mother wish to turn; and indeed when at last the girl spoke she only said to her companion: "Why do you ask me that?"

“Because I desire the pleasure of making her acquaintance.”

Rose had stopped, and in the middle of the square they stood looking at each other. “Do you remember what you said to me the last time I saw you?”

“Oh, don’t speak of that!”

“It’s better to speak of it now than to speak of it later.”

Bertram Jay looked round him, as if to see whether any one would hear; but the bright foreignness gave him a sense of safety, and he unexpectedly exclaimed: “Miss Tramore, I love you more than ever!”

“Then you ought to have come to see us,” declared the girl, quickly walking on.

“You treated me the last time as if I were positively offensive to you.”

“So I did, but you know my reason.”

“Because I protested against the course you were taking? I did, I did!” the young man rang out, as if he still, a little, stuck to that.

His tone made Rose say gaily: “Perhaps you do so yet?”

“I can’t tell till I’ve seen more of your circumstances,” he replied with eminent honesty.

The girl stared; her light laugh filled the air. “And it’s in order to see more of them and judge that you wish to make my mother’s acquaintance?”

He coloured at this and he evaded; then he broke out with a confused “Miss Tramore, let me stay with you a little!” which made her stop again.

“Your company will do us great honour, but there must be a rigid condition attached to our acceptance of it.”

“Kindly mention it,” said Captain Jay, staring at the façade of the cathedral.

“You don’t take us on trial.”

“On trial?”

“You don’t make an observation to me—not a single one, ever, ever!—on the matter that, in Hill Street, we had our last words about.”

Captain Jay appeared to be counting the thousand pinnacles of the church. “I think you really must be right,” he remarked at last.

“There you are!” cried Rose Tramore, and walked rapidly away.

He caught up with her, he laid his hand upon her arm to stay her. “If you’re going to Venice, let me go to Venice with you!”

“You don’t even understand my condition.”

“I’m sure you’re right, then: you must be right about everything.”

“That’s not in the least true, and I don’t care a fig whether you’re sure or not. Please let me go.”

He had barred her way, he kept her longer. “I’ll go and speak to your mother myself!”

Even in the midst of another emotion she was amused at the air of audacity accompanying this declaration. Poor Captain Jay might have been on the point of marching up to a battery. She looked at him a moment; then she said: “You’ll be disappointed!”

“Disappointed?”

“She’s much more proper than grandmamma, because she’s much more amiable.”

“Dear Miss Tramore—dear Miss Tramore!” the young man murmured helplessly.

“You’ll see for yourself. Only there’s another condition,” Rose went on.

“Another?” he cried, with discouragement and alarm.

“You must understand thoroughly, before you throw in your lot with us even for a few days, what our position really is.”

“Is it very bad?” asked Bertram Jay artlessly.

“No one has anything to do with us, no one speaks to us, no one looks at us.”

“Really?” stared the young man.

“We’ve no social existence, we’re utterly despised.”

“Oh, Miss Tramore!” Captain Jay interposed. He added quickly, vaguely, and with a want of presence of mind of which he as quickly felt ashamed: “Do none of your family—?” The question collapsed; the brilliant girl was looking at him.

“We’re extraordinarily happy,” she threw out.

“Now that’s all I wanted to know!” he exclaimed, with a kind of exaggerated cheery reproach, walking on with her briskly to overtake her mother.

He was not dining at their inn, but he insisted on coming that evening to their *table d’hôte*. He sat next Mrs. Tramore, and in the evening he accompanied them gallantly to the opera, at a third-rate theatre where they were almost the only ladies in the boxes. The next day they went together by rail to the Charterhouse of Pavia, and while he strolled with the girl, as they waited for the homeward train, he said to her candidly: “Your mother’s remarkably pretty.” She remembered the words and the feeling they gave her: they were the first note of new era. The feeling was somewhat that of an anxious, gratified matron who has “presented” her child and is thinking of the matrimonial market. Men might be of no use, as Mrs. Tramore said, yet it was from this moment Rose dated the rosy dawn of her confidence that her *protégée* would go off; and when later, in crowded assemblies, the phrase, or something like it behind a hat or a fan, fell repeatedly on her anxious ear, “Your mother *is* in beauty!” or “I’ve never seen her look better!” she had a faint vision of the yellow sunshine and the afternoon shadows on the dusty Italian platform.

Mrs. Tramore’s behaviour at this period was a revelation of her native understanding of delicate situations. She needed no account of this one from her daughter—it was one of the things for which she had a scent; and there was a kind of loyalty to the rules of a game in the silent sweetness with which she smoothed the path of Bertram Jay. It was clear that she was in her element in fostering the exercise of the affections, and if she ever spoke without thinking twice it is probable that she would have exclaimed, with some gaiety, “Oh, I know all about *love*!” Rose could see that she thought their companion would be a help, in spite of his being no dispenser of patronage. The key to the gates of fashion had not been placed in his hand, and no one had ever heard of the ladies of his family, who lived in some vague hollow of the Yorkshire moors; but none the less he might administer a muscular push. Yes indeed, men in general were broken reeds, but Captain Jay was peculiarly representative. Respectability was the woman’s maximum, as honour was the man’s, but this distinguished young soldier inspired more than one kind of confidence. Rose had a great deal of attention for the use to which his respectability was put; and there mingled with this

attention some amusement and much compassion. She saw that after a couple of days he decidedly liked her mother, and that he was yet not in the least aware of it. He took for granted that he believed in her but little; notwithstanding which he would have trusted her with anything except Rose herself. His trusting her with Rose would come very soon. He never spoke to her daughter about her qualities of character, but two or three of them (and indeed these were all the poor lady had, and they made the best show) were what he had in mind in praising her appearance. When he remarked: "What attention Mrs. Tramore seems to attract everywhere!" he meant: "What a beautifully simple nature it is!" and when he said: "There's something extraordinarily harmonious in the colours she wears," it signified: "Upon my word, I never saw such a sweet temper in my life!" She lost one of her boxes at Verona, and made the prettiest joke of it to Captain Jay. When Rose saw this she said to herself, "Next season we shall have only to choose." Rose knew what was in the box.

By the time they reached Venice (they had stopped at half a dozen little old romantic cities in the most frolicsome æsthetic way) she liked their companion better than she had ever liked him before. She did him the justice to recognise that if he was not quite honest with himself he was at least wholly honest with *her*. She reckoned up everything he had been since he joined them, and put upon it all an interpretation so favourable to his devotion that, catching herself in the act of glossing over one or two episodes that had not struck her at the time as disinterested she exclaimed, beneath her breath, "Look out—you're falling in love!" But if he liked correctness wasn't he quite right? Could any one possibly like it more than *she* did? And if he had protested against her throwing in her lot with her mother, this was not because of the benefit conferred but because of the injury received. He exaggerated that injury, but this was the privilege of a lover perfectly willing to be selfish on behalf of his mistress. He might have wanted her grandmother's money for her, but if he had given her up on first discovering that she was throwing away her chance of it (oh, this was *her* doing too!) he had given up her grandmother as much: not keeping well with the old woman, as some men would have done; not waiting to see how the perverse experiment would turn out and appeasing her, if it should promise tolerably, with a view to future operations. He had had a simple-minded, evangelical, lurid view of what the girl he loved would find herself in for. She could see this now—she could see it from his present bewilderment and mystification, and she liked him and pitied him, with the kindest smile, for the original *naïveté* as well as for the actual meekness. No wonder he hadn't known what she was in for, since he now didn't even know what he was in for himself. Were there not moments when he thought his companions almost unnaturally good, almost suspiciously safe? He had lost all power to verify that sketch of their isolation and *déclassement* to which she had treated him on the great square at Milan. The last thing he noticed was that they were neglected, and he had never, for himself, had such an impression of society.

It could scarcely be enhanced even by the apparition of a large, fair, hot, red-haired young man, carrying a lady's fan in his hand, who suddenly stood before their little party as, on the third evening after their arrival in Venice, it partook of ices at one of the tables before the celebrated Café Florian. The lamplit Venetian dusk appeared to have revealed them to this gentleman as he sat with other friends at a neighbouring table, and he had sprung up, with unsophisticated glee, to shake hands with Mrs. Tramore and her daughter. Rose recalled him to her mother, who looked at first as though she didn't remember him but presently bestowed a sufficiently gracious smile on Mr. Guy Mangler. He gave with youthful candour the history of his movements and indicated the whereabouts of his family: he was with his mother and sisters; they had met the Bob Veseys, who had taken Lord Whiteroy's yacht and were going to Constantinople. His mother and the girls, poor things, were at the Grand Hotel, but he was on the yacht with the Veseys, where they had Lord Whiteroy's cook. Wasn't the food in

Venice filthy, and wouldn't they come and look at the yacht? She wasn't very fast, but she was awfully jolly. His mother might have come if she would, but she wouldn't at first, and now, when she wanted to, there were other people, who naturally wouldn't turn out for her. Mr. Mangler sat down; he alluded with artless resentment to the way, in July, the door of his friends had been closed to him. He was going to Constantinople, but he didn't care—if *they* were going anywhere; meanwhile his mother hoped awfully they would look her up.

Lady Maresfield, if she had given her son any such message, which Rose disbelieved, entertained her hope in a manner compatible with her sitting for half an hour, surrounded by her little retinue, without glancing in the direction of Mrs. Tramore. The girl, however, was aware that this was not a good enough instance of their humiliation; inasmuch as it was rather she who, on the occasion of their last contact, had held off from Lady Maresfield. She was a little ashamed now of not having answered the note in which this affable personage ignored her mother. She couldn't help perceiving indeed a dim movement on the part of some of the other members of the group; she made out an attitude of observation in the high-plumed head of Mrs. Vaughan-Vesey. Mrs. Vesey, perhaps, might have been looking at Captain Jay, for as this gentleman walked back to the hotel with our young lady (they were at the "Britannia," and young Mangler, who clung to them, went in front with Mrs. Tramore) he revealed to Rose that he had some acquaintance with Lady Maresfield's eldest daughter, though he didn't know and didn't particularly want to know, her ladyship. He expressed himself with more acerbity than she had ever heard him use (Christian charity so generally governed his speech) about the young donkey who had been prattling to them. They separated at the door of the hotel. Mrs. Tramore had got rid of Mr. Mangler, and Bertram Jay was in other quarters.

"If you know Mrs. Vesey, why didn't you go and speak to her? I'm sure she saw you," Rose said.

Captain Jay replied even more circumspectly than usual. "Because I didn't want to leave you."

"Well, you can go now; you're free," Rose rejoined.

"Thank you. I shall never go again."

"That won't be civil," said Rose.

"I don't care to be civil. I don't like her."

"Why don't you like her?"

"You ask too many questions."

"I know I do," the girl acknowledged.

Captain Jay had already shaken hands with her, but at this he put out his hand again. "She's too worldly," he murmured, while he held Rose Tramore's a moment.

"Ah, you dear!" Rose exclaimed almost audibly as, with her mother, she turned away.

The next morning, upon the Grand Canal, the gondola of our three friends encountered a stately barge which, though it contained several persons, seemed pervaded mainly by one majestic presence. During the instant the gondolas were passing each other it was impossible either for Rose Tramore or for her companions not to become conscious that this distinguished identity had markedly inclined itself—a circumstance commemorated the next moment, almost within earshot of the other boat, by the most spontaneous cry that had issued for many a day from the lips of Mrs. Tramore. "Fancy, my dear, Lady Maresfield has bowed to us!"

“We ought to have returned it,” Rose answered; but she looked at Bertram Jay, who was opposite to her. He blushed, and she blushed, and during this moment was born a deeper understanding than had yet existed between these associated spirits. It had something to do with their going together that afternoon, without her mother, to look at certain out-of-the-way pictures as to which Ruskin had inspired her with a desire to see sincerely. Mrs. Tramore expressed the wish to stay at home, and the motive of this wish—a finer shade than any that even Ruskin had ever found a phrase for—was not translated into misrepresenting words by either the mother or the daughter. At San Giovanni in Bragora the girl and her companion came upon Mrs. Vaughan-Vesey, who, with one of her sisters, was also endeavouring to do the earnest thing. She did it to Rose, she did it to Captain Jay, as well as to Gianbellini; she was a handsome, long-necked, aquiline person, of a different type from the rest of her family, and she did it remarkably well. She secured our friends—it was her own expression—for luncheon, on the morrow, on the yacht, and she made it public to Rose that she would come that afternoon to invite her mother. When the girl returned to the hotel, Mrs. Tramore mentioned, before Captain Jay, who had come up to their sitting-room, that Lady Maresfield had called. “She stayed a long time—at least it seemed long!” laughed Mrs. Tramore.

The poor lady could laugh freely now; yet there was some grimness in a colloquy that she had with her daughter after Bertram Jay had departed. Before this happened Mrs. Vesey’s card, scrawled over in pencil and referring to the morrow’s luncheon, was brought up to Mrs. Tramore.

“They mean it all as a bribe,” said the principal recipient of these civilities.

“As a bribe?” Rose repeated.

“She wants to marry you to that boy; they’ve seen Captain Jay and they’re frightened.”

“Well, dear mamma, I can’t take Mr. Mangler for a husband.”

“Of course not. But oughtn’t we to go to the luncheon?”

“Certainly we’ll go to the luncheon,” Rose said; and when the affair took place, on the morrow, she could feel for the first time that she was taking her mother out. This appearance was somehow brought home to every one else, and it was really the agent of her success. For it is of the essence of this simple history that, in the first place, that success dated from Mrs. Vesey’s Venetian *déjeuner*, and in the second reposed, by a subtle social logic, on the very anomaly that had made it dubious. There is always a chance in things, and Rose Tramore’s chance was in the fact that Gwendolen Vesey was, as some one had said, awfully modern, an immense improvement on the exploded science of her mother, and capable of seeing what a “draw” there would be in the comedy, if properly brought out, of the reversed positions of Mrs. Tramore and Mrs. Tramore’s diplomatic daughter. With a first-rate managerial eye she perceived that people would flock into any room—and all the more into one of hers—to see Rose bring in her dreadful mother. She treated the cream of English society to this thrilling spectacle later in the autumn, when she once more “secured” both the performers for a week at Brimble. It made a hit on the spot, the very first evening—the girl was felt to play her part so well. The rumour of the performance spread; every one wanted to see it. It was an entertainment of which, that winter in the country, and the next season in town, persons of taste desired to give their friends the freshness. The thing was to make the Tramores come late, after every one had arrived. They were engaged for a fixed hour, like the American imitator and the Patagonian contralto. Mrs. Vesey had been the first to say the girl was awfully original, but that became the general view.

Gwendolen Vesey had with her mother one of the few quarrels in which Lady Maresfield had really stood up to such an antagonist (the elder woman had to recognise in general in whose

veins it was that the blood of the Manglers flowed) on account of this very circumstance of her attaching more importance to Miss Tramore's originality ("Her originality be hanged!" her ladyship had gone so far as unintelligently to exclaim) than to the prospects of the unfortunate Guy. Mrs. Vesey actually lost sight of these pressing problems in her admiration of the way the mother and the daughter, or rather the daughter and the mother (it was slightly confusing) "drew." It was Lady Maresfield's version of the case that the brazen girl (she was shockingly coarse) had treated poor Guy abominably. At any rate it was made known, just after Easter, that Miss Tramore was to be married to Captain Jay. The marriage was not to take place till the summer; but Rose felt that before this the field would practically be won. There had been some bad moments, there had been several warm corners and a certain number of cold shoulders and closed doors and stony stares; but the breach was effectually made—the rest was only a question of time. Mrs. Tramore could be trusted to keep what she had gained, and it was the dowagers, the old dragons with prominent fangs and glittering scales, whom the trick had already mainly caught. By this time there were several houses into which the liberated lady had crept alone. Her daughter had been expected with her, but they couldn't turn her out because the girl had stayed behind, and she was fast acquiring a new identity, that of a parental connection with the heroine of such a romantic story. She was at least the next best thing to her daughter, and Rose foresaw the day when she would be valued principally as a memento of one of the prettiest episodes in the annals of London. At a big official party, in June, Rose had the joy of introducing Eric to his mother. She was a little sorry it was an official party—there were some other such queer people there; but Eric called, observing the shade, the next day but one.

No observer, probably, would have been acute enough to fix exactly the moment at which the girl ceased to take out her mother and began to be taken out by her. A later phase was more distinguishable—that at which Rose forbore to inflict on her companion a duality that might become oppressive. She began to economise her force, she went only when the particular effect was required. Her marriage was delayed by the period of mourning consequent upon the death of her grandmother, who, the younger Mrs. Tramore averred, was killed by the rumour of her own new birth. She was the only one of the dragons who had not been tamed. Julia Tramore knew the truth about this—she was determined such things should not kill *her*. She would live to do something—she hardly knew what. The provisions of her mother's will were published in the "Illustrated News"; from which it appeared that everything that was not to go to Eric and to Julia was to go to the fortunate Edith. Miss Tramore makes no secret of her own intentions as regards this favourite.

Edith is not pretty, but Lady Maresfield is waiting for her; she is determined Gwendolen Vesey shall not get hold of her. Mrs. Vesey however takes no interest in her at all. She is whimsical, as befits a woman of her fashion; but there are two persons she is still very fond of, the delightful Bertram Jays. The fondness of this pair, it must be added, is not wholly expended in return. They are extremely united, but their life is more domestic than might have been expected from the preliminary signs. It owes a portion of its concentration to the fact that Mrs. Tramore has now so many places to go to that she has almost no time to come to her daughter's. She is, under her son-in-law's roof, a brilliant but a rare apparition, and the other day he remarked upon the circumstance to his wife.

"If it hadn't been for you," she replied, smiling, "she might have had her regular place at our fireside."

"Good heavens, how did I prevent it?" cried Captain Jay, with all the consciousness of virtue.

“You ordered it otherwise, you goose!” And she says, in the same spirit, whenever her husband commends her (which he does, sometimes, extravagantly) for the way she launched her mother: “Nonsense, my dear—practically it was *you!*”

Nona Vincent

I.

“I wondered whether you wouldn’t read it to me,” said Mrs. Alsager, as they lingered a little near the fire before he took leave. She looked down at the fire sideways, drawing her dress away from it and making her proposal with a shy sincerity that added to her charm. Her charm was always great for Allan Wayworth, and the whole air of her house, which was simply a sort of distillation of herself, so soothing, so beguiling that he always made several false starts before departure. He had spent some such good hours there, had forgotten, in her warm, golden drawing-room, so much of the loneliness and so many of the worries of his life, that it had come to be the immediate answer to his longings, the cure for his aches, the harbour of refuge from his storms. His tribulations were not unprecedented, and some of his advantages, if of a usual kind, were marked in degree, inasmuch as he was very clever for one so young, and very independent for one so poor. He was eight-and-twenty, but he had lived a good deal and was full of ambitions and curiosities and disappointments. The opportunity to talk of some of these in Grosvenor Place corrected perceptibly the immense inconvenience of London. This inconvenience took for him principally the line of insensibility to Allan Wayworth’s literary form. He had a literary form, or he thought he had, and her intelligent recognition of the circumstance was the sweetest consolation Mrs. Alsager could have administered. She was even more literary and more artistic than he, inasmuch as he could often work off his overflow (this was his occupation, his profession), while the generous woman, abounding in happy thoughts, but unedited and unpublished, stood there in the rising tide like the nymph of a fountain in the splash of the marble basin.

The year before, in a big newspaper house, he had found himself next her at dinner, and they had converted the intensely material hour into a feast of reason. There was no motive for her asking him to come to see her but that she liked him, which it was the more agreeable to him to perceive as he perceived at the same time that she was exquisite. She was enviably free to act upon her likings, and it made Wayworth feel less unsuccessful to infer that for the moment he happened to be one of them. He kept the revelation to himself, and indeed there was nothing to turn his head in the kindness of a kind woman. Mrs. Alsager occupied so completely the ground of possession that she would have been condemned to inaction had it not been for the principle of giving. Her husband, who was twenty years her senior, a massive personality in the City and a heavy one at home (wherever he stood, or even sat, he was monumental), owned half a big newspaper and the whole of a great many other things. He admired his wife, though she bore no children, and liked her to have other tastes than his, as that seemed to give a greater acreage to their life. His own appetites went so far he could scarcely see the boundary, and his theory was to trust her to push the limits of hers, so that between them the pair should astound by their consumption. His ideas were prodigiously vulgar, but some of them had the good fortune to be carried out by a person of perfect delicacy. Her delicacy made her play strange tricks with them, but he never found this out. She attenuated him without his knowing it, for what he mainly thought was that he had aggrandised *her*. Without her he really would have been bigger still, and society, breathing more freely, was practically under an obligation to her which, to do it justice, it acknowledged by an attitude of mystified respect. She felt a tremulous need to throw her liberty and her leisure into the things of the soul—the most beautiful things she knew. She found them, when she gave time to seeking, in a hundred places, and particularly in a dim and sacred region—the region of active pity—over her entrance into which she dropped curtains

so thick that it would have been an impertinence to lift them. But she cultivated other beneficent passions, and if she cherished the dream of something fine the moments at which it most seemed to her to come true were when she saw beauty plucked flower-like in the garden of art. She loved the perfect work—she had the artistic chord. This chord could vibrate only to the touch of another, so that appreciation, in her spirit, had the added intensity of regret. She could understand the joy of creation, and she thought it scarcely enough to be told that she herself created happiness. She would have liked, at any rate, to choose her way; but it was just here that her liberty failed her. She had not the voice—she had only the vision. The only envy she was capable of was directed to those who, as she said, could do something.

As everything in her, however, turned to gentleness, she was admirably hospitable to such people as a class. She believed Allan Wayworth could do something, and she liked to hear him talk of the ways in which he meant to show it. He talked of them almost to no one else—she spoiled him for other listeners. With her fair bloom and her quiet grace she was indeed an ideal public, and if she had ever confided to him that she would have liked to scribble (she had in fact not mentioned it to a creature), he would have been in a perfect position for asking her why a woman whose face had so much expression should not have felt that she achieved. How in the world could she express better? There was less than that in Shakespeare and Beethoven. She had never been more generous than when, in compliance with her invitation, which I have recorded, he brought his play to read to her. He had spoken of it to her before, and one dark November afternoon, when her red fireside was more than ever an escape from the place and the season, he had broken out as he came in—"I've done it, I've done it!" She made him tell her all about it—she took an interest really minute and asked questions delightfully apt. She had spoken from the first as if he were on the point of being acted, making him jump, with her participation, all sorts of dreary intervals. She liked the theatre as she liked all the arts of expression, and he had known her to go all the way to Paris for a particular performance. Once he had gone with her—the time she took that stupid Mrs. Mostyn. She had been struck, when he sketched it, with the subject of his drama, and had spoken words that helped him to believe in it. As soon as he had rung down his curtain on the last act he rushed off to see her, but after that he kept the thing for repeated last touches. Finally, on Christmas day, by arrangement, she sat there and listened to it. It was in three acts and in prose, but rather of the romantic order, though dealing with contemporary English life, and he fondly believed that it showed the hand if not of the master, at least of the prize pupil.

Allan Wayworth had returned to England, at two-and-twenty, after a miscellaneous continental education; his father, the correspondent, for years, in several foreign countries successively, of a conspicuous London journal, had died just after this, leaving his mother and her two other children, portionless girls, to subsist on a very small income in a very dull German town. The young man's beginnings in London were difficult, and he had aggravated them by his dislike of journalism. His father's connection with it would have helped him, but he was (insanely, most of his friends judged—the great exception was always Mrs. Alsager) *intraitable* on the question of form. Form—in his sense—was not demanded by English newspapers, and he couldn't give it to them in *their* sense. The demand for it was not great anywhere, and Wayworth spent costly weeks in polishing little compositions for magazines that didn't pay for style. The only person who paid for it was really Mrs. Alsager: she had an infallible instinct for the perfect. She paid in her own way, and if Allan Wayworth had been a wage-earning person it would have made him feel that if he didn't receive his legal dues his palm was at least occasionally conscious of a gratuity. He had his limitations, his perversities, but the finest parts of him were the most alive, and he was restless and

sincere. It is however the impression he produced on Mrs. Alsager that most concerns us: she thought him not only remarkably good-looking but altogether original. There were some usual bad things he would never do—too many prohibitive puddles for him in the short cut to success.

For himself, he had never been so happy as since he had seen his way, as he fondly believed, to some sort of mastery of the scenic idea, which struck him as a very different matter now that he looked at it from within. He had had his early days of contempt for it, when it seemed to him a jewel, dim at the best, hidden in a dunghill, a taper burning low in an air thick with vulgarity. It was hedged about with sordid approaches, it was not worth sacrifice and suffering. The man of letters, in dealing with it, would have to put off all literature, which was like asking the bearer of a noble name to forego his immemorial heritage. Aspects change, however, with the point of view: Wayworth had waked up one morning in a different bed altogether. It is needless here to trace this accident to its source; it would have been much more interesting to a spectator of the young man's life to follow some of the consequences. He had been made (as he felt) the subject of a special revelation, and he wore his hat like a man in love. An angel had taken him by the hand and guided him to the shabby door which opens, it appeared, into an interior both splendid and austere. The scenic idea was magnificent when once you had embraced it—the dramatic form had a purity which made some others look ingloriously rough. It had the high dignity of the exact sciences, it was mathematical and architectural. It was full of the refreshment of calculation and construction, the incorruptibility of line and law. It was bare, but it was erect, it was poor, but it was noble; it reminded him of some sovereign famed for justice who should have lived in a palace despoiled. There was a fearful amount of concession in it, but what you kept had a rare intensity. You were perpetually throwing over the cargo to save the ship, but what a motion you gave her when you made her ride the waves—a motion as rhythmic as the dance of a goddess! Wayworth took long London walks and thought of these things—London poured into his ears the mighty hum of its suggestion. His imagination glowed and melted down material, his intentions multiplied and made the air a golden haze. He saw not only the thing he should do, but the next and the next and the next; the future opened before him and he seemed to walk on marble slabs. The more he tried the dramatic form the more he loved it, the more he looked at it the more he perceived in it. What he perceived in it indeed he now perceived everywhere; if he stopped, in the London dusk, before some flaring shop-window, the place immediately constituted itself behind footlights, became a framed stage for his figures. He hammered at these figures in his lonely lodging, he shaped them and he shaped their tabernacle; he was like a goldsmith chiselling a casket, bent over with the passion for perfection. When he was neither roaming the streets with his vision nor worrying his problem at his table, he was exchanging ideas on the general question with Mrs. Alsager, to whom he promised details that would amuse her in later and still happier hours. Her eyes were full of tears when he read her the last words of the finished work, and she murmured, divinely—

“And now—to get it done, to get it done!”

“Yes, indeed—to get it done!” Wayworth stared at the fire, slowly rolling up his type-copy. “But that’s a totally different part of the business, and altogether secondary.”

“But of course you want to be acted?”

“Of course I do—but it’s a sudden descent. I want to intensely, but I’m sorry I want to.”

“It’s there indeed that the difficulties begin,” said Mrs. Alsager, a little off her guard.

“How can you say that? It’s there that they end!”

“Ah, wait to see where they end!”

“I mean they’ll now be of a totally different order,” Wayworth explained. “It seems to me there can be nothing in the world more difficult than to write a play that will stand an all-round test, and that in comparison with them the complications that spring up at this point are of an altogether smaller kind.”

“Yes, they’re not inspiring,” said Mrs. Alsager; “they’re discouraging, because they’re vulgar. The other problem, the working out of the thing itself, is pure art.”

“How well you understand everything!” The young man had got up, nervously, and was leaning against the chimney-piece with his back to the fire and his arms folded. The roll of his copy, in his fist, was squeezed into the hollow of one of them. He looked down at Mrs. Alsager, smiling gratefully, and she answered him with a smile from eyes still charmed and suffused. “Yes, the vulgarity will begin now,” he presently added.

“You’ll suffer dreadfully.”

“I shall suffer in a good cause.”

“Yes, giving *that* to the world! You must leave it with me, I must read it over and over,” Mrs. Alsager pleaded, rising to come nearer and draw the copy, in its cover of greenish-grey paper, which had a generic identity now to him, out of his grasp. “Who in the world will do it?—who in the world *can*?” she went on, close to him, turning over the leaves. Before he could answer she had stopped at one of the pages; she turned the book round to him, pointing out a speech. “That’s the most beautiful place—those lines are a perfection.” He glanced at the spot she indicated, and she begged him to read them again—he had read them admirably before. He knew them by heart, and, closing the book while she held the other end of it, he murmured them over to her—they had indeed a cadence that pleased him—watching, with a facetious complacency which he hoped was pardonable, the applause in her face. “Ah, who can utter such lines as *that*?” Mrs. Alsager broke out; “whom can you find to do *her*?”

“We’ll find people to do them all!”

“But not people who are worthy.”

“They’ll be worthy enough if they’re willing enough. I’ll work with them—I’ll grind it into them.” He spoke as if he had produced twenty plays.

“Oh, it will be interesting!” she echoed.

“But I shall have to find my theatre first. I shall have to get a manager to believe in me.”

“Yes—they’re so stupid!”

“But fancy the patience I shall want, and how I shall have to watch and wait,” said Allan Wayworth. “Do you see me hawking it about London?”

“Indeed I don’t—it would be sickening.”

“It’s what I shall have to do. I shall be old before it’s produced.”

“I shall be old very soon if it isn’t!” Mrs. Alsager cried. “I know one or two of them,” she mused.

“Do you mean you would speak to them?”

“The thing is to get them to read it. I could do that.”

“That’s the utmost I ask. But it’s even for that I shall have to wait.”

She looked at him with kind sisterly eyes. "You sha'n't wait."

"Ah, you dear lady!" Wayworth murmured.

"That is *you* may, but *I* won't! Will you leave me your copy?" she went on, turning the pages again.

"Certainly; I have another." Standing near him she read to herself a passage here and there; then, in her sweet voice, she read some of them out. "Oh, if *you* were only an actress!" the young man exclaimed.

"That's the last thing I am. There's no comedy in *me*!"

She had never appeared to Wayworth so much his good genius. "Is there any tragedy?" he asked, with the levity of complete confidence.

She turned away from him, at this, with a strange and charming laugh and a "Perhaps that will be for you to determine!" But before he could disclaim such a responsibility she had faced him again and was talking about Nona Vincent as if she had been the most interesting of their friends and her situation at that moment an irresistible appeal to their sympathy. Nona Vincent was the heroine of the play, and Mrs. Alsager had taken a tremendous fancy to her. "I can't *tell* you how I like that woman!" she exclaimed in a pensive rapture of credulity which could only be balm to the artistic spirit.

"I'm awfully glad she lives a bit. What I feel about her is that she's a good deal like *you*," Wayworth observed.

Mrs. Alsager stared an instant and turned faintly red. This was evidently a view that failed to strike her; she didn't, however, treat it as a joke. "I'm not impressed with the resemblance. I don't see myself doing what she does."

"It isn't so much what she *does*," the young man argued, drawing out his moustache.

"But what she does is the whole point. She simply tells her love—I should never do that."

"If you repudiate such a proceeding with such energy, why do you like her for it?"

"It isn't what I like her for."

"What else, then? That's intensely characteristic."

Mrs. Alsager reflected, looking down at the fire; she had the air of having half-a-dozen reasons to choose from. But the one she produced was unexpectedly simple; it might even have been prompted by despair at not finding others. "I like her because *you* made her!" she exclaimed with a laugh, moving again away from her companion.

Wayworth laughed still louder. "You made her a little yourself. I've thought of her as looking like you."

"She ought to look much better," said Mrs. Alsager. "No, certainly, I shouldn't do what *she* does."

"Not even in the same circumstances?"

"I should never find myself in such circumstances. They're exactly your play, and have nothing in common with such a life as mine. However," Mrs. Alsager went on, "her behaviour was natural for *her*, and not only natural, but, it seems to me, thoroughly beautiful and noble. I can't sufficiently admire the talent and tact with which you make one accept it, and I tell you frankly that it's evident to me there must be a brilliant future before a young

man who, at the start, has been capable of such a stroke as that. Thank heaven I can admire Nona Vincent as intensely as I feel that I don't resemble her!"

"Don't exaggerate that," said Allan Wayworth.

"My admiration?"

"Your dissimilarity. She has your face, your air, your voice, your motion; she has many elements of your being."

"Then she'll damn your play!" Mrs. Alsager replied. They joked a little over this, though it was not in the tone of pleasantry that Wayworth's hostess soon remarked: "You've got your remedy, however: have her done by the right woman."

"Oh, have her 'done'—have her 'done'!" the young man gently wailed.

"I see what you mean, my poor friend. What a pity, when it's such a magnificent part—such a chance for a clever serious girl! Nona Vincent is practically your play—it will be open to her to carry it far or to drop it at the first corner."

"It's a charming prospect," said Allan Wayworth, with sudden scepticism. They looked at each other with eyes that, for a lurid moment, saw the worst of the worst; but before they parted they had exchanged vows and confidences that were dedicated wholly to the ideal. It is not to be supposed, however, that the knowledge that Mrs. Alsager would help him made Wayworth less eager to help himself. He did what he could and felt that she, on her side, was doing no less; but at the end of a year he was obliged to recognise that their united effort had mainly produced the fine flower of discouragement. At the end of a year the lustre had, to his own eyes, quite faded from his unappreciated masterpiece, and he found himself writing for a biographical dictionary little lives of celebrities he had never heard of. To be printed, anywhere and anyhow, was a form of glory for a man so unable to be acted, and to be paid, even at encyclopædic rates, had the consequence of making one resigned and verbose. He couldn't smuggle style into a dictionary, but he could at least reflect that he had done his best to learn from the drama that it is a gross impertinence almost anywhere. He had knocked at the door of every theatre in London, and, at a ruinous expense, had multiplied type-copies of *Nona Vincent* to replace the neat transcripts that had descended into the managerial abyss. His play was not even declined—no such flattering intimation was given him that it had been read. What the managers would do for Mrs. Alsager concerned him little today; the thing that was relevant was that they would do nothing for *him*. That charming woman felt humbled to the earth, so little response had she had from the powers on which she counted. The two never talked about the play now, but he tried to show her a still finer friendship, that she might not think he felt she had failed him. He still walked about London with his dreams, but as months succeeded months and he left the year behind him they were dreams not so much of success as of revenge. Success seemed a colourless name for the reward of his patience; something fiercely florid, something sanguinolent was more to the point. His best consolation however was still in the scenic idea; it was not till now that he discovered how incurably he was in love with it. By the time a vain second year had chafed itself away he cherished his fruitless faculty the more for the obloquy it seemed to suffer. He lived, in his best hours, in a world of subjects and situations; he wrote another play and made it as different from its predecessor as such a very good thing could be. It might be a very good thing, but when he had committed it to the theatrical limbo indiscriminating fate took no account of the difference. He was at last able to leave England for three or four months; he went to Germany to pay a visit long deferred to his mother and sisters.

Shortly before the time he had fixed for his return he received from Mrs. Alsager a telegram consisting of the words: "Loder wishes see you—putting *Nona* instant rehearsal." He spent

the few hours before his departure in kissing his mother and sisters, who knew enough about Mrs. Alsager to judge it lucky this respectable married lady was not there—a relief, however, accompanied with speculative glances at London and the morrow. Loder, as our young man was aware, meant the new “Renaissance,” but though he reached home in the evening it was not to this convenient modern theatre that Wayworth first proceeded. He spent a late hour with Mrs. Alsager, an hour that throbbed with calculation. She told him that Mr. Loder was charming, he had simply taken up the play in its turn; he had hopes of it, moreover, that on the part of a professional pessimist might almost be qualified as ecstatic. It had been cast, with a margin for objections, and Violet Grey was to do the heroine. She had been capable, while he was away, of a good piece of work at that foggy old playhouse the “Legitimate;” the piece was a clumsy *réchauffé*, but she at least had been fresh. Wayworth remembered Violet Grey—hadn’t he, for two years, on a fond policy of “looking out,” kept dipping into the London theatres to pick up prospective interpreters? He had not picked up many as yet, and this young lady at all events had never wriggled in his net. She was pretty and she was odd, but he had never prefigured her as Nona Vincent, nor indeed found himself attracted by what he already felt sufficiently launched in the profession to speak of as her artistic personality. Mrs. Alsager was different—she declared that she had been struck not a little by some of her tones. The girl was interesting in the thing at the “Legitimate,” and Mr. Loder, who had his eye on her, described her as ambitious and intelligent. She wanted awfully to get on—and some of those ladies were so lazy! Wayworth was sceptical—he had seen Miss Violet Grey, who was terribly itinerant, in a dozen theatres but only in one aspect. Nona Vincent had a dozen aspects, but only one theatre; yet with what a feverish curiosity the young man promised himself to watch the actress on the morrow! Talking the matter over with Mrs. Alsager now seemed the very stuff that rehearsal was made of. The near prospect of being acted laid a finger even on the lip of inquiry; he wanted to go on tiptoe till the first night, to make no condition but that they should speak his lines, and he felt that he wouldn’t so much as raise an eyebrow at the scene-painter if he should give him an old oak chamber.

He became conscious, the next day, that his danger would be other than this, and yet he couldn’t have expressed to himself what it would be. Danger was there, doubtless—danger was everywhere, in the world of art, and still more in the world of commerce; but what he really seemed to catch, for the hour, was the beating of the wings of victory. Nothing could undermine that, since it was victory simply to be acted. It would be victory even to be acted badly; a reflection that didn’t prevent him, however, from banishing, in his politic optimism, the word “bad” from his vocabulary. It had no application, in the compromise of practice; it didn’t apply even to his play, which he was conscious he had already outlived and as to which he foresaw that, in the coming weeks, frequent alarm would alternate, in his spirit, with frequent esteem. When he went down to the dusky daylight theatre (it arched over him like the temple of fame) Mr. Loder, who was as charming as Mrs. Alsager had announced, struck him as the genius of hospitality. The manager began to explain why, for so long, he had given no sign; but that was the last thing that interested Wayworth now, and he could never remember afterwards what reasons Mr. Loder had enumerated. He liked, in the whole business of discussion and preparation, even the things he had thought he should probably dislike, and he revelled in those he had thought he should like. He watched Miss Violet Grey that evening with eyes that sought to penetrate her possibilities. She certainly had a few; they were qualities of voice and face, qualities perhaps even of intelligence; he sat there at any rate with a fostering, coaxing attention, repeating over to himself as convincingly as he could that she was not common—a circumstance all the more creditable as the part she was playing seemed to him desperately so. He perceived that this was why it pleased the audience; he divined that it was the part they enjoyed rather than the actress. He had a private panic, wondering how, if they liked *that* form, they could possibly like his. His form had now

become quite an ultimate idea to him. By the time the evening was over some of Miss Violet Grey's features, several of the turns of her head, a certain vibration of her voice, had taken their place in the same category. She *was* interesting, she was distinguished; at any rate he had accepted her: it came to the same thing. But he left the theatre that night without speaking to her—moved (a little even to his own mystification) by an odd procrastinating impulse. On the morrow he was to read his three acts to the company, and then he should have a good deal to say; what he felt for the moment was a vague indisposition to commit himself. Moreover he found a slight confusion of annoyance in the fact that though he had been trying all the evening to look at Nona Vincent in Violet Grey's person, what subsisted in his vision was simply Violet Grey in Nona's. He didn't wish to see the actress so directly, or even so simply as that; and it had been very fatiguing, the effort to focus Nona both through the performer and through the "Legitimate." Before he went to bed that night he posted three words to Mrs. Alsager—"She's not a bit like it, but I dare say I can make her do."

He was pleased with the way the actress listened, the next day, at the reading; he was pleased indeed with many things, at the reading, and most of all with the reading itself. The whole affair loomed large to him and he magnified it and mapped it out. He enjoyed his occupation of the big, dim, hollow theatre, full of the echoes of "effect" and of a queer smell of gas and success—it all seemed such a passive canvas for his picture. For the first time in his life he was in command of resources; he was acquainted with the phrase, but had never thought he should know the feeling. He was surprised at what Loder appeared ready to do, though he reminded himself that he must never show it. He foresaw that there would be two distinct concomitants to the artistic effort of producing a play, one consisting of a great deal of anguish and the other of a great deal of amusement. He looked back upon the reading, afterwards, as the best hour in the business, because it was then that the piece had most struck him as represented. What came later was the doing of others; but this, with its imperfections and failures, was all his own. The drama lived, at any rate, for that hour, with an intensity that it was promptly to lose in the poverty and patchiness of rehearsal; he could see its life reflected, in a way that was sweet to him, in the stillness of the little semi-circle of attentive and inscrutable, of water-proofed and muddy-booted, actors. Miss Violet Grey was the auditor he had most to say to, and he tried on the spot, across the shabby stage, to let her have the soul of her part. Her attitude was graceful, but though she appeared to listen with all her faculties her face remained perfectly blank; a fact, however, not discouraging to Wayworth, who liked her better for not being premature. Her companions gave discernible signs of recognising the passages of comedy; yet Wayworth forgave her even then for being inexpressive. She evidently wished before everything else to be simply sure of what it was all about.

He was more surprised even than at the revelation of the scale on which Mr. Loder was ready to proceed by the discovery that some of the actors didn't like their parts, and his heart sank as he asked himself what he could possibly do with them if they were going to be so stupid. This was the first of his disappointments; somehow he had expected every individual to become instantly and gratefully conscious of a rare opportunity, and from the moment such a calculation failed he was at sea, or mindful at any rate that more disappointments would come. It was impossible to make out what the manager liked or disliked; no judgment, no comment escaped him; his acceptance of the play and his views about the way it should be mounted had apparently converted him into a veiled and shrouded figure. Wayworth was able to grasp the idea that they would all move now in a higher and sharper air than that of compliment and confidence. When he talked with Violet Grey after the reading he gathered that she was really rather crude: what better proof of it could there be than her failure to break out instantly with an expression of delight about her great chance? This reserve, however,

had evidently nothing to do with high pretensions; she had no wish to make him feel that a person of her eminence was superior to easy raptures. He guessed, after a little, that she was puzzled and even somewhat frightened—to a certain extent she had not understood. Nothing could appeal to him more than the opportunity to clear up her difficulties, in the course of the examination of which he quickly discovered that, so far as she *had* understood, she had understood wrong. If she was crude it was only a reason the more for talking to her; he kept saying to her “Ask me—ask me: ask me everything you can think of.”

She asked him, she was perpetually asking him, and at the first rehearsals, which were without form and void to a degree that made them strike him much more as the death of an experiment than as the dawn of a success, they threshed things out immensely in a corner of the stage, with the effect of his coming to feel that at any rate she was in earnest. He felt more and more that his heroine was the keystone of his arch, for which indeed the actress was very ready to take her. But when he reminded this young lady of the way the whole thing practically depended on her she was alarmed and even slightly scandalised: she spoke more than once as if that could scarcely be the right way to construct a play—make it stand or fall by one poor nervous girl. She was almost morbidly conscientious, and in theory he liked her for this, though he lost patience three or four times with the things she couldn't do and the things she could. At such times the tears came to her eyes; but they were produced by her own stupidity, she hastened to assure him, not by the way he spoke, which was awfully kind under the circumstances. Her sincerity made her beautiful, and he wished to heaven (and made a point of telling her so) that she could sprinkle a little of it over Nona. Once, however, she was so touched and troubled that the sight of it brought the tears for an instant to his own eyes; and it so happened that, turning at this moment, he found himself face to face with Mr. Loder. The manager stared, glanced at the actress, who turned in the other direction, and then smiling at Wayworth, exclaimed, with the humour of a man who heard the gallery laugh every night:

“I say—I say!”

“What's the matter?” Wayworth asked.

“I'm glad to see Miss Grey is taking such pains with you.”

“Oh, yes—she'll turn me out!” said the young man, gaily. He was quite aware that it was apparent he was not superficial about Nona, and abundantly determined, into the bargain, that the rehearsal of the piece should not sacrifice a shade of thoroughness to any extrinsic consideration.

Mrs. Alsager, whom, late in the afternoon, he used often to go and ask for a cup of tea, thanking her in advance for the rest she gave him and telling her how he found that rehearsal (as *they* were doing it—it was a caution!) took it out of one—Mrs. Alsager, more and more his good genius and, as he repeatedly assured her, his ministering angel, confirmed him in this superior policy and urged him on to every form of artistic devotion. She had, naturally, never been more interested than now in his work; she wanted to hear everything about everything. She treated him as heroically fatigued, plied him with luxurious restoratives, made him stretch himself on cushions and rose-leaves. They gossiped more than ever, by her fire, about the artistic life; he confided to her, for instance, all his hopes and fears, all his experiments and anxieties, on the subject of the representative of Nona. She was immensely interested in this young lady and showed it by taking a box again and again (she had seen her half-a-dozen times already), to study her capacity through the veil of her present part. Like Allan Wayworth she found her encouraging only by fits, for she had fine flashes of badness. She was intelligent, but she cried aloud for training, and the training was so absent

that the intelligence had only a fraction of its effect. She was like a knife without an edge—good steel that had never been sharpened; she hacked away at her hard dramatic loaf, she couldn't cut it smooth.

II.

“Certainly my leading lady won't make Nona much like *you!*” Wayworth one day gloomily remarked to Mrs. Alsager. There were days when the prospect seemed to him awful.

“So much the better. There's no necessity for that.”

“I wish you'd train her a little—you could so easily,” the young man went on; in response to which Mrs. Alsager requested him not to make such cruel fun of her. But she was curious about the girl, wanted to hear of her character, her private situation, how she lived and where, seemed indeed desirous to befriend her. Wayworth might not have known much about the private situation of Miss Violet Grey, but, as it happened, he was able, by the time his play had been three weeks in rehearsal, to supply information on such points. She was a charming, exemplary person, educated, cultivated, with highly modern tastes, an excellent musician. She had lost her parents and was very much alone in the world, her only two relations being a sister, who was married to a civil servant (in a highly responsible post) in India, and a dear little old-fashioned aunt (really a great-aunt) with whom she lived at Notting Hill, who wrote children's books and who, it appeared, had once written a Christmas pantomime. It was quite an artistic home—not on the scale of Mrs. Alsager's (to compare the smallest things with the greatest!) but intensely refined and honourable. Wayworth went so far as to hint that it would be rather nice and human on Mrs. Alsager's part to go there—they would take it so kindly if she should call on them. She had acted so often on his hints that he had formed a pleasant habit of expecting it: it made him feel so wisely responsible about giving them. But this one appeared to fall to the ground, so that he let the subject drop. Mrs. Alsager, however, went yet once more to the “Legitimate,” as he found by her saying to him abruptly, on the morrow: “Oh, she'll be very good—she'll be very good.” When they said “she,” in these days, they always meant Violet Grey, though they pretended, for the most part, that they meant Nona Vincent.

“Oh yes,” Wayworth assented, “she wants so to!”

Mrs. Alsager was silent a moment; then she asked, a little inconsequently, as if she had come back from a reverie: “Does she want to *very* much?”

“Tremendously—and it appears she has been fascinated by the part from the first.”

“Why then didn't she say so?”

“Oh, because she's so funny.”

“She *is* funny,” said Mrs. Alsager, musingly; and presently she added: “She's in love with you.”

Wayworth stared, blushed very red, then laughed out. “What is there funny in that?” he demanded; but before his interlocutress could satisfy him on this point he inquired, further, how she knew anything about it. After a little graceful evasion she explained that the night before, at the “Legitimate,” Mrs. Beaumont, the wife of the actor-manager, had paid her a visit in her box; which had happened, in the course of their brief gossip, to lead to her remarking that she had never been “behind.” Mrs. Beaumont offered on the spot to take her round, and the fancy had seized her to accept the invitation. She had been amused for the moment, and in this way it befell that her conductress, at her request, had introduced her to Miss Violet Grey, who was waiting in the wing for one of her scenes. Mrs. Beaumont had

been called away for three minutes, and during this scrap of time, face to face with the actress, she had discovered the poor girl's secret. Wayworth qualified it as a senseless thing, but wished to know what had led to the discovery. She characterised this inquiry as superficial for a painter of the ways of women; and he doubtless didn't improve it by remarking profanely that a cat might look at a king and that such things were convenient to know. Even on this ground, however, he was threatened by Mrs. Alsager, who contended that it might not be a joking matter to the poor girl. To this Wayworth, who now professed to hate talking about the passions he might have inspired, could only reply that he meant it couldn't make a difference to Mrs. Alsager.

"How in the world do you know what makes a difference to *me*?" this lady asked, with incongruous coldness, with a haughtiness indeed remarkable in so gentle a spirit.

He saw Violet Grey that night at the theatre, and it was she who spoke first of her having lately met a friend of his.

"She's in love with you," the actress said, after he had made a show of ignorance; "doesn't that tell you anything?"

He blushed redder still than Mrs. Alsager had made him blush, but replied, quickly enough and very adequately, that hundreds of women were naturally dying for him.

"Oh, I don't care, for you're not in love with *her*!" the girl continued.

"Did she tell you that too?" Wayworth asked; but she had at that moment to go on.

Standing where he could see her he thought that on this occasion she threw into her scene, which was the best she had in the play, a brighter art than ever before, a talent that could play with its problem. She was perpetually doing things out of rehearsal (she did two or three to-night, in the other man's piece), that he as often wished to heaven Nona Vincent might have the benefit of. She appeared to be able to do them for every one but him—that is for every one but Nona. He was conscious, in these days, of an odd new feeling, which mixed (this was a part of its oddity) with a very natural and comparatively old one and which in its most definite form was a dull ache of regret that this young lady's unlucky star should have placed her on the stage. He wished in his worst uneasiness that, without going further, she would give it up; and yet it soothed that uneasiness to remind himself that he saw grounds to hope she would go far enough to make a marked success of Nona. There were strange and painful moments when, as the interpreter of Nona, he almost hated her; after which, however, he always assured himself that he exaggerated, inasmuch as what made this aversion seem great, when he was nervous, was simply its contrast with the growing sense that there *were* grounds—totally different—on which she pleased him. She pleased him as a charming creature—by her sincerities and her perversities, by the varieties and surprises of her character and by certain happy facts of her person. In private her eyes were sad to him and her voice was rare. He detested the idea that she should have a disappointment or an humiliation, and he wanted to rescue her altogether, to save and transplant her. One way to save her was to see to it, to the best of his ability, that the production of his play should be a triumph; and the other way—it was really too queer to express—was almost to wish that it shouldn't be. Then, for the future, there would be safety and peace, and not the peace of death—the peace of a different life. It is to be added that our young man clung to the former of these ways in proportion as the latter perversely tempted him. He was nervous at the best, increasingly and intolerably nervous; but the immediate remedy was to rehearse harder and harder, and above all to work it out with Violet Grey. Some of her comrades reproached him with working it out only with her, as if she were the whole affair; to which he replied that

they could afford to be neglected, they were all so tremendously good. She was the only person concerned whom he didn't flatter.

The author and the actress stuck so to the business in hand that she had very little time to speak to him again of Mrs. Alsager, of whom indeed her imagination appeared adequately to have disposed. Wayworth once remarked to her that Nona Vincent was supposed to be a good deal like his charming friend; but she gave a blank "Supposed by whom?" in consequence of which he never returned to the subject. He confided his nervousness as freely as usual to Mrs. Alsager, who easily understood that he had a peculiar complication of anxieties. His suspense varied in degree from hour to hour, but any relief there might have been in this was made up for by its being of several different kinds. One afternoon, as the first performance drew near, Mrs. Alsager said to him, in giving him his cup of tea and on his having mentioned that he had not closed his eyes the night before:

"You must indeed be in a dreadful state. Anxiety for another is still worse than anxiety for one's self."

"For another?" Wayworth repeated, looking at her over the rim of his cup.

"My poor friend, you're nervous about Nona Vincent, but you're infinitely more nervous about Violet Grey."

"She *is* Nona Vincent!"

"No, she isn't—not a bit!" said Mrs. Alsager, abruptly.

"Do you really think so?" Wayworth cried, spilling his tea in his alarm.

"What I think doesn't signify—I mean what I think about that. What I meant to say was that great as is your suspense about your play, your suspense about your actress is greater still."

"I can only repeat that my actress *is* my play."

Mrs. Alsager looked thoughtfully into the teapot.

"Your actress is your—"

"My what?" the young man asked, with a little tremor in his voice, as his hostess paused.

"Your very dear friend. You're in love with her—at present." And with a sharp click Mrs. Alsager dropped the lid on the fragrant receptacle.

"Not yet—not yet!" laughed her visitor.

"You will be if she pulls you through."

"You declare that she *won't* pull me through."

Mrs. Alsager was silent a moment, after which she softly murmured: "I'll pray for her."

"You're the most generous of women!" Wayworth cried; then coloured as if the words had not been happy. They would have done indeed little honour to a man of tact.

The next morning he received five hurried lines from Mrs. Alsager. She had suddenly been called to Torquay, to see a relation who was seriously ill; she should be detained there several days, but she had an earnest hope of being able to return in time for his first night. In any event he had her unrestricted good wishes. He missed her extremely, for these last days were a great strain and there was little comfort to be derived from Violet Grey. She was even more nervous than himself, and so pale and altered that he was afraid she would be too ill to act. It was settled between them that they made each other worse and that he had now much better leave her alone. They had pulled Nona so to pieces that nothing seemed left of her—she

must at least have time to grow together again. He left Violet Grey alone, to the best of his ability, but she carried out imperfectly her own side of the bargain. She came to him with new questions—she waited for him with old doubts, and half an hour before the last dress-rehearsal, on the eve of production, she proposed to him a totally fresh rendering of his heroine. This incident gave him such a sense of insecurity that he turned his back on her without a word, bolted out of the theatre, dashed along the Strand and walked as far as the Bank. Then he jumped into a hansom and came westward, and when he reached the theatre again the business was nearly over. It appeared, almost to his disappointment, not bad enough to give him the consolation of the old playhouse adage that the worst dress-rehearsals make the best first nights.

The morrow, which was a Wednesday, was the dreadful day; the theatre had been closed on the Monday and the Tuesday. Every one, on the Wednesday, did his best to let every one else alone, and every one signally failed in the attempt. The day, till seven o'clock, was understood to be consecrated to rest, but every one except Violet Grey turned up at the theatre. Wayworth looked at Mr. Loder, and Mr. Loder looked in another direction, which was as near as they came to conversation. Wayworth was in a fidget, unable to eat or sleep or sit still, at times almost in terror. He kept quiet by keeping, as usual, in motion; he tried to walk away from his nervousness. He walked in the afternoon toward Notting Hill, but he succeeded in not breaking the vow he had taken not to meddle with his actress. She was like an acrobat poised on a slippery ball—if he should touch her she would topple over. He passed her door three times and he thought of her three hundred. This was the hour at which he most regretted that Mrs. Alsager had not come back—for he had called at her house only to learn that she was still at Torquay. This was probably queer, and it was probably queerer still that she hadn't written to him; but even of these things he wasn't sure, for in losing, as he had now completely lost, his judgment of his play, he seemed to himself to have lost his judgment of everything. When he went home, however, he found a telegram from the lady of Grosvenor Place—"Shall be able to come—reach town by seven." At half-past eight o'clock, through a little aperture in the curtain of the "Renaissance," he saw her in her box with a cluster of friends—completely beautiful and beneficent. The house was magnificent—too good for his play, he felt; too good for any play. Everything now seemed too good—the scenery, the furniture, the dresses, the very programmes. He seized upon the idea that this was probably what was the matter with the representative of Nona—she was only too good. He had completely arranged with this young lady the plan of their relations during the evening; and though they had altered everything else that they had arranged they had promised each other not to alter this. It was wonderful the number of things they had promised each other. He would start her, he would see her off—then he would quit the theatre and stay away till just before the end. She besought him to stay away—it would make her infinitely easier. He saw that she was exquisitely dressed—she had made one or two changes for the better since the night before, and that seemed something definite to turn over and over in his mind as he rumbled foggily home in the four-wheeler in which, a few steps from the stage-door, he had taken refuge as soon as he knew that the curtain was up. He lived a couple of miles off, and he had chosen a four-wheeler to drag out the time.

When he got home his fire was out, his room was cold, and he lay down on his sofa in his overcoat. He had sent his landlady to the dress-circle, on purpose; she would overflow with words and mistakes. The house seemed a black void, just as the streets had done—every one was, formidably, at his play. He was quieter at last than he had been for a fortnight, and he felt too weak even to wonder how the thing was going. He believed afterwards that he had slept an hour; but even if he had he felt it to be still too early to return to the theatre. He sat down by his lamp and tried to read—to read a little compendious life of a great English

statesman, out of a “series.” It struck him as brilliantly clever, and he asked himself whether that perhaps were not rather the sort of thing he ought to have taken up: not the statesmanship, but the art of brief biography. Suddenly he became aware that he must hurry if he was to reach the theatre at all—it was a quarter to eleven o’clock. He scrambled out and, this time, found a hansom—he had lately spent enough money in cabs to add to his hope that the profits of his new profession would be great. His anxiety, his suspense flamed up again, and as he rattled eastward—he went fast now—he was almost sick with alternations. As he passed into the theatre the first man—some underling—who met him, cried to him, breathlessly:

“You’re wanted, sir—you’re wanted!” He thought his tone very ominous—he devoured the man’s eyes with his own, for a betrayal: did he mean that he was wanted for execution? Some one else pressed him, almost pushed him, forward; he was already on the stage. Then he became conscious of a sound more or less continuous, but seemingly faint and far, which he took at first for the voice of the actors heard through their canvas walls, the beautiful built-in room of the last act. But the actors were in the wing, they surrounded him; the curtain was down and they were coming off from before it. They had been called, and *he* was called—they all greeted him with “Go on—go on!” He was terrified—he couldn’t go on—he didn’t believe in the applause, which seemed to him only audible enough to sound half-hearted.

“Has it gone?—*has* it gone?” he gasped to the people round him; and he heard them say “Rather—rather!” perfunctorily, mendaciously too, as it struck him, and even with mocking laughter, the laughter of defeat and despair. Suddenly, though all this must have taken but a moment, Loder burst upon him from somewhere with a “For God’s sake don’t keep them, or they’ll *stop!*” “But I can’t go on for *that!*” Wayworth cried, in anguish; the sound seemed to him already to have ceased. Loder had hold of him and was shoving him; he resisted and looked round frantically for Violet Grey, who perhaps would tell him the truth. There was by this time a crowd in the wing, all with strange grimacing painted faces, but Violet was not among them and her very absence frightened him. He uttered her name with an accent that he afterwards regretted—it gave them, as he thought, both away; and while Loder hustled him before the curtain he heard some one say “She took her call and disappeared.” She had had a call, then—this was what was most present to the young man as he stood for an instant in the glare of the footlights, looking blindly at the great vaguely-peopled horseshoe and greeted with plaudits which now seemed to him at once louder than he deserved and feebler than he desired. They sank to rest quickly, but he felt it to be long before he could back away, before he could, in his turn, seize the manager by the arm and cry huskily—“Has it really gone—*really?*”

Mr. Loder looked at him hard and replied after an instant: “The play’s all right!”

Wayworth hung upon his lips. “Then what’s all wrong?”

“We must do something to Miss Grey.”

“What’s the matter with her?”

“She isn’t *in* it!”

“Do you mean she has failed?”

“Yes, damn it—she has failed.”

Wayworth stared. “Then how can the play be all right?”

“Oh, we’ll save it—we’ll save it.”

“Where’s Miss Grey—where *is* she?” the young man asked.

Loder caught his arm as he was turning away again to look for his heroine. “Never mind her now—she knows it!”

Wayworth was approached at the same moment by a gentleman he knew as one of Mrs. Alsager’s friends—he had perceived him in that lady’s box. Mrs. Alsager was waiting there for the successful author; she desired very earnestly that he would come round and speak to her. Wayworth assured himself first that Violet had left the theatre—one of the actresses could tell him that she had seen her throw on a cloak, without changing her dress, and had learnt afterwards that she had, the next moment, flung herself, after flinging her aunt, into a cab. He had wished to invite half a dozen persons, of whom Miss Grey and her elderly relative were two, to come home to supper with him; but she had refused to make any engagement beforehand (it would be so dreadful to have to keep it if she shouldn’t have made a hit), and this attitude had blighted the pleasant plan, which fell to the ground. He had called her morbid, but she was immovable. Mrs. Alsager’s messenger let him know that he was expected to supper in Grosvenor Place, and half an hour afterwards he was seated there among complimentary people and flowers and popping corks, eating the first orderly meal he had partaken of for a week. Mrs. Alsager had carried him off in her brougham—the other people who were coming got into things of their own. He stopped her short as soon as she began to tell him how tremendously every one had been struck by the piece; he nailed her down to the question of Violet Grey. Had she spoiled the play, had she jeopardised or compromised it—had she been utterly bad, had she been good in any degree?

“Certainly the performance would have seemed better if *she* had been better,” Mrs. Alsager confessed.

“And the play would have seemed better if the performance had been better,” Wayworth said, gloomily, from the corner of the brougham.

“She does what she can, and she has talent, and she looked lovely. But she doesn’t *see* Nona Vincent. She doesn’t see the type—she doesn’t see the individual—she doesn’t see the woman you meant. She’s out of it—she gives you a different person.”

“Oh, the woman I meant!” the young man exclaimed, looking at the London lamps as he rolled by them. “I wish to God she had known *you!*” he added, as the carriage stopped. After they had passed into the house he said to his companion:

“You see she *won’t* pull me through.”

“Forgive her—be kind to her!” Mrs. Alsager pleaded.

“I shall only thank her. The play may go to the dogs.”

“If it does—if it does,” Mrs. Alsager began, with her pure eyes on him.

“Well, what if it does?”

She couldn’t tell him, for the rest of her guests came in together; she only had time to say: “It *sha’n’t* go to the dogs!”

He came away before the others, restless with the desire to go to Notting Hill even that night, late as it was, haunted with the sense that Violet Grey had measured her fall. When he got into the street, however, he allowed second thoughts to counsel another course; the effect of knocking her up at two o’clock in the morning would hardly be to soothe her. He looked at six newspapers the next day and found in them never a good word for her. They were well enough about the piece, but they were unanimous as to the disappointment caused by the

young actress whose former efforts had excited such hopes and on whom, on this occasion, such pressing responsibilities rested. They asked in chorus what was the matter with her, and they declared in chorus that the play, which was not without promise, was handicapped (they all used the same word) by the odd want of correspondence between the heroine and her interpreter. Wayworth drove early to Notting Hill, but he didn't take the newspapers with him; Violet Grey could be trusted to have sent out for them by the peep of dawn and to have fed her anguish full. She declined to see him—she only sent down word by her aunt that she was extremely unwell and should be unable to act that night unless she were suffered to spend the day unmolested and in bed. Wayworth sat for an hour with the old lady, who understood everything and to whom he could speak frankly. She gave him a touching picture of her niece's condition, which was all the more vivid for the simple words in which it was expressed: "She feels she isn't right, you know—she feels she isn't right!"

"Tell her it doesn't matter—it doesn't matter a straw!" said Wayworth.

"And she's so proud—you know how proud she is!" the old lady went on.

"Tell her I'm more than satisfied, that I accept her gratefully as she is."

"She says she injures your play, that she ruins it," said his interlocutress.

"She'll improve, immensely—she'll grow into the part," the young man continued.

"She'd improve if she knew how—but she says she doesn't. She has given all she has got, and she doesn't know what's wanted."

"What's wanted is simply that she should go straight on and trust me."

"How can she trust you when she feels she's losing you?"

"Losing me?" Wayworth cried.

"You'll never forgive her if your play is taken off!"

"It will run six months," said the author of the piece.

The old lady laid her hand on his arm. "What will you do for her if it does?"

He looked at Violet Grey's aunt a moment. "Do you say your niece is very proud?"

"Too proud for her dreadful profession."

"Then she wouldn't wish you to ask me that," Wayworth answered, getting up.

When he reached home he was very tired, and for a person to whom it was open to consider that he had scored a success he spent a remarkably dismal day. All his restlessness had gone, and fatigue and depression possessed him. He sank into his old chair by the fire and sat there for hours with his eyes closed. His landlady came in to bring his luncheon and mend the fire, but he feigned to be asleep, so as not to be spoken to. It is to be supposed that sleep at last overtook him, for about the hour that dusk began to gather he had an extraordinary impression, a visit that, it would seem, could have belonged to no waking consciousness. Nona Vincent, in face and form, the living heroine of his play, rose before him in his little silent room, sat down with him at his dingy fireside. She was not Violet Grey, she was not Mrs. Alsager, she was not any woman he had seen upon earth, nor was it any masquerade of friendship or of penitence. Yet she was more familiar to him than the women he had known best, and she was ineffably beautiful and consoling. She filled the poor room with her presence, the effect of which was as soothing as some odour of incense. She was as quiet as an affectionate sister, and there was no surprise in her being there. Nothing more real had ever befallen him, and nothing, somehow, more reassuring. He

felt her hand rest upon his own, and all his senses seemed to open to her message. She struck him, in the strangest way, both as his creation and as his inspirer, and she gave him the happiest consciousness of success. If she was so charming, in the red firelight, in her vague, clear-coloured garments, it was because he had made her so, and yet if the weight seemed lifted from his spirit it was because she drew it away. When she bent her deep eyes upon him they seemed to speak of safety and freedom and to make a green garden of the future. From time to time she smiled and said: "I live—I live—I live." How long she stayed he couldn't have told, but when his landlady blundered in with the lamp Nona Vincent was no longer there. He rubbed his eyes, but no dream had ever been so intense; and as he slowly got out of his chair it was with a deep still joy—the joy of the artist—in the thought of how right he had been, how exactly like herself he had made her. She had come to show him that. At the end of five minutes, however, he felt sufficiently mystified to call his landlady back—he wanted to ask her a question. When the good woman reappeared the question hung fire an instant; then it shaped itself as the inquiry:

"Has any lady been here?"

"No, sir—no lady at all."

The woman seemed slightly scandalised. "Not Miss Vincent?"

"Miss Vincent, sir?"

"The young lady of my play, don't you know?"

"Oh, sir, you mean Miss Violet Grey!"

"No I don't, at all. I think I mean Mrs. Alsager."

"There has been no Mrs. Alsager, sir."

"Nor anybody at all like her?"

The woman looked at him as if she wondered what had suddenly taken him. Then she asked in an injured tone: "Why shouldn't I have told you if you'd 'ad callers, sir?"

"I thought you might have thought I was asleep."

"Indeed you were, sir, when I came in with the lamp—and well you'd earned it, Mr. Wayworth!"

The landlady came back an hour later to bring him a telegram; it was just as he had begun to dress to dine at his club and go down to the theatre.

"See me to-night in front, and don't come near me till it's over."

It was in these words that Violet communicated her wishes for the evening. He obeyed them to the letter; he watched her from the depths of a box. He was in no position to say how she might have struck him the night before, but what he saw during these charmed hours filled him with admiration and gratitude. She *was* in it, this time; she had pulled herself together, she had taken possession, she was felicitous at every turn. Fresh from his revelation of Nona he was in a position to judge, and as he judged he exulted. He was thrilled and carried away, and he was moreover intensely curious to know what had happened to her, by what unfathomable art she had managed in a few hours to effect such a change of base. It was as if *she* had had a revelation of Nona, so convincing a clearness had been breathed upon the picture. He kept himself quiet in the *entr'actes*—he would speak to her only at the end; but before the play was half over the manager burst into his box.

“It’s prodigious, what she’s up to!” cried Mr. Loder, almost more bewildered than gratified. “She has gone in for a new reading—a blessed somersault in the air!”

“Is it quite different?” Wayworth asked, sharing his mystification.

“Different? Hyperion to a satyr! It’s devilish good, my boy!”

“It’s devilish good,” said Wayworth, “and it’s in a different key altogether from the key of her rehearsal.”

“I’ll run you six months!” the manager declared; and he rushed round again to the actress, leaving Wayworth with a sense that she had already pulled him through. She had with the audience an immense personal success.

When he went behind, at the end, he had to wait for her; she only showed herself when she was ready to leave the theatre. Her aunt had been in her dressing-room with her, and the two ladies appeared together. The girl passed him quickly, motioning him to say nothing till they should have got out of the place. He saw that she was immensely excited, lifted altogether above her common artistic level. The old lady said to him: “You must come home to supper with us: it has been all arranged.” They had a brougham, with a little third seat, and he got into it with them. It was a long time before the actress would speak. She leaned back in her corner, giving no sign but still heaving a little, like a subsiding sea, and with all her triumph in the eyes that shone through the darkness. The old lady was hushed to awe, or at least to discretion, and Wayworth was happy enough to wait. He had really to wait till they had alighted at Notting Hill, where the elder of his companions went to see that supper had been attended to.

“I was better—I was better,” said Violet Grey, throwing off her cloak in the little drawing-room.

“You were perfection. You’ll be like that every night, won’t you?”

She smiled at him. “Every night? There can scarcely be a miracle every day.”

“What do you mean by a miracle?”

“I’ve had a revelation.”

Wayward stared. “At what hour?”

“The right hour—this afternoon. Just in time to save me—and to save *you*.”

“At five o’clock? Do you mean you had a visit?”

“She came to me—she stayed two hours.”

“Two hours? Nona Vincent?”

“Mrs. Alsager.” Violet Grey smiled more deeply. “It’s the same thing.”

“And how did Mrs. Alsager save you?”

“By letting me look at her. By letting me hear her speak. By letting me know her.”

“And what did she say to you?”

“Kind things—encouraging, intelligent things.”

“Ah, the dear woman!” Wayworth cried.

“You ought to like her—she likes *you*. She was just what I wanted,” the actress added.

“Do you mean she talked to you about Nona?”

“She said you thought she was like her. She *is*—she’s exquisite.”

“She’s exquisite,” Wayworth repeated. “Do you mean she tried to coach you?”

“Oh, no—she only said she would be so glad if it would help me to see her. And I felt it did help me. I don’t know what took place—she only sat there, and she held my hand and smiled at me, and she had tact and grace, and she had goodness and beauty, and she soothed my nerves and lighted up my imagination. Somehow she seemed to *give* it all to me. I took it—I took it. I kept her before me, I drank her in. For the first time, in the whole study of the part, I had my model—I could make my copy. All my courage came back to me, and other things came that I hadn’t felt before. She was different—she was delightful; as I’ve said, she was a revelation. She kissed me when she went away—and you may guess if I kissed *her*. We were awfully affectionate, but it’s *you* she likes!” said Violet Grey.

Wayworth had never been more interested in his life, and he had rarely been more mystified. “Did she wear vague, clear-coloured garments?” he asked, after a moment.

Violet Grey stared, laughed, then bade him go in to supper. “*You* know how she dresses!”

He was very well pleased at supper, but he was silent and a little solemn. He said he would go to see Mrs. Alsager the next day. He did so, but he was told at her door that she had returned to Torquay. She remained there all winter, all spring, and the next time he saw her his play had run two hundred nights and he had married Violet Grey. His plays sometimes succeed, but his wife is not in them now, nor in any others. At these representations Mrs. Alsager continues frequently to be present.

The Real Thing

I.

When the porter's wife (she used to answer the house-bell), announced "A gentleman—with a lady, sir," I had, as I often had in those days, for the wish was father to the thought, an immediate vision of sitters. Sitters my visitors in this case proved to be; but not in the sense I should have preferred. However, there was nothing at first to indicate that they might not have come for a portrait. The gentleman, a man of fifty, very high and very straight, with a moustache slightly grizzled and a dark grey walking-coat admirably fitted, both of which I noted professionally—I don't mean as a barber or yet as a tailor—would have struck me as a celebrity if celebrities often were striking. It was a truth of which I had for some time been conscious that a figure with a good deal of frontage was, as one might say, almost never a public institution. A glance at the lady helped to remind me of this paradoxical law: she also looked too distinguished to be a "personality." Moreover one would scarcely come across two variations together.

Neither of the pair spoke immediately—they only prolonged the preliminary gaze which suggested that each wished to give the other a chance. They were visibly shy; they stood there letting me take them in—which, as I afterwards perceived, was the most practical thing they could have done. In this way their embarrassment served their cause. I had seen people painfully reluctant to mention that they desired anything so gross as to be represented on canvas; but the scruples of my new friends appeared almost insurmountable. Yet the gentleman might have said "I should like a portrait of my wife," and the lady might have said "I should like a portrait of my husband." Perhaps they were not husband and wife—this naturally would make the matter more delicate. Perhaps they wished to be done together—in which case they ought to have brought a third person to break the news.

"We come from Mr. Rivet," the lady said at last, with a dim smile which had the effect of a moist sponge passed over a "sunk" piece of painting, as well as of a vague allusion to vanished beauty. She was as tall and straight, in her degree, as her companion, and with ten years less to carry. She looked as sad as a woman could look whose face was not charged with expression; that is her tinted oval mask showed friction as an exposed surface shows it. The hand of time had played over her freely, but only to simplify. She was slim and stiff, and so well-dressed, in dark blue cloth, with lappets and pockets and buttons, that it was clear she employed the same tailor as her husband. The couple had an indefinable air of prosperous thrift—they evidently got a good deal of luxury for their money. If I was to be one of their luxuries it would behove me to consider my terms.

"Ah, Claude Rivet recommended me?" I inquired; and I added that it was very kind of him, though I could reflect that, as he only painted landscape, this was not a sacrifice.

The lady looked very hard at the gentleman, and the gentleman looked round the room. Then staring at the floor a moment and stroking his moustache, he rested his pleasant eyes on me with the remark:

"He said you were the right one."

"I try to be, when people want to sit."

"Yes, we should like to," said the lady anxiously.

"Do you mean together?"

My visitors exchanged a glance. "If you could do anything with *me*, I suppose it would be double," the gentleman stammered.

"Oh yes, there's naturally a higher charge for two figures than for one."

"We should like to make it pay," the husband confessed.

"That's very good of you," I returned, appreciating so unwonted a sympathy—for I supposed he meant pay the artist.

A sense of strangeness seemed to dawn on the lady. "We mean for the illustrations—Mr. Rivet said you might put one in."

"Put one in—an illustration?" I was equally confused.

"Sketch her off, you know," said the gentleman, colouring.

It was only then that I understood the service Claude Rivet had rendered me; he had told them that I worked in black and white, for magazines, for story-books, for sketches of contemporary life, and consequently had frequent employment for models. These things were true, but it was not less true (I may confess it now—whether because the aspiration was to lead to everything or to nothing I leave the reader to guess), that I couldn't get the honours, to say nothing of the emoluments, of a great painter of portraits out of my head. My "illustrations" were my pot-boilers; I looked to a different branch of art (far and away the most interesting it had always seemed to me), to perpetuate my fame. There was no shame in looking to it also to make my fortune; but that fortune was by so much further from being made from the moment my visitors wished to be "done" for nothing. I was disappointed; for in the pictorial sense I had immediately *seen* them. I had seized their type—I had already settled what I would do with it. Something that wouldn't absolutely have pleased them, I afterwards reflected.

"Ah, you're—you're—a—?" I began, as soon as I had mastered my surprise. I couldn't bring out the dingy word "models"; it seemed to fit the case so little.

"We haven't had much practice," said the lady.

"We've got to *do* something, and we've thought that an artist in your line might perhaps make something of us," her husband threw off. He further mentioned that they didn't know many artists and that they had gone first, on the off-chance (he painted views of course, but sometimes put in figures—perhaps I remembered), to Mr. Rivet, whom they had met a few years before at a place in Norfolk where he was sketching.

"We used to sketch a little ourselves," the lady hinted.

"It's very awkward, but we absolutely *must* do something," her husband went on.

"Of course, we're not so *very* young," she admitted, with a wan smile.

With the remark that I might as well know something more about them, the husband had handed me a card extracted from a neat new pocket-book (their appurtenances were all of the freshest) and inscribed with the words "Major Monarch." Impressive as these words were they didn't carry my knowledge much further; but my visitor presently added: "I've left the army, and we've had the misfortune to lose our money. In fact our means are dreadfully small."

"It's an awful bore," said Mrs. Monarch.

They evidently wished to be discreet—to take care not to swagger because they were gentlefolks. I perceived they would have been willing to recognise this as something of a

drawback, at the same time that I guessed at an underlying sense—their consolation in adversity—that they *had* their points. They certainly had; but these advantages struck me as preponderantly social; such for instance as would help to make a drawing-room look well. However, a drawing-room was always, or ought to be, a picture.

In consequence of his wife's allusion to their age Major Monarch observed: "Naturally, it's more for the figure that we thought of going in. We can still hold ourselves up." On the instant I saw that the figure was indeed their strong point. His "naturally" didn't sound vain, but it lighted up the question. "*She* has got the best," he continued, nodding at his wife, with a pleasant after-dinner absence of circumlocution. I could only reply, as if we were in fact sitting over our wine, that this didn't prevent his own from being very good; which led him in turn to rejoin: "We thought that if you ever have to do people like us, we might be something like it. *She*, particularly—for a lady in a book, you know."

I was so amused by them that, to get more of it, I did my best to take their point of view; and though it was an embarrassment to find myself appraising physically, as if they were animals on hire or useful blacks, a pair whom I should have expected to meet only in one of the relations in which criticism is tacit, I looked at Mrs. Monarch judicially enough to be able to exclaim, after a moment, with conviction: "Oh yes, a lady in a book!" She was singularly like a bad illustration.

"We'll stand up, if you like," said the Major; and he raised himself before me with a really grand air.

I could take his measure at a glance—he was six feet two and a perfect gentleman. It would have paid any club in process of formation and in want of a stamp to engage him at a salary to stand in the principal window. What struck me immediately was that in coming to me they had rather missed their vocation; they could surely have been turned to better account for advertising purposes. I couldn't of course see the thing in detail, but I could see them make someone's fortune—I don't mean their own. There was something in them for a waistcoat-maker, an hotel-keeper or a soap-vendor. I could imagine "We always use it" pinned on their bosoms with the greatest effect; I had a vision of the promptitude with which they would launch a table d'hôte.

Mrs. Monarch sat still, not from pride but from shyness, and presently her husband said to her: "Get up my dear and show how smart you are." She obeyed, but she had no need to get up to show it. She walked to the end of the studio, and then she came back blushing, with her fluttered eyes on her husband. I was reminded of an incident I had accidentally had a glimpse of in Paris—being with a friend there, a dramatist about to produce a play—when an actress came to him to ask to be intrusted with a part. She went through her paces before him, walked up and down as Mrs. Monarch was doing. Mrs. Monarch did it quite as well, but I abstained from applauding. It was very odd to see such people apply for such poor pay. She looked as if she had ten thousand a year. Her husband had used the word that described her: she was, in the London current jargon, essentially and typically "smart." Her figure was, in the same order of ideas, conspicuously and irreproachably "good." For a woman of her age her waist was surprisingly small; her elbow moreover had the orthodox crook. She held her head at the conventional angle; but why did she come to *me*? She ought to have tried on jackets at a big shop. I feared my visitors were not only destitute, but "artistic"—which would be a great complication. When she sat down again I thanked her, observing that what a draughtsman most valued in his model was the faculty of keeping quiet.

"Oh, *she* can keep quiet," said Major Monarch. Then he added, jocosely: "I've always kept her quiet."

“I’m not a nasty fidget, am I?” Mrs. Monarch appealed to her husband.

He addressed his answer to me. “Perhaps it isn’t out of place to mention—because we ought to be quite business-like, oughtn’t we?—that when I married her she was known as the Beautiful Statue.”

“Oh dear!” said Mrs. Monarch, ruefully.

“Of course I should want a certain amount of expression,” I rejoined.

“Of *course!*” they both exclaimed.

“And then I suppose you know that you’ll get awfully tired.”

“Oh, we *never* get tired!” they eagerly cried.

“Have you had any kind of practice?”

They hesitated—they looked at each other. “We’ve been photographed, *immensely*,” said Mrs. Monarch.

“She means the fellows have asked us,” added the Major.

“I see—because you’re so good-looking.”

“I don’t know what they thought, but they were always after us.”

“We always got our photographs for nothing,” smiled Mrs. Monarch.

“We might have brought some, my dear,” her husband remarked.

“I’m not sure we have any left. We’ve given quantities away,” she explained to me.

“With our autographs and that sort of thing,” said the Major.

“Are they to be got in the shops?” I inquired, as a harmless pleasantry.

“Oh, yes; hers—they used to be.”

“Not now,” said Mrs. Monarch, with her eyes on the floor.

II.

I could fancy the “sort of thing” they put on the presentation-copies of their photographs, and I was sure they wrote a beautiful hand. It was odd how quickly I was sure of everything that concerned them. If they were now so poor as to have to earn shillings and pence, they never had had much of a margin. Their good looks had been their capital, and they had good-humouredly made the most of the career that this resource marked out for them. It was in their faces, the blankness, the deep intellectual repose of the twenty years of country-house visiting which had given them pleasant intonations. I could see the sunny drawing-rooms, sprinkled with periodicals she didn’t read, in which Mrs. Monarch had continuously sat; I could see the wet shrubberies in which she had walked, equipped to admiration for either exercise. I could see the rich covers the Major had helped to shoot and the wonderful garments in which, late at night, he repaired to the smoking-room to talk about them. I could imagine their leggings and waterproofs, their knowing tweeds and rugs, their rolls of sticks and cases of tackle and neat umbrellas; and I could evoke the exact appearance of their servants and the compact variety of their luggage on the platforms of country stations.

They gave small tips, but they were liked; they didn’t do anything themselves, but they were welcome. They looked so well everywhere; they gratified the general relish for stature, complexion and “form.” They knew it without fatuity or vulgarity, and they respected themselves in consequence. They were not superficial; they were thorough and kept

themselves up—it had been their line. People with such a taste for activity had to have some line. I could feel how, even in a dull house, they could have been counted upon for cheerfulness. At present something had happened—it didn't matter what, their little income had grown less, it had grown least—and they had to do something for pocket-money. Their friends liked them, but didn't like to support them. There was something about them that represented credit—their clothes, their manners, their type; but if credit is a large empty pocket in which an occasional chink reverberates, the chink at least must be audible. What they wanted of me was to help to make it so. Fortunately they had no children—I soon divined that. They would also perhaps wish our relations to be kept secret: this was why it was “for the figure”—the reproduction of the face would betray them.

I liked them—they were so simple; and I had no objection to them if they would suit. But, somehow, with all their perfections I didn't easily believe in them. After all they were amateurs, and the ruling passion of my life was the detestation of the amateur. Combined with this was another perversity—an innate preference for the represented subject over the real one: the defect of the real one was so apt to be a lack of representation. I liked things that appeared; then one was sure. Whether they *were* or not was a subordinate and almost always a profitless question. There were other considerations, the first of which was that I already had two or three people in use, notably a young person with big feet, in alpaca, from Kilburn, who for a couple of years had come to me regularly for my illustrations and with whom I was still—perhaps ignobly—satisfied. I frankly explained to my visitors how the case stood; but they had taken more precautions than I supposed. They had reasoned out their opportunity, for Claude Rivet had told them of the projected *édition de luxe* of one of the writers of our day—the rarest of the novelists—who, long neglected by the multitudinous vulgar and dearly prized by the attentive (need I mention Philip Vincent?) had had the happy fortune of seeing, late in life, the dawn and then the full light of a higher criticism—an estimate in which, on the part of the public, there was something really of expiation. The edition in question, planned by a publisher of taste, was practically an act of high reparation; the wood-cuts with which it was to be enriched were the homage of English art to one of the most independent representatives of English letters. Major and Mrs. Monarch confessed to me that they had hoped I might be able to work *them* into my share of the enterprise. They knew I was to do the first of the books, “Rutland Ramsay,” but I had to make clear to them that my participation in the rest of the affair—this first book was to be a test—was to depend on the satisfaction I should give. If this should be limited my employers would drop me without a scruple. It was therefore a crisis for me, and naturally I was making special preparations, looking about for new people, if they should be necessary, and securing the best types. I admitted however that I should like to settle down to two or three good models who would do for everything.

“Should we have often to—a—put on special clothes?” Mrs. Monarch timidly demanded.

“Dear, yes—that's half the business.”

“And should we be expected to supply our own costumes?”

“Oh, no; I've got a lot of things. A painter's models put on—or put off—anything he likes.”

“And do you mean—a—the same?”

“The same?”

Mrs. Monarch looked at her husband again.

“Oh, she was just wondering,” he explained, “if the costumes are in *general* use.” I had to confess that they were, and I mentioned further that some of them (I had a lot of genuine,

greasy last-century things), had served their time, a hundred years ago, on living, world-stained men and women. “We’ll put on anything that fits,” said the Major.

“Oh, I arrange that—they fit in the pictures.”

“I’m afraid I should do better for the modern books. I would come as you like,” said Mrs. Monarch.

“She has got a lot of clothes at home: they might do for contemporary life,” her husband continued.

“Oh, I can fancy scenes in which you’d be quite natural.” And indeed I could see the slipshod rearrangements of stale properties—the stories I tried to produce pictures for without the exasperation of reading them—whose sandy tracts the good lady might help to people. But I had to return to the fact that for this sort of work—the daily mechanical grind—I was already equipped; the people I was working with were fully adequate.

“We only thought we might be more like *some* characters,” said Mrs. Monarch mildly, getting up.

Her husband also rose; he stood looking at me with a dim wistfulness that was touching in so fine a man. “Wouldn’t it be rather a pull sometimes to have—a—to have—?” He hung fire; he wanted me to help him by phrasing what he meant. But I couldn’t—I didn’t know. So he brought it out, awkwardly: “The *real* thing; a gentleman, you know, or a lady.” I was quite ready to give a general assent—I admitted that there was a great deal in that. This encouraged Major Monarch to say, following up his appeal with an unacted gulp: “It’s awfully hard—we’ve tried everything.” The gulp was communicative; it proved too much for his wife. Before I knew it Mrs. Monarch had dropped again upon a divan and burst into tears. Her husband sat down beside her, holding one of her hands; whereupon she quickly dried her eyes with the other, while I felt embarrassed as she looked up at me. “There isn’t a confounded job I haven’t applied for—waited for—prayed for. You can fancy we’d be pretty bad first. Secretaryships and that sort of thing? You might as well ask for a peerage. I’d be *anything*—I’m strong; a messenger or a coalheaver. I’d put on a gold-laced cap and open carriage-doors in front of the haberdasher’s; I’d hang about a station, to carry portmanteaus; I’d be a postman. But they won’t *look* at you; there are thousands, as good as yourself, already on the ground. *Gentlemen*, poor beggars, who have drunk their wine, who have kept their hunters!”

I was as reassuring as I knew how to be, and my visitors were presently on their feet again while, for the experiment, we agreed on an hour. We were discussing it when the door opened and Miss Churm came in with a wet umbrella. Miss Churm had to take the omnibus to Maida Vale and then walk half-a-mile. She looked a trifle blowsy and slightly splashed. I scarcely ever saw her come in without thinking afresh how odd it was that, being so little in herself, she should yet be so much in others. She was a meagre little Miss Churm, but she was an ample heroine of romance. She was only a freckled cockney, but she could represent everything, from a fine lady to a shepherdess; she had the faculty, as she might have had a fine voice or long hair.

She couldn’t spell, and she loved beer, but she had two or three “points,” and practice, and a knack, and mother-wit, and a kind of whimsical sensibility, and a love of the theatre, and seven sisters, and not an ounce of respect, especially for the *h*. The first thing my visitors saw was that her umbrella was wet, and in their spotless perfection they visibly winced at it. The rain had come on since their arrival.

“I’m all in a soak; there *was* a mess of people in the ‘bus. I wish you lived near a stytion,” said Miss Churm. I requested her to get ready as quickly as possible, and she passed into the room in which she always changed her dress. But before going out she asked me what she was to get into this time.

“It’s the Russian princess, don’t you know?” I answered; “the one with the ‘golden eyes,’ in black velvet, for the long thing in the *Cheapside*.”

“Golden eyes? I *say*!” cried Miss Churm, while my companions watched her with intensity as she withdrew. She always arranged herself, when she was late, before I could turn round; and I kept my visitors a little, on purpose, so that they might get an idea, from seeing her, what would be expected of themselves. I mentioned that she was quite my notion of an excellent model—she was really very clever.

“Do you think she looks like a Russian princess?” Major Monarch asked, with lurking alarm.

“When I make her, yes.”

“Oh, if you have to *make* her—!” he reasoned, acutely.

“That’s the most you can ask. There are so many that are not makeable.”

“Well now, *here’s* a lady”—and with a persuasive smile he passed his arm into his wife’s—”who’s already made!”

“Oh, I’m not a Russian princess,” Mrs. Monarch protested, a little coldly. I could see that she had known some and didn’t like them. There, immediately, was a complication of a kind that I never had to fear with Miss Churm.

This young lady came back in black velvet—the gown was rather rusty and very low on her lean shoulders—and with a Japanese fan in her red hands. I reminded her that in the scene I was doing she had to look over someone’s head. “I forget whose it is; but it doesn’t matter. Just look over a head.”

“I’d rather look over a stove,” said Miss Churm; and she took her station near the fire. She fell into position, settled herself into a tall attitude, gave a certain backward inclination to her head and a certain forward droop to her fan, and looked, at least to my prejudiced sense, distinguished and charming, foreign and dangerous. We left her looking so, while I went down-stairs with Major and Mrs. Monarch.

“I think I could come about as near it as that,” said Mrs. Monarch.

“Oh, you think she’s shabby, but you must allow for the alchemy of art.”

However, they went off with an evident increase of comfort, founded on their demonstrable advantage in being the real thing. I could fancy them shuddering over Miss Churm. She was very droll about them when I went back, for I told her what they wanted.

“Well, if *she* can sit I’ll tyke to bookkeeping,” said my model.

“She’s very lady-like,” I replied, as an innocent form of aggravation.

“So much the worse for *you*. That means she can’t turn round.”

“She’ll do for the fashionable novels.”

“Oh yes, she’ll *do* for them!” my model humorously declared. “Ain’t they had enough without her?” I had often sociably denounced them to Miss Churm.

III.

It was for the elucidation of a mystery in one of these works that I first tried Mrs. Monarch. Her husband came with her, to be useful if necessary—it was sufficiently clear that as a general thing he would prefer to come with her. At first I wondered if this were for “propriety’s” sake—if he were going to be jealous and meddling. The idea was too tiresome, and if it had been confirmed it would speedily have brought our acquaintance to a close. But I soon saw there was nothing in it and that if he accompanied Mrs. Monarch it was (in addition to the chance of being wanted), simply because he had nothing else to do. When she was away from him his occupation was gone—she never *had* been away from him. I judged, rightly, that in their awkward situation their close union was their main comfort and that this union had no weak spot. It was a real marriage, an encouragement to the hesitating, a nut for pessimists to crack. Their address was humble (I remember afterwards thinking it had been the only thing about them that was really professional), and I could fancy the lamentable lodgings in which the Major would have been left alone. He could bear them with his wife—he couldn’t bear them without her.

He had too much tact to try and make himself agreeable when he couldn’t be useful; so he simply sat and waited, when I was too absorbed in my work to talk. But I liked to make him talk—it made my work, when it didn’t interrupt it, less sordid, less special. To listen to him was to combine the excitement of going out with the economy of staying at home. There was only one hindrance: that I seemed not to know any of the people he and his wife had known. I think he wondered extremely, during the term of our intercourse, whom the deuce I *did* know. He hadn’t a stray sixpence of an idea to fumble for; so we didn’t spin it very fine—we confined ourselves to questions of leather and even of liquor (saddlers and breeches-makers and how to get good claret cheap), and matters like “good trains” and the habits of small game. His lore on these last subjects was astonishing, he managed to interweave the station-master with the ornithologist. When he couldn’t talk about greater things he could talk cheerfully about smaller, and since I couldn’t accompany him into reminiscences of the fashionable world he could lower the conversation without a visible effort to my level.

So earnest a desire to please was touching in a man who could so easily have knocked one down. He looked after the fire and had an opinion on the draught of the stove, without my asking him, and I could see that he thought many of my arrangements not half clever enough. I remember telling him that if I were only rich I would offer him a salary to come and teach me how to live. Sometimes he gave a random sigh, of which the essence was: “Give me even such a bare old barrack as *this*, and I’d do something with it!” When I wanted to use him he came alone; which was an illustration of the superior courage of women. His wife could bear her solitary second floor, and she was in general more discreet; showing by various small reserves that she was alive to the propriety of keeping our relations markedly professional—not letting them slide into sociability. She wished it to remain clear that she and the Major were employed, not cultivated, and if she approved of me as a superior, who could be kept in his place, she never thought me quite good enough for an equal.

She sat with great intensity, giving the whole of her mind to it, and was capable of remaining for an hour almost as motionless as if she were before a photographer’s lens. I could see she had been photographed often, but somehow the very habit that made her good for that purpose unfitted her for mine. At first I was extremely pleased with her lady-like air, and it was a satisfaction, on coming to follow her lines, to see how good they were and how far they could lead the pencil. But after a few times I began to find her too insurmountably stiff; do what I would with it my drawing looked like a photograph or a copy of a photograph. Her figure had no variety of expression—she herself had no sense of variety. You may say that this was my business, was only a question of placing her. I placed her in every conceivable

position, but she managed to obliterate their differences. She was always a lady certainly, and into the bargain was always the same lady. She was the real thing, but always the same thing. There were moments when I was oppressed by the serenity of her confidence that she *was* the real thing. All her dealings with me and all her husband's were an implication that this was lucky for *me*. Meanwhile I found myself trying to invent types that approached her own, instead of making her own transform itself—in the clever way that was not impossible, for instance, to poor Miss Churm. Arrange as I would and take the precautions I would, she always, in my pictures, came out too tall—landing me in the dilemma of having represented a fascinating woman as seven feet high, which, out of respect perhaps to my own very much scantier inches, was far from my idea of such a personage.

The case was worse with the Major—nothing I could do would keep *him* down, so that he became useful only for the representation of brawny giants. I adored variety and range, I cherished human accidents, the illustrative note; I wanted to characterise closely, and the thing in the world I most hated was the danger of being ridden by a type. I had quarrelled with some of my friends about it—I had parted company with them for maintaining that one *had* to be, and that if the type was beautiful (witness Raphael and Leonardo), the servitude was only a gain. I was neither Leonardo nor Raphael; I might only be a presumptuous young modern searcher, but I held that everything was to be sacrificed sooner than character. When they averred that the haunting type in question could easily *be* character, I retorted, perhaps superficially: “Whose?” It couldn't be everybody's—it might end in being nobody's.

After I had drawn Mrs. Monarch a dozen times I perceived more clearly than before that the value of such a model as Miss Churm resided precisely in the fact that she had no positive stamp, combined of course with the other fact that what she did have was a curious and inexplicable talent for imitation. Her usual appearance was like a curtain which she could draw up at request for a capital performance. This performance was simply suggestive; but it was a word to the wise—it was vivid and pretty. Sometimes, even, I thought it, though she was plain herself, too insipidly pretty; I made it a reproach to her that the figures drawn from her were monotonously (*bêtement*, as we used to say) graceful. Nothing made her more angry: it was so much her pride to feel that she could sit for characters that had nothing in common with each other. She would accuse me at such moments of taking away her “reputation.”

It suffered a certain shrinkage, this queer quantity, from the repeated visits of my new friends. Miss Churm was greatly in demand, never in want of employment, so I had no scruple in putting her off occasionally, to try them more at my ease. It was certainly amusing at first to do the real thing—it was amusing to do Major Monarch's trousers. They *were* the real thing, even if he did come out colossal. It was amusing to do his wife's back hair (it was so mathematically neat,) and the particular “smart” tension of her tight stays. She lent herself especially to positions in which the face was somewhat averted or blurred; she abounded in lady-like back views and *profils perdus*. When she stood erect she took naturally one of the attitudes in which court-painters represent queens and princesses; so that I found myself wondering whether, to draw out this accomplishment, I couldn't get the editor of the *Cheapside* to publish a really royal romance, “A Tale of Buckingham Palace.” Sometimes, however, the real thing and the make-believe came into contact; by which I mean that Miss Churm, keeping an appointment or coming to make one on days when I had much work in hand, encountered her invidious rivals. The encounter was not on their part, for they noticed her no more than if she had been the housemaid; not from intentional loftiness, but simply because, as yet, professionally, they didn't know how to fraternise, as I could guess that they would have liked—or at least that the Major

would. They couldn't talk about the omnibus—they always walked; and they didn't know what else to try—she wasn't interested in good trains or cheap claret. Besides, they must have felt—in the air—that she was amused at them, secretly derisive of their ever knowing how. She was not a person to conceal her scepticism if she had had a chance to show it. On the other hand Mrs. Monarch didn't think her tidy; for why else did she take pains to say to me (it was going out of the way, for Mrs. Monarch), that she didn't like dirty women?

One day when my young lady happened to be present with my other sitters (she even dropped in, when it was convenient, for a chat), I asked her to be so good as to lend a hand in getting tea—a service with which she was familiar and which was one of a class that, living as I did in a small way, with slender domestic resources, I often appealed to my models to render. They liked to lay hands on my property, to break the sitting, and sometimes the china—I made them feel Bohemian. The next time I saw Miss Churm after this incident she surprised me greatly by making a scene about it—she accused me of having wished to humiliate her. She had not resented the outrage at the time, but had seemed obliging and amused, enjoying the comedy of asking Mrs. Monarch, who sat vague and silent, whether she would have cream and sugar, and putting an exaggerated simper into the question. She had tried intonations—as if she too wished to pass for the real thing; till I was afraid my other visitors would take offence.

Oh, *they* were determined not to do this; and their touching patience was the measure of their great need. They would sit by the hour, uncomplaining, till I was ready to use them; they would come back on the chance of being wanted and would walk away cheerfully if they were not. I used to go to the door with them to see in what magnificent order they retreated. I tried to find other employment for them—I introduced them to several artists. But they didn't "take," for reasons I could appreciate, and I became conscious, rather anxiously, that after such disappointments they fell back upon me with a heavier weight. They did me the honour to think that it was I who was most *their* form. They were not picturesque enough for the painters, and in those days there were not so many serious workers in black and white. Besides, they had an eye to the great job I had mentioned to them—they had secretly set their hearts on supplying the right essence for my pictorial vindication of our fine novelist. They knew that for this undertaking I should want no costume-effects, none of the frippery of past ages—that it was a case in which everything would be contemporary and satirical and, presumably, genteel. If I could work them into it their future would be assured, for the labour would of course be long and the occupation steady.

One day Mrs. Monarch came without her husband—she explained his absence by his having had to go to the City. While she sat there in her usual anxious stiffness there came, at the door, a knock which I immediately recognised as the subdued appeal of a model out of work. It was followed by the entrance of a young man whom I easily perceived to be a foreigner and who proved in fact an Italian acquainted with no English word but my name, which he uttered in a way that made it seem to include all others. I had not then visited his country, nor was I proficient in his tongue; but as he was not so meanly constituted—what Italian is?—as to depend only on that member for expression he conveyed to me, in familiar but graceful mimicry, that he was in search of exactly the employment in which the lady before me was engaged. I was not struck with him at first, and while I continued to draw I emitted rough sounds of discouragement and dismissal. He stood his ground, however, not importunately, but with a dumb, dog-like fidelity in his eyes which amounted to innocent impudence—the manner of a devoted servant (he might have been in the house for years), unjustly suspected. Suddenly I saw that this very attitude and expression made a picture, whereupon I told him to sit down and wait till I should be free. There was another picture in

the way he obeyed me, and I observed as I worked that there were others still in the way he looked wonderingly, with his head thrown back, about the high studio. He might have been crossing himself in St. Peter's. Before I finished I said to myself: "The fellow's a bankrupt orange-monger, but he's a treasure."

When Mrs. Monarch withdrew he passed across the room like a flash to open the door for her, standing there with the rapt, pure gaze of the young Dante spellbound by the young Beatrice. As I never insisted, in such situations, on the blankness of the British domestic, I reflected that he had the making of a servant (and I needed one, but couldn't pay him to be only that), as well as of a model; in short I made up my mind to adopt my bright adventurer if he would agree to officiate in the double capacity. He jumped at my offer, and in the event my rashness (for I had known nothing about him), was not brought home to me. He proved a sympathetic though a desultory ministrant, and had in a wonderful degree the *sentiment de la pose*. It was uncultivated, instinctive; a part of the happy instinct which had guided him to my door and helped him to spell out my name on the card nailed to it. He had had no other introduction to me than a guess, from the shape of my high north window, seen outside, that my place was a studio and that as a studio it would contain an artist. He had wandered to England in search of fortune, like other itinerants, and had embarked, with a partner and a small green handcart, on the sale of penny ices. The ices had melted away and the partner had dissolved in their train. My young man wore tight yellow trousers with reddish stripes and his name was Oronte. He was sallow but fair, and when I put him into some old clothes of my own he looked like an Englishman. He was as good as Miss Churm, who could look, when required, like an Italian.

IV.

I thought Mrs. Monarch's face slightly convulsed when, on her coming back with her husband, she found Oronte installed. It was strange to have to recognise in a scrap of a lazzarone a competitor to her magnificent Major. It was she who scented danger first, for the Major was anecdotically unconscious. But Oronte gave us tea, with a hundred eager confusions (he had never seen such a queer process), and I think she thought better of me for having at last an "establishment." They saw a couple of drawings that I had made of the establishment, and Mrs. Monarch hinted that it never would have struck her that he had sat for them. "Now the drawings you make from *us*, they look exactly like us," she reminded me, smiling in triumph; and I recognised that this was indeed just their defect. When I drew the Monarchs I couldn't, somehow, get away from them—get into the character I wanted to represent; and I had not the least desire my model should be discoverable in my picture. Miss Churm never was, and Mrs. Monarch thought I hid her, very properly, because she was vulgar; whereas if she was lost it was only as the dead who go to heaven are lost—in the gain of an angel the more.

By this time I had got a certain start with "Rutland Ramsay," the first novel in the great projected series; that is I had produced a dozen drawings, several with the help of the Major and his wife, and I had sent them in for approval. My understanding with the publishers, as I have already hinted, had been that I was to be left to do my work, in this particular case, as I liked, with the whole book committed to me; but my connection with the rest of the series was only contingent. There were moments when, frankly, it *was* a comfort to have the real thing under one's hand; for there were characters in "Rutland Ramsay" that were very much like it. There were people presumably as straight as the Major and women of as good a fashion as Mrs. Monarch. There was a great deal of country-house life—treated, it is true, in a fine, fanciful, ironical, generalised way—and there was a considerable implication of knickerbockers and kilts. There were certain things I had to settle at the outset; such things

for instance as the exact appearance of the hero, the particular bloom of the heroine. The author of course gave me a lead, but there was a margin for interpretation. I took the Monarchs into my confidence, I told them frankly what I was about, I mentioned my embarrassments and alternatives. "Oh, take *him!*" Mrs. Monarch murmured sweetly, looking at her husband; and "What could you want better than my wife?" the Major inquired, with the comfortable candour that now prevailed between us.

I was not obliged to answer these remarks—I was only obliged to place my sitters. I was not easy in mind, and I postponed, a little timidly perhaps, the solution of the question. The book was a large canvas, the other figures were numerous, and I worked off at first some of the episodes in which the hero and the heroine were not concerned. When once I had set *them* up I should have to stick to them—I couldn't make my young man seven feet high in one place and five feet nine in another. I inclined on the whole to the latter measurement, though the Major more than once reminded me that *he* looked about as young as anyone. It was indeed quite possible to arrange him, for the figure, so that it would have been difficult to detect his age. After the spontaneous Oronte had been with me a month, and after I had given him to understand several different times that his native exuberance would presently constitute an insurmountable barrier to our further intercourse, I waked to a sense of his heroic capacity. He was only five feet seven, but the remaining inches were latent. I tried him almost secretly at first, for I was really rather afraid of the judgment my other models would pass on such a choice. If they regarded Miss Churm as little better than a snare, what would they think of the representation by a person so little the real thing as an Italian street-vendor of a protagonist formed by a public school?

If I went a little in fear of them it was not because they bullied me, because they had got an oppressive foothold, but because in their really pathetic decorum and mysteriously permanent newness they counted on me so intensely. I was therefore very glad when Jack Hawley came home: he was always of such good counsel. He painted badly himself, but there was no one like him for putting his finger on the place. He had been absent from England for a year; he had been somewhere—I don't remember where—to get a fresh eye. I was in a good deal of dread of any such organ, but we were old friends; he had been away for months and a sense of emptiness was creeping into my life. I hadn't dodged a missile for a year.

He came back with a fresh eye, but with the same old black velvet blouse, and the first evening he spent in my studio we smoked cigarettes till the small hours. He had done no work himself, he had only got the eye; so the field was clear for the production of my little things. He wanted to see what I had done for the *Cheapside*, but he was disappointed in the exhibition. That at least seemed the meaning of two or three comprehensive groans which, as he lounged on my big divan, on a folded leg, looking at my latest drawings, issued from his lips with the smoke of the cigarette.

"What's the matter with you?" I asked.

"What's the matter with *you?*"

"Nothing save that I'm mystified."

"You are indeed. You're quite off the hinge. What's the meaning of this new fad?" And he tossed me, with visible irreverence, a drawing in which I happened to have depicted both my majestic models. I asked if he didn't think it good, and he replied that it struck him as execrable, given the sort of thing I had always represented myself to him as wishing to arrive at; but I let that pass, I was so anxious to see exactly what he meant. The two figures in the picture looked colossal, but I supposed this was *not* what he meant, inasmuch as, for aught he knew to the contrary, I might have been trying for that. I maintained that I was working

exactly in the same way as when he last had done me the honour to commend me. “Well, there’s a big hole somewhere,” he answered; “wait a bit and I’ll discover it.” I depended upon him to do so: where else was the fresh eye? But he produced at last nothing more luminous than “I don’t know—I don’t like your types.” This was lame, for a critic who had never consented to discuss with me anything but the question of execution, the direction of strokes and the mystery of values.

“In the drawings you’ve been looking at I think my types are very handsome.”

“Oh, they won’t do!”

“I’ve had a couple of new models.”

“I see you have. *They* won’t do.”

“Are you very sure of that?”

“Absolutely—they’re stupid.”

“You mean *I* am—for I ought to get round that.”

“You *can’t*—with such people. Who are they?”

I told him, as far as was necessary, and he declared, heartlessly: “*Ce sont des gens qu’il faut mettre à la porte.*”

“You’ve never seen them; they’re awfully good,” I compassionately objected.

“Not seen them? Why, all this recent work of yours drops to pieces with them. It’s all I want to see of them.”

“No one else has said anything against it—the *Cheapside* people are pleased.”

“Everyone else is an ass, and the *Cheapside* people the biggest asses of all. Come, don’t pretend, at this time of day, to have pretty illusions about the public, especially about publishers and editors. It’s not for *such* animals you work—it’s for those who know, *coloro che sanno*; so keep straight for *me* if you can’t keep straight for yourself. There’s a certain sort of thing you tried for from the first—and a very good thing it is. But this twaddle isn’t *in* it.” When I talked with Hawley later about “Rutland Ramsay” and its possible successors he declared that I must get back into my boat again or I would go to the bottom. His voice in short was the voice of warning.

I noted the warning, but I didn’t turn my friends out of doors. They bored me a good deal; but the very fact that they bored me admonished me not to sacrifice them—if there was anything to be done with them—simply to irritation. As I look back at this phase they seem to me to have pervaded my life not a little. I have a vision of them as most of the time in my studio, seated, against the wall, on an old velvet bench to be out of the way, and looking like a pair of patient courtiers in a royal ante-chamber. I am convinced that during the coldest weeks of the winter they held their ground because it saved them fire. Their newness was losing its gloss, and it was impossible not to feel that they were objects of charity. Whenever Miss Churm arrived they went away, and after I was fairly launched in “Rutland Ramsay” Miss Churm arrived pretty often. They managed to express to me tacitly that they supposed I wanted her for the low life of the book, and I let them suppose it, since they had attempted to study the work—it was lying about the studio—without discovering that it dealt only with the highest circles. They had dipped into the most brilliant of our novelists without deciphering many passages. I still took an hour from them, now and again, in spite of Jack Hawley’s warning: it would be time enough to dismiss them, if dismissal should be necessary, when the rigour of the season was over. Hawley had made their acquaintance—he had met them at my

fireside—and thought them a ridiculous pair. Learning that he was a painter they tried to approach him, to show him too that they were the real thing; but he looked at them, across the big room, as if they were miles away: they were a compendium of everything that he most objected to in the social system of his country. Such people as that, all convention and patent-leather, with ejaculations that stopped conversation, had no business in a studio. A studio was a place to learn to see, and how could you see through a pair of feather beds?

The main inconvenience I suffered at their hands was that, at first, I was shy of letting them discover how my artful little servant had begun to sit to me for “Rutland Ramsay.” They knew that I had been odd enough (they were prepared by this time to allow oddity to artists,) to pick a foreign vagabond out of the streets, when I might have had a person with whiskers and credentials; but it was some time before they learned how high I rated his accomplishments. They found him in an attitude more than once, but they never doubted I was doing him as an organ-grinder. There were several things they never guessed, and one of them was that for a striking scene in the novel, in which a footman briefly figured, it occurred to me to make use of Major Monarch as the menial. I kept putting this off, I didn’t like to ask him to don the livery—besides the difficulty of finding a livery to fit him. At last, one day late in the winter, when I was at work on the despised Oronte (he caught one’s idea in an instant), and was in the glow of feeling that I was going very straight, they came in, the Major and his wife, with their society laugh about nothing (there was less and less to laugh at), like country-callers—they always reminded me of that—who have walked across the park after church and are presently persuaded to stay to luncheon. Luncheon was over, but they could stay to tea—I knew they wanted it. The fit was on me, however, and I couldn’t let my ardour cool and my work wait, with the fading daylight, while my model prepared it. So I asked Mrs. Monarch if she would mind laying it out—a request which, for an instant, brought all the blood to her face. Her eyes were on her husband’s for a second, and some mute telegraphy passed between them. Their folly was over the next instant; his cheerful shrewdness put an end to it. So far from pitying their wounded pride, I must add, I was moved to give it as complete a lesson as I could. They bustled about together and got out the cups and saucers and made the kettle boil. I know they felt as if they were waiting on my servant, and when the tea was prepared I said: “He’ll have a cup, please—he’s tired.” Mrs. Monarch brought him one where he stood, and he took it from her as if he had been a gentleman at a party, squeezing a crush-hat with an elbow.

Then it came over me that she had made a great effort for me—made it with a kind of nobleness—and that I owed her a compensation. Each time I saw her after this I wondered what the compensation could be. I couldn’t go on doing the wrong thing to oblige them. Oh, it *was* the wrong thing, the stamp of the work for which they sat—Hawley was not the only person to say it now. I sent in a large number of the drawings I had made for “Rutland Ramsay,” and I received a warning that was more to the point than Hawley’s. The artistic adviser of the house for which I was working was of opinion that many of my illustrations were not what had been looked for. Most of these illustrations were the subjects in which the Monarchs had figured. Without going into the question of what *had* been looked for, I saw at this rate I shouldn’t get the other books to do. I hurled myself in despair upon Miss Churm, I put her through all her paces. I not only adopted Oronte publicly as my hero, but one morning when the Major looked in to see if I didn’t require him to finish a figure for the *Cheapside*, for which he had begun to sit the week before, I told him that I had changed my mind—I would do the drawing from my man. At this my visitor turned pale and stood looking at me. “Is *he* your idea of an English gentleman?” he asked.

I was disappointed, I was nervous, I wanted to get on with my work; so I replied with irritation: “Oh, my dear Major—I can’t be ruined for *you!*”

He stood another moment; then, without a word, he quitted the studio. I drew a long breath when he was gone, for I said to myself that I shouldn't see him again. I had not told him definitely that I was in danger of having my work rejected, but I was vexed at his not having felt the catastrophe in the air, read with me the moral of our fruitless collaboration, the lesson that, in the deceptive atmosphere of art, even the highest respectability may fail of being plastic.

I didn't owe my friends money, but I did see them again. They re-appeared together, three days later, and under the circumstances there was something tragic in the fact. It was a proof to me that they could find nothing else in life to do. They had threshed the matter out in a dismal conference—they had digested the bad news that they were not in for the series. If they were not useful to me even for the *Cheapside* their function seemed difficult to determine, and I could only judge at first that they had come, forgivingly, decorously, to take a last leave. This made me rejoice in secret that I had little leisure for a scene; for I had placed both my other models in position together and I was pegging away at a drawing from which I hoped to derive glory. It had been suggested by the passage in which Rutland Ramsay, drawing up a chair to Artemisia's piano-stool, says extraordinary things to her while she ostensibly fingers out a difficult piece of music. I had done Miss Churm at the piano before—it was an attitude in which she knew how to take on an absolutely poetic grace. I wished the two figures to “compose” together, intensely, and my little Italian had entered perfectly into my conception. The pair were vividly before me, the piano had been pulled out; it was a charming picture of blended youth and murmured love, which I had only to catch and keep. My visitors stood and looked at it, and I was friendly to them over my shoulder.

They made no response, but I was used to silent company and went on with my work, only a little disconcerted (even though exhilarated by the sense that *this* was at least the ideal thing), at not having got rid of them after all. Presently I heard Mrs. Monarch's sweet voice beside, or rather above me: “I wish her hair was a little better done.” I looked up and she was staring with a strange fixedness at Miss Churm, whose back was turned to her. “Do you mind my just touching it?” she went on—a question which made me spring up for an instant, as with the instinctive fear that she might do the young lady a harm. But she quieted me with a glance I shall never forget—I confess I should like to have been able to paint *that*—and went for a moment to my model. She spoke to her softly, laying a hand upon her shoulder and bending over her; and as the girl, understanding, gratefully assented, she disposed her rough curls, with a few quick passes, in such a way as to make Miss Churm's head twice as charming. It was one of the most heroic personal services I have ever seen rendered. Then Mrs. Monarch turned away with a low sigh and, looking about her as if for something to do, stooped to the floor with a noble humility and picked up a dirty rag that had dropped out of my paint-box.

The Major meanwhile had also been looking for something to do and, wandering to the other end of the studio, saw before him my breakfast things, neglected, unremoved. “I say, can't I be useful *here*?” he called out to me with an irrepressible quaver. I assented with a laugh that I fear was awkward and for the next ten minutes, while I worked, I heard the light clatter of china and the tinkle of spoons and glass. Mrs. Monarch assisted her husband—they washed up my crockery, they put it away. They wandered off into my little scullery, and I afterwards found that they had cleaned my knives and that my slender stock of plate had an unprecedented surface. When it came over me, the latent eloquence of what they were doing, I confess that my drawing was blurred for a moment—the picture swam. They had accepted their failure, but they couldn't accept their fate. They had bowed their heads in bewilderment to the perverse and cruel law in virtue of which the real thing could be so much less precious

than the unreal; but they didn't want to starve. If my servants were my models, my models might be my servants. They would reverse the parts—the others would sit for the ladies and gentlemen, and *they* would do the work. They would still be in the studio—it was an intense dumb appeal to me not to turn them out. “Take us on,” they wanted to say—“we’ll do *anything*.”

When all this hung before me the *afflatus* vanished—my pencil dropped from my hand. My sitting was spoiled and I got rid of my sitters, who were also evidently rather mystified and awestruck. Then, alone with the Major and his wife, I had a most uncomfortable moment, He put their prayer into a single sentence: “I say, you know—just let *us* do for you, can't you?” I couldn't—it was dreadful to see them emptying my slops; but I pretended I could, to oblige them, for about a week. Then I gave them a sum of money to go away; and I never saw them again. I obtained the remaining books, but my friend Hawley repeats that Major and Mrs. Monarch did me a permanent harm, got me into a second-rate trick. If it be true I am content to have paid the price—for the memory.

The Private Life

We talked of London, face to face with a great bristling, primeval glacier. The hour and the scene were one of those impressions which make up a little, in Switzerland, for the modern indignity of travel—the promiscuities and vulgarities, the station and the hotel, the gregarious patience, the struggle for a scrappy attention, the reduction to a numbered state. The high valley was pink with the mountain rose, the cool air as fresh as if the world were young. There was a faint flush of afternoon on undiminished snows, and the fraternizing tinkle of the unseen cattle came to us with a cropped and sun-warmed odour. The balconied inn stood on the very neck of the sweetest pass in the Oberland, and for a week we had had company and weather. This was felt to be great luck, for one would have made up for the other had either been bad.

The weather certainly would have made up for the company; but it was not subjected to this tax, for we had by a happy chance the *fleur des pois*: Lord and Lady Mellifont, Clare Vawdrey, the greatest (in the opinion of many) of our literary glories, and Blanche Adney, the greatest (in the opinion of all) of our theatrical. I mention these first, because they were just the people whom in London, at that time, people tried to “get.” People endeavoured to “book” them six weeks ahead, yet on this occasion we had come in for them, we had all come in for each other, without the least wire-pulling. A turn of the game had pitched us together, the last of August, and we recognized our luck by remaining so, under protection of the barometer. When the golden days were over—that would come soon enough—we should wind down opposite sides of the pass and disappear over the crest of surrounding heights. We were of the same general communion, we participated in the same miscellaneous publicity. We met, in London, with irregular frequency; we were more or less governed by the laws and the language, the traditions and the shibboleths of the same dense social state. I think all of us, even the ladies, “did” something, though we pretended we didn’t when it was mentioned. Such things are not mentioned indeed in London, but it was our innocent pleasure to be different here. There had to be some way to show the difference, inasmuch as we were under the impression that this was our annual holiday. We felt at any rate that the conditions were more human than in London, or that at least we ourselves were. We were frank about this, we talked about it: it was what we were talking about as we looked at the flushing glacier, just as some one called attention to the prolonged absence of Lord Mellifont and Mrs. Adney. We were seated on the terrace of the inn, where there were benches and little tables, and those of us who were most bent on proving that we had returned to nature were, in the queer Germanic fashion, having coffee before meat.

The remark about the absence of our two companions was not taken up, not even by Lady Mellifont, not even by little Adney, the fond composer; for it had been dropped only in the briefest intermission of Clare Vawdrey’s talk. (This celebrity was “Clarence” only on the title-page.) It was just that revelation of our being after all human that was his theme. He asked the company whether, candidly, every one hadn’t been tempted to say to every one else: “I had no idea you were really so nice.” I had had, for my part, an idea that he was, and even a good deal nicer, but that was too complicated to go into then; besides it is exactly my story. There was a general understanding among us that when Vawdrey talked we should be silent, and not, oddly enough, because he at all expected it. He didn’t, for of all abundant talkers he was the most unconscious, the least greedy and professional. It was rather the religion of the host, of the hostess, that prevailed among us: it was their own idea, but they always looked for a listening circle when the great novelist dined with them. On the occasion

I allude to there was probably no one present with whom, in London, he had not dined, and we felt the force of this habit. He had dined even with me; and on the evening of that dinner, as on this Alpine afternoon, I had been at no pains to hold my tongue, absorbed as I inveterately was in a study of the question which always rose before me, to such a height, in his fair, square, strong stature.

This question was all the more tormenting that he never suspected himself (I am sure) of imposing it, any more than he had ever observed that every day of his life every one listened to him at dinner. He used to be called “subjective” in the weekly papers, but in society no distinguished man could have been less so. He never talked about himself; and this was a topic on which, though it would have been tremendously worthy of him, he apparently never even reflected. He had his hours and his habits, his tailor and his hatter, his hygiene and his particular wine, but all these things together never made up an attitude. Yet they constituted the only attitude he ever adopted, and it was easy for him to refer to our being “nicer” abroad than at home. *He* was exempt from variations, and not a shade either less or more nice in one place than in another. He differed from other people, but never from himself (save in the extraordinary sense which I will presently explain), and struck me as having neither moods nor sensibilities nor preferences. He might have been always in the same company, so far as he recognized any influence from age or condition or sex: he addressed himself to women exactly as he addressed himself to men, and gossiped with all men alike, talking no better to clever folk than to dull. I used to feel a despair at his way of liking one subject—so far as I could tell—precisely as much as another: there were some I hated so myself. I never found him anything but loud and cheerful and copious, and I never heard him utter a paradox or express a shade or play with an idea. That fancy about our being “human” was, in his conversation, quite an exceptional flight. His opinions were sound and second-rate, and of his perceptions it was too mystifying to think. I envied him his magnificent health.

Vawdrey had marched, with his even pace and his perfectly good conscience, into the flat country of anecdote, where stories are visible from afar like windmills and signposts; but I observed after a little that Lady Mellifont’s attention wandered. I happened to be sitting next her. I noticed that her eyes rambled a little anxiously over the lower slopes of the mountains. At last, after looking at her watch, she said to me: “Do you know where they went?”

“Do you mean Mrs. Adney and Lord Mellifont?”

“Lord Mellifont and Mrs. Adney.” Her ladyship’s speech seemed—unconsciously indeed—to correct me, but it didn’t occur to me that this was because she was jealous. I imputed to her no such vulgar sentiment: in the first place, because I liked her, and in the second because it would always occur to one quickly that it was right, in any connection, to put Lord Mellifont first. He *was* first—extraordinarily first. I don’t say greatest or wisest or most renowned, but essentially at the top of the list and the head of the table. That is a position by itself, and his wife was naturally accustomed to see him in it. My phrase had sounded as if Mrs. Adney had taken him; but it was not possible for him to be taken—he only took. No one, in the nature of things, could know this better than Lady Mellifont. I had originally been rather afraid of her, thinking her, with her stiff silences and the extreme blackness of almost everything that made up her person, somewhat hard, even a little saturnine. Her paleness seemed slightly grey, and her glossy black hair metallic, like the brooches and bands and combs with which it was inveterately adorned. She was in perpetual mourning, and wore numberless ornaments of jet and onyx, a thousand clicking chains and bugles and beads. I had heard Mrs. Adney call her the queen of night, and the term was descriptive if you understood that the night was cloudy. She had a secret, and if you didn’t find it out as you knew her better you at least perceived that she was gentle and unaffected and limited, and also rather submissively sad. She was like

a woman with a painless malady. I told her that I had merely seen her husband and his companion stroll down the glen together about an hour before, and suggested that Mr. Adney would perhaps know something of their intentions.

Vincent Adney, who, though he was fifty years old, looked like a good little boy on whom it had been impressed that children should not talk before company, acquitted himself with remarkable simplicity and taste of the position of husband of a great exponent of comedy. When all was said about her making it easy for him, one couldn't help admiring the charmed affection with which he took everything for granted. It is difficult for a husband who is not on the stage, or at least in the theatre, to be graceful about a wife who is; but Adney was more than graceful—he was exquisite, he was inspired. He set his beloved to music; and you remember how genuine his music could be—the only English compositions I ever saw a foreigner take an interest in. His wife was in them, somewhere, always; they were like a free, rich translation of the impression she produced. She seemed, as one listened, to pass laughing, with loosened hair, across the scene. He had been only a little fiddler at her theatre, always in his place during the acts; but she had made him something rare and misunderstood. Their superiority had become a kind of partnership, and their happiness was a part of the happiness of their friends. Adney's one discomfort was that he couldn't write a play for his wife, and the only way he meddled with her affairs was by asking impossible people if *they* couldn't.

Lady Mellifont, after looking across at him a moment, remarked to me that she would rather not put any question to him. She added the next minute: "I had rather people shouldn't see I'm nervous."

"Are you nervous?"

"I always become so if my husband is away from me for any time."

"Do you imagine something has happened to him?"

"Yes, always. Of course I'm used to it."

"Do you mean his tumbling over precipices—that sort of thing?"

"I don't know exactly what it is: it's the general sense that he'll never come back."

She said so much and kept back so much that the only way to treat the condition she referred to seemed the jocular. "Surely he'll never forsake you!" I laughed.

She looked at the ground a moment. "Oh, at bottom I'm easy."

"Nothing can ever happen to a man so accomplished, so infallible, so armed at all points," I went on, encouragingly.

"Oh, you don't know how he's armed!" she exclaimed, with such an odd quaver that I could account for it only by her being nervous. This idea was confirmed by her moving just afterwards, changing her seat rather pointlessly, not as if to cut our conversation short, but because she was in a fidget. I couldn't know what was the matter with her, but I was presently relieved to see Mrs. Adney come toward us. She had in her hand a big bunch of wild flowers, but she was not closely attended by Lord Mellifont. I quickly saw, however, that she had no disaster to announce; yet as I knew there was a question Lady Mellifont would like to hear answered, but did not wish to ask, I expressed to her immediately the hope that his lordship had not remained in a crevasse.

"Oh, no; he left me but three minutes ago. He has gone into the house." Blanche Adney rested her eyes on mine an instant—a mode of intercourse to which no man, for himself,

could ever object. The interest, on this occasion, was quickened by the particular thing the eyes happened to say. What they usually said was only: "Oh, yes, I'm charming, I know, but don't make a fuss about it. I only want a new part—I do, I do!" At present they added, dimly, surreptitiously, and of course sweetly—for that was the way they did everything: "It's all right, but something did happen. Perhaps I'll tell you later." She turned to Lady Mellifont, and the transition to simple gaiety suggested her mastery of her profession. "I've brought him safe. We had a charming walk."

"I'm so very glad," returned Lady Mellifont, with her faint smile; continuing vaguely, as she got up: "He must have gone to dress for dinner. Isn't it rather near?" She moved away, to the hotel, in her leave-taking, simplifying fashion, and the rest of us, at the mention of dinner, looked at each other's watches, as if to shift the responsibility of such grossness. The head-waiter, essentially, like all head-waiters, a man of the world, allowed us hours and places of our own, so that in the evening, apart under the lamp, we formed a compact, an indulged little circle. But it was only the Mellifonts who "dressed" and as to whom it was recognized that they naturally *would* dress: she in exactly the same manner as on any other evening of her ceremonious existence (she was not a woman whose habits could take account of anything so mutable as fitness); and he, on the other hand, with remarkable adjustment and suitability. He was almost as much a man of the world as the head-waiter, and spoke almost as many languages; but he abstained from courting a comparison of dress-coats and white waistcoats, analyzing the occasion in a much finer way—into black velvet and blue velvet and brown velvet, for instance, into delicate harmonies of necktie and subtle informalities of shirt. He had a costume for every function and a moral for every costume; and his functions and costumes and morals were ever a part of the amusement of life—a part at any rate of its beauty and romance—for an immense circle of spectators. For his particular friends indeed these things were more than an amusement; they were a topic, a social support and of course, in addition, a subject of perpetual suspense. If his wife had not been present before dinner they were what the rest of us probably would have been putting our heads together about.

Clare Vawdrey had a fund of anecdote on the whole question: he had known Lord Mellifont almost from the beginning. It was a peculiarity of this nobleman that there could be no conversation about him that didn't instantly take the form of anecdote, and a still further distinction that there could apparently be no anecdote that was not on the whole to his honour. If he had come into a room at any moment, people might have said frankly: "Of course we were telling stories about you!" As consciences go, in London, the general conscience would have been good. Moreover it would have been impossible to imagine his taking such a tribute otherwise than amiably, for he was always as unperturbed as an actor with the right cue. He had never in his life needed the prompter—his very embarrassments had been rehearsed. For myself, when he was talked about I always had an odd impression that we were speaking of the dead—it was with that peculiar accumulation of relish. His reputation was a kind of gilded obelisk, as if he had been buried beneath it; the body of legend and reminiscence of which he was to be the subject had crystallized in advance.

This ambiguity sprang, I suppose, from the fact that the mere sound of his name and air of his person, the general expectation he created, were, somehow, too exalted to be verified. The experience of his urbanity always came later; the prefigurement, the legend paled before the reality. I remember that on the evening I refer to the reality was particularly operative. The handsomest man of his period could never have looked better, and he sat among us like a bland conductor controlling by an harmonious play of arm an orchestra still a little rough. He directed the conversation by gestures as irresistible as they were vague; one felt as if without him it wouldn't have had anything to call a tone. This was essentially what he contributed to any occasion—what he contributed above all to English public life. He pervaded it, he

coloured it, he embellished it, and without him it would scarcely have had a vocabulary. Certainly it would not have had a style; for a style was what it had in having Lord Mellifont. He *was* a style. I was freshly struck with it as, in the *salle à manger* of the little Swiss inn, we resigned ourselves to inevitable veal. Confronted with his form (I must parenthesize that it was not confronted much), Clare Vawdrey's talk suggested the reporter contrasted with the bard. It was interesting to watch the shock of characters from which, of an evening, so much would be expected. There was however no concussion—it was all muffled and minimized in Lord Mellifont's tact. It was rudimentary with him to find the solution of such a problem in playing the host, assuming responsibilities which carried with them their sacrifice. He had indeed never been a guest in his life; he was the host, the patron, the moderator at every board. If there was a defect in his manner (and I suggest it under my breath), it was that he had a little more art than any conjunction—even the most complicated—could possibly require. At any rate one made one's reflections in noticing how the accomplished peer handled the situation and how the sturdy man of letters was unconscious that the situation (and least of all he himself as part of it), was handled. Lord Mellifont poured forth treasures of tact, and Clare Vawdrey never dreamed he was doing it.

Vawdrey had no suspicion of any such precaution even when Blanche Adney asked him if he saw yet their third act—an inquiry into which she introduced a subtlety of her own. She had a theory that he was to write her a play and that the heroine, if he would only do his duty, would be the part for which she had immemorably longed. She was forty years old (this could be no secret to those who had admired her from the first), and she could now reach out her hand and touch her uttermost goal. This gave a kind of tragic passion—perfect actress of comedy as she was—to her desire not to miss the great thing. The years had passed, and still she had missed it; none of the things she had done was the thing she had dreamed of, so that at present there was no more time to lose. This was the canker in the rose, the ache beneath the smile. It made her touching—made her sadness even sweeter than her laughter. She had done the old English and the new French, and had charmed her generation; but she was haunted by the vision of a bigger chance, of something truer to the conditions that lay near her. She was tired of Sheridan and she hated Bowdler; she called for a canvas of a finer grain. The worst of it, to my sense, was that she would never extract her modern comedy from the great mature novelist, who was as incapable of producing it as he was of threading a needle. She coddled him, she talked to him, she made love to him, as she frankly proclaimed; but she dwelt in illusions—she would have to live and die with Bowdler.

It is difficult to be cursory over this charming woman, who was beautiful without beauty and complete with a dozen deficiencies. The perspective of the stage made her over, and in society she was like the model off the pedestal. She was the picture walking about, which to the artless social mind was a perpetual surprise—a miracle. People thought she told them the secrets of the pictorial nature, in return for which they gave her relaxation and tea. She told them nothing and she drank the tea; but they had, all the same, the best of the bargain. Vawdrey was really at work on a play; but if he had begun it because he liked her I think he let it drag for the same reason. He secretly felt the atrocious difficulty—knew that from his hand the finished piece would have received no active life. At the same time nothing could be more agreeable than to have such a question open with Blanche Adney, and from time to time he put something very good into the play. If he deceived Mrs. Adney it was only because in her despair she was determined to be deceived. To her question about their third act he replied that, before dinner, he had written a magnificent passage.

“Before dinner?” I said. “Why, *cher maître*, before dinner you were holding us all spellbound on the terrace.”

My words were a joke, because I thought his had been; but for the first time that I could remember I perceived a certain confusion in his face. He looked at me hard, throwing back his head quickly, the least bit like a horse who has been pulled up short. "Oh, it was before that," he replied, naturally enough.

"Before that you were playing billiards with *me*," Lord Mellifont intimated.

"Then it must have been yesterday," said Vawdrey.

But he was in a tight place. "You told me this morning you did nothing yesterday," the actress objected.

"I don't think I really know when I do things." Vawdrey looked vaguely, without helping himself, at a dish that was offered him.

"It's enough if *we* know," smiled Lord Mellifont.

"I don't believe you've written a line," said Blanche Adney.

"I think I could repeat you the scene." Vawdrey helped himself to *haricots verts*.

"Oh, do—oh, do!" two or three of us cried.

"After dinner, in the salon; it will be an immense *régal*," Lord Mellifont declared.

"I'm not sure, but I'll try," Vawdrey went on.

"Oh, you lovely man!" exclaimed the actress, who was practising Americanisms, being resigned even to an American comedy.

"But there must be this condition," said Vawdrey: "you must make your husband play."

"Play while you're reading? Never!"

"I've too much vanity," said Adney.

Lord Mellifont distinguished him. "You must give us the overture, before the curtain rises. That's a peculiarly delightful moment."

"I sha'n't read—I shall just speak," said Vawdrey.

"Better still, let me go and get your manuscript," the actress suggested.

Vawdrey replied that the manuscript didn't matter; but an hour later, in the salon, we wished he might have had it. We sat expectant, still under the spell of Adney's violin. His wife, in the foreground, on an ottoman, was all impatience and profile, and Lord Mellifont, in the chair—it was always *the* chair, Lord Mellifont's—made our grateful little group feel like a social science congress or a distribution of prizes. Suddenly, instead of beginning, our tame lion began to roar out of tune—he had clean forgotten every word. He was very sorry, but the lines absolutely wouldn't come to him; he was utterly ashamed, but his memory was a blank. He didn't look in the least ashamed—Vawdrey had never looked ashamed in his life; he was only imperturbably and merrily natural. He protested that he had never expected to make such a fool of himself, but we felt that this wouldn't prevent the incident from taking its place among his jolliest reminiscences. It was only *we* who were humiliated, as if he had played us a premeditated trick. This was an occasion, if ever, for Lord Mellifont's tact, which descended on us all like balm: he told us, in his charming artistic way, his way of bridging over arid intervals (he had a *débit*—there was nothing to approach it in England—like the actors of the Comédie Française), of his own collapse on a momentous occasion, the delivery of an address to a mighty multitude, when, finding he had forgotten his memoranda, he fumbled, on the terrible platform, the cynosure of every eye, fumbled vainly in irreproachable

pockets for indispensable notes. But the point of his story was finer than that of Vawdrey's pleasantry; for he sketched with a few light gestures the brilliancy of a performance which had risen superior to embarrassment, had resolved itself, we were left to divine, into an effort recognised at the moment as not absolutely a blot on what the public was so good as to call his reputation.

"Play up—play up!" cried Blanche Adney, tapping her husband and remembering how, on the stage, a *contretemps* is always drowned in music. Adney threw himself upon his fiddle, and I said to Clare Vawdrey that his mistake could easily be corrected by his sending for the manuscript. If he would tell me where it was I would immediately fetch it from his room. To this he replied: "My dear fellow, I'm afraid there *is* no manuscript."

"Then you've not written anything?"

"I'll write it to-morrow."

"Ah, you trifle with us," I said, in much mystification.

Vawdrey hesitated an instant. "If there *is* anything, you'll find it on my table."

At this moment one of the others spoke to him, and Lady Mellifont remarked audibly, as if to correct gently our want of consideration, that Mr. Adney was playing something very beautiful. I had noticed before that she appeared extremely fond of music; she always listened to it in a hushed transport. Vawdrey's attention was drawn away, but it didn't seem to me that the words he had just dropped constituted a definite permission to go to his room. Moreover I wanted to speak to Blanche Adney; I had something to ask her. I had to await my chance, however, as we remained silent awhile for her husband, after which the conversation became general. It was our habit to go to bed early, but there was still a little of the evening left. Before it quite waned I found an opportunity to tell the actress that Vawdrey had given me leave to put my hand on his manuscript. She adjured me, by all I held sacred, to bring it immediately, to give it to her; and her insistence was proof against my suggestion that it would now be too late for him to begin to read: besides which the charm was broken—the others wouldn't care. It was not too late for *her* to begin; therefore I was to possess myself, without more delay, of the precious pages. I told her she should be obeyed in a moment, but I wanted her first to satisfy my just curiosity. What had happened before dinner, while she was on the hills with Lord Mellifont?

"How do you know anything happened?"

"I saw it in your face when you came back."

"And they call me an actress!" cried Mrs. Adney.

"What do they call *me*?" I inquired.

"You're a searcher of hearts—that frivolous thing an observer."

"I wish you'd let an observer write you a play!" I broke out.

"People don't care for what you write: you'd break any run of luck."

"Well, I see plays all round me," I declared; "the air is full of them to-night."

"The air? Thank you for nothing! I only wish my table-drawers were."

"Did he make love to you on the glacier?" I went on.

She stared; then broke into the graduated ecstasy of her laugh. "Lord Mellifont, poor dear? What a funny place! It would indeed be the place for *our* love!"

“Did he fall into a crevasse?” I continued.

Blanche Adney looked at me again as she had done for an instant when she came up, before dinner, with her hands full of flowers. “I don’t know into what he fell. I’ll tell you to-morrow.”

“He did come down, then?”

“Perhaps he went up,” she laughed. “It’s really strange.”

“All the more reason you should tell me to-night.”

“I must think it over; I must puzzle it out.”

“Oh, if you want conundrums I’ll throw in another,” I said. “What’s the matter with the master?”

“The master of what?”

“Of every form of dissimulation. Vawdrey hasn’t written a line.”

“Go and get his papers and we’ll see.”

“I don’t like to expose him,” I said.

“Why not, if I expose Lord Mellifont?”

“Oh, I’d do anything for that,” I conceded. “But why should Vawdrey have made a false statement? It’s very curious.”

“It’s very curious,” Blanche Adney repeated, with a musing air and her eyes on Lord Mellifont. Then, rousing herself, she added: “Go and look in his room.”

“In Lord Mellifont’s?”

She turned to me quickly. “*That* would be a way!”

“A way to what?”

“To find out—to find out!” She spoke gaily and excitedly, but suddenly checked herself. “We’re talking nonsense,” she said.

“We’re mixing things up, but I’m struck with your idea. Get Lady Mellifont to let you.”

“Oh, *she* has looked!” Mrs. Adney murmured, with the oddest dramatic expression. Then, after a movement of her beautiful uplifted hand, as if to brush away a fantastic vision, she exclaimed imperiously: “Bring me the scene—bring me the scene!”

“I go for it,” I answered; “but don’t tell me I can’t write a play.”

She left me, but my errand was arrested by the approach of a lady who had produced a birthday-book—we had been threatened with it for several evenings—and who did me the honour to solicit my autograph. She had been asking the others, and she couldn’t decently leave me out. I could usually remember my name, but it always took me some time to recall my date, and even when I had done so I was never very sure. I hesitated between two days and I remarked to my petitioner that I would sign on both if it would give her any satisfaction. She said that surely I had been born only once; and I replied of course that on the day I made her acquaintance I had been born again. I mention the feeble joke only to show that, with the obligatory inspection of the other autographs, we gave some minutes to this transaction. The lady departed with her book, and then I became aware that the company had dispersed. I was alone in the little salon that had been appropriated to our use. My first impression was one of disappointment: if Vawdrey had gone to bed I didn’t wish to disturb

him. While I hesitated, however. I recognised that Vawdrey had not gone to bed. A window was open, and the sound of voices outside came in to me: Blanche was on the terrace with her dramatist, and they were talking about the stars. I went to the window for a glimpse—the Alpine night was splendid. My friends had stepped out together; the actress had picked up a cloak; she looked as I had seen her look in the wing of the theatre. They were silent awhile, and I heard the roar of a neighbouring torrent. I turned back into the room, and its quiet lamplight gave me an idea. Our companions had dispersed—it was late for a pastoral country—and we three should have the place to ourselves. Clare Vawdrey had written his scene—it was magnificent; and his reading it to us there, at such an hour, would be an episode intensely memorable. I would bring down his manuscript and meet the two with it as they came in.

I quitted the salon for this purpose; I had been in Vawdrey's room and knew it was on the second floor, the last in a long corridor. A minute later my hand was on the knob of his door, which I naturally pushed open without knocking. It was equally natural that in the absence of its occupant the room should be dark; the more so as, the end of the corridor being at that hour unlighted, the obscurity was not immediately diminished by the opening of the door. I was only aware at first that I had made no mistake and that, the window-curtains not being drawn, I was confronted with a couple of vague starlighted apertures. Their aid, however, was not sufficient to enable me to find what I had come for, and my hand, in my pocket, was already on the little box of matches that I always carried for cigarettes. Suddenly I withdrew it with a start, uttering an ejaculation, an apology. I had entered the wrong room; a glance prolonged for three seconds showed me a figure seated at a table near one of the windows—a figure I had at first taken for a travelling-rug thrown over a chair. I retreated, with a sense of intrusion; but as I did so I became aware, more rapidly than it takes me to express it, in the first place that this was Vawdrey's room and in the second that, most singularly, Vawdrey himself sat before me. Checking myself on the threshold I had a momentary feeling of bewilderment, but before I knew it I had exclaimed: "Hullo! is that you, Vawdrey?"

He neither turned nor answered me, but my question received an immediate and practical reply in the opening of a door on the other side of the passage. A servant, with a candle, had come out of the opposite room, and in this flitting illumination I definitely recognised the man whom, an instant before, I had to the best of my belief left below in conversation with Mrs. Adney. His back was half turned to me, and he bent over the table in the attitude of writing, but I was conscious that I was in no sort of error about his identity. "I beg your pardon—I thought you were downstairs," I said; and as the personage gave no sign of hearing me I added: "If you're busy I won't disturb you." I backed out, closing the door—I had been in the place, I suppose, less than a minute. I had a sense of mystification, which however deepened infinitely the next instant. I stood there with my hand still on the knob of the door, overtaken by the oddest impression of my life. Vawdrey was at his table, writing, and it was a very natural place for him to be; but why was he writing in the dark and why hadn't he answered me? I waited a few seconds for the sound of some movement, to see if he wouldn't rouse himself from his abstraction—a fit conceivable in a great writer—and call out: "Oh, my dear fellow, is it you?" But I heard only the stillness, I felt only the starlighted dusk of the room, with the unexpected presence it enclosed. I turned away, slowly retracing my steps, and came confusedly downstairs. The lamp was still burning in the salon, but the room was empty. I passed round to the door of the hotel and stepped out. Empty too was the terrace. Blanche Adney and the gentleman with her had apparently come in. I hung about five minutes; then I went to bed.

I slept badly, for I was agitated. On looking back at these queer occurrences (you will see presently that they were queer), I perhaps suppose myself more agitated than I was; for great

anomalies are never so great at first as after we have reflected upon them. It takes us some time to exhaust explanations. I was vaguely nervous—I had been sharply startled; but there was nothing I could not clear up by asking Blanche Adney, the first thing in the morning, who had been with her on the terrace. Oddly enough, however, when the morning dawned—it dawned admirably—I felt less desire to satisfy myself on this point than to escape, to brush away the shadow of my stupefaction. I saw the day would be splendid, and the fancy took me to spend it, as I had spent happy days of youth, in a lonely mountain ramble. I dressed early, partook of conventional coffee, put a big roll into one pocket and a small flask into the other, and, with a stout stick in my hand, went forth into the high places. My story is not closely concerned with the charming hours I passed there—hours of the kind that make intense memories. If I roamed away half of them on the shoulders of the hills, I lay on the sloping grass for the other half and, with my cap pulled over my eyes (save a peep for immensities of view), listened, in the bright stillness, to the mountain bee and felt most things sink and dwindle. Clare Vawdrey grew small, Blanche Adney grew dim, Lord Mellifont grew old, and before the day was over I forgot that I had ever been puzzled. When in the late afternoon I made my way down to the inn there was nothing I wanted so much to find out as whether dinner would not soon be ready. To-night I dressed, in a manner, and by the time I was presentable they were all at table.

In their company again my little problem came back to me, so that I was curious to see if Vawdrey wouldn't look at me the least bit queerly. But he didn't look at me at all; which gave me a chance both to be patient and to wonder why I should hesitate to ask him my question across the table. I did hesitate, and with the consciousness of doing so came back a little of the agitation I had left behind me, or below me, during the day. I wasn't ashamed of my scruple, however: it was only a fine discretion. What I vaguely felt was that a public inquiry wouldn't have been fair. Lord Mellifont was there, of course, to mitigate with his perfect manner all consequences; but I think it was present to me that with these particular elements his lordship would not be at home. The moment we got up, therefore, I approached Mrs. Adney, asking her whether, as the evening was lovely, she wouldn't take a turn with me outside.

"You've walked a hundred miles; had you not better be quiet?" she replied.

"I'd walk a hundred miles more to get you to tell me something."

She looked at me an instant, with a little of the queerness that I had sought, but had not found, in Clare Vawdrey's eyes. "Do you mean what became of Lord Mellifont?"

"Of Lord Mellifont?" With my new speculation I had lost that thread.

"Where's your memory, foolish man? We talked of it last evening."

"Ah, yes!" I cried, recalling; "we shall have lots to discuss." I drew her out to the terrace, and before we had gone three steps I said to her: "Who was with you here last night?"

"Last night?" she repeated, as wide of the mark as I had been.

"At ten o'clock—just after our company broke up. You came out here with a gentleman; you talked about the stars."

She stared a moment; then she gave her laugh. "Are you jealous of dear Vawdrey?"

"Then it was he?"

"Certainly it was."

"And how long did he stay?"

“You have it badly. He stayed about a quarter of an hour—perhaps rather more. We walked some distance; he talked about his play. There you have it all; that is the only witchcraft I have used.”

“And what did Vawdrey do afterwards?”

“I haven’t the least idea. I left him and went to bed.”

“At what time did you go to bed?”

“At what time did *you*? I happen to remember that I parted from Mr. Vawdrey at ten twenty-five,” said Mrs. Adney. “I came back into the salon to pick up a book, and I noticed the clock.”

“In other words you and Vawdrey distinctly lingered here from about five minutes past ten till the hour you mention?”

“I don’t know how distinct we were, but we were very jolly. *Où voulez-vous en venir?*” Blanche Adney asked.

“Simply to this, dear lady: that at the time your companion was occupied in the manner you describe, he was also engaged in literary composition in his own room.”

She stopped short at this, and her eyes had an expression in the darkness. She wanted to know if I challenged her veracity; and I replied that, on the contrary, I backed it up—it made the case so interesting. She returned that this would only be if she should back up mine; which, however, I had no difficulty in persuading her to do, after I had related to her circumstantially the incident of my quest of the manuscript—the manuscript which, at the time, for a reason I could now understand, appeared to have passed so completely out of her own head.

“His talk made me forget it—I forgot I sent you for it. He made up for his fiasco in the salon: he declaimed me the scene,” said my companion. She had dropped on a bench to listen to me and, as we sat there, had briefly cross-examined me. Then she broke out into fresh laughter. “Oh, the eccentricities of genius!”

“They seem greater even than I supposed.”

“Oh, the mysteries of greatness!”

“You ought to know all about them, but they take me by surprise.”

“Are you absolutely certain it was Mr. Vawdrey?” my companion asked.

“If it wasn’t he, who in the world was it? That a strange gentleman, looking exactly like him, should be sitting in his room at that hour of the night and writing at his table *in the dark*,” I insisted, “would be practically as wonderful as my own contention.”

“Yes, why in the dark?” mused Mrs. Adney.

“Cats can see in the dark,” I said.

She smiled at me dimly. “Did it look like a cat?”

“No, dear lady, but I’ll tell you what it did look like—it looked like the author of Vawdrey’s admirable works. It looked infinitely more like him than our friend does himself,” I declared.

“Do you mean it was somebody he gets to do them?”

“Yes, while he dines out and disappoints you.”

“Disappoints me?” murmured Mrs. Adney artlessly.

“Disappoints *me*—disappoints every one who looks in him for the genius that created the pages they adore. Where is it in his talk?”

“Ah, last night he was splendid,” said the actress.

“He’s always splendid, as your morning bath is splendid, or a sirloin of beef, or the railway service to Brighton. But he’s never rare.”

“I see what you mean.”

“That’s what makes you such a comfort to talk to. I’ve often wondered—now I know. There are two of them.”

“What a delightful idea!”

“One goes out, the other stays at home. One is the genius, the other’s the bourgeois, and it’s only the bourgeois whom we personally know. He talks, he circulates, he’s awfully popular, he flirts with you—”

“Whereas it’s the genius *you* are privileged to see!” Mrs. Adney broke in. “I’m much obliged to you for the distinction.”

I laid my hand on her arm. “See him yourself. Try it, test it, go to his room.”

“Go to his room? It wouldn’t be proper!” she exclaimed, in the tone of her best comedy.

“Anything is proper in such an inquiry. If you see him, it settles it.”

“How charming—to settle it!” She thought a moment, then she sprang up. “Do you mean *now*?”

“Whenever you like.”

“But suppose I should find the wrong one?” said Blanche Adney, with an exquisite effect.

“The wrong one? Which one do you call the right?”

“The wrong one for a lady to go and see. Suppose I shouldn’t find—the genius?”

“Oh, I’ll look after the other,” I replied. Then, as I had happened to glance about me, I added: “Take care—here comes Lord Mellifont.”

“I wish you’d look after *him*,” my interlocutress murmured.

“What’s the matter with him?”

“That’s just what I was going to tell you.”

“Tell me now; he’s not coming.”

Blanche Adney looked a moment. Lord Mellifont, who appeared to have emerged from the hotel to smoke a meditative cigar, had paused, at a distance from us, and stood admiring the wonders of the prospect, discernible even in the dusk. We strolled slowly in another direction, and she presently said: “My idea is almost as droll as yours.”

“I don’t call mine droll: it’s beautiful.”

“There’s nothing so beautiful as the droll,” Mrs. Adney declared.

“You take a professional view. But I’m all ears.” My curiosity was indeed alive again.

“Well then, my dear friend, if Clare Vawdrey is double (and I’m bound to say I think that the more of him the better), his lordship there has the opposite complaint: he isn’t even whole.”

We stopped once more, simultaneously. “I don’t understand.”

“No more do I. But I have a fancy that if there are two of Mr. Vawdrey, there isn’t so much as one, all told, of Lord Mellifont.”

I considered a moment, then I laughed out. “I think I see what you mean!”

“That’s what makes *you* a comfort. Did you ever see him alone?”

I tried to remember. “Oh, yes; he has been to see me.”

“Ah, then he wasn’t alone.”

“And I’ve been to see him, in his study.”

“Did he know you were there?”

“Naturally—I was announced.”

Blanche Adney glanced at me like a lovely conspirator. “You mustn’t be announced!” With this she walked on.

I rejoined her, breathless. “Do you mean one must come upon him when he doesn’t know it?”

“You must take him unawares. You must go to his room—that’s what you must do.”

If I was elated by the way our mystery opened out, I was also, pardonably, a little confused.

“When I know he’s not there?”

“When you know he *is*.”

“And what shall I see?”

“You won’t see anything!” Mrs. Adney cried as we turned round.

We had reached the end of the terrace, and our movement brought us face to face with Lord Mellifont, who, resuming his walk, had now, without indiscretion, overtaken us. The sight of him at that moment was illuminating, and it kindled a great backward train, connecting itself with one’s general impression of the personage. As he stood there smiling at us and waving a practised hand into the transparent night (he introduced the view as if it had been a candidate and “supported” the very Alps), as he rose before us in the delicate fragrance of his cigar and all his other delicacies and fragrances, with more perfections, somehow, heaped upon his handsome head than one had ever seen accumulated before, he struck me as so essentially, so conspicuously and uniformly the public character that I read in a flash the answer to Blanche Adney’s riddle. He was all public and had no corresponding private life, just as Clare Vawdrey was all private and had no corresponding public one. I had heard only half my companion’s story, yet as we joined Lord Mellifont (he had followed us—he liked Mrs. Adney; but it was always to be conceived of him that he accepted society rather than sought it), as we participated for half an hour in the distributed wealth of his conversation, I felt with unabashed duplicity that we had, as it were, found him out. I was even more deeply diverted by that whisk of the curtain to which the actress had just treated me than I had been by my own discovery; and if I was not ashamed of my share of her secret any more than of having divided my own with her (though my own was, of the two mysteries, the more glorious for the personage involved), this was because there was no cruelty in my advantage, but on the contrary an extreme tenderness and a positive compassion. Oh, he was safe with me, and I felt moreover rich and enlightened, as if I had suddenly put the universe into my pocket. I had learned what an affair of the spot and the moment a great appearance may be. It would doubtless be too much to say that I had always suspected the possibility, in the background of his lordship’s being, of some such beautiful instance; but it is at least a fact that, patronising as it sounds, I had been conscious of a certain reserve of indulgence for him. I had secretly pitied him for the perfection of his performance, had wondered what blank face such a mask

had to cover, what was left to him for the immitigable hours in which a man sits down with himself, or, more serious still, with that intenser self, his lawful wife. How was he at home and what did he do when he was alone? There was something in Lady Mellifont that gave a point to these researches—something that suggested that even to her he was still the public character and that she was haunted by similar questionings. She had never cleared them up: that was her eternal trouble. We therefore knew more than she did, Blanche Adney and I; but we wouldn't tell her for the world, nor would she probably thank us for doing so. She preferred the relative grandeur of uncertainty. She was not at home with him, so she couldn't say; and with her he was not alone, so he couldn't show her. He represented to his wife and he was a hero to his servants, and what one wanted to arrive at was what really became of him when no eye could see. He rested, presumably; but what form of rest could repair such a plenitude of presence? Lady Mellifont was too proud to pry, and as she had never looked through a keyhole she remained dignified and unassuaged.

It may have been a fancy of mine that Blanche Adney drew out our companion, or it may be that the practical irony of our relation to him at such a moment made me see him more vividly: at any rate he never had struck me as so dissimilar from what he would have been if we had not offered him a reflection of his image. We were only a concourse of two, but he had never been more public. His perfect manner had never been more perfect, his remarkable tact had never been more remarkable. I had a tacit sense that it would all be in the morning papers, with a leader, and also a secretly exhilarating one that I knew something that wouldn't be, that never could be, though any enterprising journal would give one a fortune for it. I must add, however, that in spite of my enjoyment—it was almost sensual, like that of a consummate dish—I was eager to be alone again with Mrs. Adney, who owed me an anecdote. It proved impossible, that evening, for some of the others came out to see what we found so absorbing; and then Lord Mellifont bespoke a little music from the fiddler, who produced his violin and played to us divinely, on our platform of echoes, face to face with the ghosts of the mountains. Before the concert was over I missed our actress and, glancing into the window of the salon, saw that she was established with Vawdrey, who was reading to her from a manuscript. The great scene had apparently been achieved and was doubtless the more interesting to Blanche from the new lights she had gathered about its author. I judged it discreet not to disturb them, and I went to bed without seeing her again. I looked out for her betimes the next morning and, as the promise of the day was fair, proposed to her that we should take to the hills, reminding her of the high obligation she had incurred. She recognised the obligation and gratified me with her company; but before we had strolled ten yards up the pass she broke out with intensity: "My dear friend, you've no idea how it works in me! I can think of nothing else."

"Than your theory about Lord Mellifont?"

"Oh, bother Lord Mellifont! I allude to yours about Mr. Vawdrey, who is much the more interesting person of the two. I'm fascinated by that vision of his—what-do-you-call-it?"

"His alternative identity?"

"His other self: that's easier to say."

"You accept it, then, you adopt it?"

"Adopt it? I rejoice in it! It became tremendously vivid to me last evening."

"While he read to you there?"

"Yes, as I listened to him, watched him. It simplified everything, explained everything."

"That's indeed the blessing of it. Is the scene very fine?"

“Magnificent, and he reads beautifully.”

“Almost as well as the other one writes!” I laughed.

This made my companion stop a moment, laying her hand on my arm. “You utter my very impression. I felt that he was reading me the work of another man.”

“What a service to the other man!”

“Such a totally different person,” said Mrs. Adney. We talked of this difference as we went on, and of what a wealth it constituted, what a resource for life, such a duplication of character.

“It ought to make him live twice as long as other people,” I observed.

“Ought to make which of them?”

“Well, both; for after all they’re members of a firm, and one of them couldn’t carry on the business without the other. Moreover mere survival would be dreadful for either.”

Blanche Adney was silent a little; then she exclaimed: “I don’t know—I wish he *would* survive!”

“May I, on my side, inquire which?”

“If you can’t guess I won’t tell you.”

“I know the heart of woman. You always prefer the other.”

She halted again, looking round her. “Off here, away from my husband, I *can* tell you. I’m in love with him!”

“Unhappy woman, he has no passions,” I answered.

“That’s exactly why I adore him. Doesn’t a woman with my history know that the passions of others are insupportable? An actress, poor thing, can’t care for any love that’s not all on *her* side; she can’t afford to be repaid. My marriage proves that: marriage is ruinous. Do you know what was in my mind last night, all the while Mr. Vawdrey was reading me those beautiful speeches? An insane desire to see the author.” And dramatically, as if to hide her shame, Blanche Adney passed on.

“We’ll manage that,” I returned. “I want another glimpse of him myself. But meanwhile please remember that I’ve been waiting more than forty-eight hours for the evidence that supports your sketch, intensely suggestive and plausible, of Lord Mellifont’s private life.”

“Oh, Lord Mellifont doesn’t interest me.”

“He did yesterday,” I said.

“Yes, but that was before I fell in love. You blotted him out with your story.”

“You’ll make me sorry I told it. Come,” I pleaded, “if you don’t let me know how your idea came into your head I shall imagine you simply made it up.”

“Let me recollect then, while we wander in this grassy valley.”

We stood at the entrance of a charming crooked gorge, a portion of whose level floor formed the bed of a stream that was smooth with swiftness. We turned into it, and the soft walk beside the clear torrent drew us on and on; till suddenly, as we continued and I waited for my companion to remember, a bend of the valley showed us Lady Mellifont coming toward us. She was alone, under the canopy of her parasol, drawing her sable train over the turf; and in this form, on the devious ways, she was a sufficiently rare apparition. She usually took a

footman, who marched behind her on the highroads and whose livery was strange to the mountaineers. She blushed on seeing us, as if she ought somehow to justify herself; she laughed vaguely and said she had come out for a little early stroll. We stood together a moment, exchanging platitudes, and then she remarked that she had thought she might find her husband.

“Is he in this quarter?” I inquired.

“I supposed he would be. He came out an hour ago to sketch.”

“Have you been looking for him?” Mrs. Adney asked.

“A little; not very much,” said Lady Mellifont.

Each of the women rested her eyes with some intensity, as it seemed to me, on the eyes of the other.

“We’ll look for him *for* you, if you like,” said Mrs. Adney.

“Oh, it doesn’t matter. I thought I’d join him.”

“He won’t make his sketch if you don’t,” my companion hinted.

“Perhaps he will if *you* do,” said Lady Mellifont.

“Oh, I dare say he’ll turn up,” I interposed.

“He certainly will if he knows we’re here!” Blanche Adney retorted.

“Will you wait while we search?” I asked of Lady Mellifont.

She repeated that it was of no consequence; upon which Mrs. Adney went on: “We’ll go into the matter for our own pleasure.”

“I wish you a pleasant expedition,” said her ladyship, and was turning away when I sought to know if we should inform her husband that she had followed him. She hesitated a moment; then she jerked out oddly: “I think you had better not.” With this she took leave of us, floating a little stiffly down the gorge.

My companion and I watched her retreat, then we exchanged a stare, while a light ghost of a laugh rippled from the actress’s lips. “She might be walking in the shrubberies at Mellifont!”

“She suspects it, you know,” I replied.

“And she doesn’t want him to know it. There won’t be any sketch.”

“Unless we overtake him,” I subjoined. “In that case we shall find him producing one, in the most graceful attitude, and the queer thing is that it will be brilliant.”

“Let us leave him alone—he’ll have to come home without it.”

“He’d rather never come home. Oh, he’ll find a public!”

“Perhaps he’ll do it for the cows,” Blanche Adney suggested; and as I was on the point of rebuking her profanity she went on: “That’s simply what I happened to discover.”

“What are you speaking of?”

“The incident of day before yesterday.”

“Ah, let’s have it at last!”

“That’s all it was—that I was like Lady Mellifont: I couldn’t find him.”

“Did you lose him?”

“He lost *me*—that appears to be the way of it. He thought I was gone.”

“But you did find him, since you came home with him.”

“It was he who found *me*. That again is what must happen. He’s there from the moment he knows somebody else is.”

“I understand his intermissions,” I said after a short reflection, “but I don’t quite seize the law that governs them.”

“Oh, it’s a fine shade, but I caught it at that moment. I had started to come home. I was tired, and I had insisted on his not coming back with me. We had found some rare flowers—those I brought home—and it was he who had discovered almost all of them. It amused him very much, and I knew he wanted to get more; but I was weary and I quitted him. He let me go—where else would have been his tact?—and I was too stupid then to have guessed that from the moment I was not there no flower would be gathered. I started homeward, but at the end of three minutes I found I had brought away his penknife—he had lent it to me to trim a branch—and I knew he would need it. I turned back a few steps, to call him, but before I spoke I looked about for him. You can’t understand what happened then without having the place before you.”

“You must take me there,” I said.

“We may see the wonder here. The place was simply one that offered no chance for concealment—a great gradual hillside, without obstructions or trees. There were some rocks below me, behind which I myself had disappeared, but from which on coming back I immediately emerged again.”

“Then he must have seen you.”

“He was too utterly gone, for some reason best known to himself. It was probably some moment of fatigue—he’s getting on, you know, so that, with the sense of returning solitude, the reaction had been proportionately great, the extinction proportionately complete. At any rate the stage was as bare as your hand.”

“Could he have been somewhere else?”

“He couldn’t have been, in the time, anywhere but where I had left him. Yet the place was utterly empty—as empty as this stretch of valley before us. He had vanished—he had ceased to be. But as soon as my voice rang out (I uttered his name), he rose before me like the rising sun.”

“And where did the sun rise?”

“Just where it ought to—just where he would have been and where I should have seen him had he been like other people.”

I had listened with the deepest interest, but it was my duty to think of objections. “How long a time elapsed between the moment you perceived his absence and the moment you called?”

“Oh, only an instant. I don’t pretend it was long.”

“Long enough for you to be sure?” I said.

“Sure he wasn’t there?”

“Yes, and that you were not mistaken, not the victim of some hocus-pocus of your eyesight.”

“I may have been mistaken, but I don’t believe it. At any rate, that’s just why I want you to look in his room.”

I thought a moment. "How *can* I, when even his wife doesn't dare to?"

"She *wants* to; propose it to her. It wouldn't take much to make her. She does suspect."

I thought another moment. "Did he seem to know?"

"That I had missed him? So it struck me, but he thought he had been quick enough."

"Did you speak of his disappearance?"

"Heaven forbid! It seemed to me too strange."

"Quite right. And how did he look?"

Trying to think it out again and reconstitute her miracle, Blanche Adney gazed abstractedly up the valley. Suddenly she exclaimed: "Just as he looks now!" and I saw Lord Mellifont stand before us with his sketch-block. I perceived, as we met him, that he looked neither suspicious nor blank: he looked simply, as he did always, everywhere, the principal feature of the scene. Naturally he had no sketch to show us, but nothing could better have rounded off our actual conception of him than the way he fell into position as we approached. He had been selecting his point of view; he took possession of it with a flourish of the pencil. He leaned against a rock; his beautiful little box of water-colours reposed on a natural table beside him, a ledge of the bank which showed how inveterately nature ministered to his convenience. He painted while he talked and he talked while he painted; and if the painting was as miscellaneous as the talk, the talk would equally have graced an album. We waited while the exhibition went on, and it seemed indeed as if the conscious profiles of the peaks were interested in his success. They grew as black as silhouettes in paper, sharp against a livid sky from which, however, there would be nothing to fear till Lord Mellifont's sketch should be finished. Blanche Adney communed with me dumbly, and I could read the language of her eyes: "Oh, if *we* could only do it as well as that! He fills the stage in a way that beats us." We could no more have left him than we could have quitted the theatre till the play was over; but in due time we turned round with him and strolled back to the inn, before the door of which his lordship, glancing again at his picture, tore the fresh leaf from the block and presented it with a few happy words to Mrs. Adney. Then he went into the house; and a moment later, looking up from where we stood, we saw him, above, at the window of his sitting-room (he had the best apartments), watching the signs of the weather.

"He'll have to rest after this," Blanche said, dropping her eyes on her water-colour.

"Indeed he will!" I raised mine to the window: Lord Mellifont had vanished. "He's already reabsorbed."

"Reabsorbed?" I could see the actress was now thinking of something else.

"Into the immensity of things. He has lapsed again; there's an *entr'acte*."

"It ought to be long." Mrs. Adney looked up and down the terrace, and at that moment the head-waiter appeared in the doorway. Suddenly she turned to this functionary with the question: "Have you seen Mr. Vawdrey lately?"

The man immediately approached. "He left the house five minutes ago—for a walk, I think. He went down the pass; he had a book."

I was watching the ominous clouds. "He had better have had an umbrella."

The waiter smiled. "I recommended him to take one."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Adney; and the Oberkellner withdrew. Then she went on, abruptly: "Will you do me a favour?"

“Yes, if you’ll do *me* one. Let me see if your picture is signed.”

She glanced at the sketch before giving it to me. “For a wonder it isn’t.”

“It ought to be, for full value. May I keep it awhile?”

“Yes, if you’ll do what I ask. Take an umbrella and go after Mr. Vawdrey.”

“To bring him to Mrs. Adney?”

“To keep him out—as long as you can.”

“I’ll keep him as long as the rain holds off.”

“Oh, never mind the rain!” my companion exclaimed.

“Would you have us drenched?”

“Without remorse.” Then with a strange light in her eyes she added: “I’m going to try.”

“To try?”

“To see the real one. Oh, if I can get at him!” she broke out with passion.

“Try, try!” I replied. “I’ll keep our friend all day.”

“If I can get at the one who does it”—and she paused, with shining eyes—“if I can have it out with him I shall get my part!”

“I’ll keep Vawdrey for ever!” I called after her as she passed quickly into the house.

Her audacity was communicative, and I stood there in a glow of excitement. I looked at Lord Mellifont’s water-colour and I looked at the gathering storm; I turned my eyes again to his lordship’s windows and then I bent them on my watch. Vawdrey had so little the start of me that I should have time to overtake him—time even if I should take five minutes to go up to Lord Mellifont’s sitting-room (where we had all been hospitably received), and say to him, as a messenger, that Mrs. Adney begged he would bestow upon his sketch the high consecration of his signature. As I again considered this work of art I perceived there was something it certainly did lack: what else then but so noble an autograph? It was my duty to supply the deficiency without delay, and in accordance with this conviction I instantly re-entered the hotel. I went up to Lord Mellifont’s apartments; I reached the door of his salon. Here, however, I was met by a difficulty of which my extravagance had not taken account. If I were to knock I should spoil everything; yet was I prepared to dispense with this ceremony? I asked myself the question, and it embarrassed me; I turned my little picture round and round, but it didn’t give me the answer I wanted. I wanted it to say: “Open the door gently, gently, without a sound, yet very quickly: then you will see what you will see.” I had gone so far as to lay my hand, upon the knob when I became aware (having my wits so about me), that exactly in the manner I was thinking of—gently, gently, without a sound—another door had moved, on the opposite side of the hall. At the same instant I found myself smiling rather constrainedly upon Lady Mellifont, who, on seeing me, had checked herself on the threshold of her room. For a moment, as she stood there, we exchanged two or three ideas that were the more singular for being unspoken. We had caught each other hovering, and we understood each other; but as I stepped over to her (so that we were separated from the sitting-room by the width of the hall), her lips formed the almost soundless entreaty: “Don’t!” I could see in her conscious eyes everything that the word expressed—the confession of her own curiosity and the dread of the consequences of mine. “*Don’t!*” she repeated, as I stood before her. From the moment my experiment could strike her as an act of violence I was ready to renounce it; yet I thought I detected in her frightened face a still deeper betrayal—a possibility of disappointment if I should give way. It was as if she had said: “I’ll let you do it

if you'll take the responsibility. Yes, with some one else I'd surprise him. But it would never do for him to think it was I."

"We soon found Lord Mellifont," I observed, in allusion to our encounter with her an hour before, "and he was so good as to give this lovely sketch to Mrs. Adney, who has asked me to come up and beg him to put in the omitted signature."

Lady Mellifont took the drawing from me, and I could guess the struggle that went on in her while she looked at it. She was silent for some time; then I felt that all her delicacies and dignities, all her old timidities and pieties were fighting against her opportunity. She turned away from me and, with the drawing, went back to her room. She was absent for a couple of minutes, and when she reappeared I could see that she had vanquished her temptation; that even, with a kind of resurgent horror, she had shrunk from it. She had deposited the sketch in the room. "If you will kindly leave the picture with me, I will see that Mrs. Adney's request is attended to," she said, with great courtesy and sweetness, but in a manner that put an end to our colloquy.

I assented, with a somewhat artificial enthusiasm perhaps, and then, to ease off our separation, remarked that we were going to have a change of weather.

"In that case we shall go—we shall go immediately," said Lady Mellifont. I was amused at the eagerness with which she made this declaration: it appeared to represent a coveted flight into safety, an escape with her threatened secret. I was the more surprised therefore when, as I was turning away, she put out her hand to take mine. She had the pretext of bidding me farewell, but as I shook hands with her on this supposition I felt that what the movement really conveyed was: "I thank you for the help you would have given me, but it's better as it is. If I should know, who would help me then?" As I went to my room to get my umbrella I said to myself: "She's sure, but she won't put it to the proof."

A quarter of an hour later I had overtaken Clare Vawdrey in the pass, and shortly after this we found ourselves looking for refuge. The storm had not only completely gathered, but it had broken at the last with extraordinary rapidity. We scrambled up a hillside to an empty cabin, a rough structure that was hardly more than a shed for the protection of cattle. It was a tolerable shelter however, and it had fissures through which we could watch the splendid spectacle of the tempest. This entertainment lasted an hour—an hour that has remained with me as full of odd disparities. While the lightning played with the thunder and the rain gushed in on our umbrellas, I said to myself that Clare Vawdrey was disappointing. I don't know exactly what I should have predicated of a great author exposed to the fury of the elements, I can't say what particular Manfred attitude I should have expected my companion to assume, but it seemed to me somehow that I shouldn't have looked to him to regale me in such a situation with stories (which I had already heard), about the celebrated Lady Ringrose. Her ladyship formed the subject of Vawdrey's conversation during this prodigious scene, though before it was quite over he had launched out on Mr. Chafer, the scarcely less notorious reviewer. It broke my heart to hear a man like Vawdrey talk of reviewers. The lightning projected a hard clearness upon the truth, familiar to me for years, to which the last day or two had added transcendent support—the irritating certitude that for personal relations this admirable genius thought his second-best good enough. It was, no doubt, as society was made, but there was a contempt in the distinction which could not fail to be galling to an admirer. The world was vulgar and stupid, and the real man would have been a fool to come out for it when he could gossip and dine by deputy. None the less my heart sank as I felt my companion practice this economy. I don't know exactly what I wanted; I suppose I wanted him to make an exception for *me*. I almost believed he would, if he had known how I worshipped his talent. But I had never been able to translate this to him, and his application

of his principle was relentless. At any rate I was more than ever sure that at such an hour his chair at home was not empty: *there* was the Manfred attitude, *there* were the responsive flashes. I could only envy Mrs. Adney her presumable enjoyment of them.

The weather drew off at last, and the rain abated sufficiently to allow us to emerge from our asylum and make our way back to the inn, where we found on our arrival that our prolonged absence had produced some agitation. It was judged apparently that the fury of the elements might have placed us in a predicament. Several of our friends were at the door, and they seemed a little disconcerted when it was perceived that we were only drenched. Clare Vawdrey, for some reason, was wetter than I, and he took his course to his room. Blanche Adney was among the persons collected to look out for us, but as Vawdrey came toward her she shrank from him, without a greeting; with a movement that I observed as almost one of estrangement she turned her back on him and went quickly into the salon. Wet as I was I went in after her; on which she immediately flung round and faced me. The first thing I saw was that she had never been so beautiful. There was a light of inspiration in her face, and she broke out to me in the quickest whisper, which was at the same time the loudest cry, I have ever heard: "I've got my *part!*"

"You went to his room—I was right?"

"Right?" Blanche Adney repeated. "Ah, my dear fellow!" she murmured.

"He was there—you saw him?"

"He saw me. It was the hour of my life!"

"It must have been the hour of his, if you were half as lovely as you are at this moment."

"He's splendid," she pursued, as if she didn't hear me. "He *is* the one who does it!" I listened, immensely impressed, and she added: "We understood each other."

"By flashes of lightning?"

"Oh, I didn't see the lightning then!"

"How long were you there?" I asked with admiration.

"Long enough to tell him I adore him."

"Ah, that's what I've never been able to tell him!" I exclaimed ruefully.

"I shall have my part—I shall have my part!" she continued, with triumphant indifference; and she flung round the room with the joy of a girl, only checking herself to say: "Go and change your clothes."

"You shall have Lord Mellifont's signature," I said.

"Oh, bother Lord Mellifont's signature! He's far nicer than Mr. Vawdrey," she went on irrelevantly.

"Lord Mellifont?" I pretended to inquire.

"Confound Lord Mellifont!" And Blanche Adney, in her elation, brushed by me, whisking again through the open door. Just outside of it she came upon her husband; whereupon, with a charming cry of "We're talking of you, my love!" she threw herself upon him and kissed him.

I went to my room and changed my clothes, but I remained there till the evening. The violence of the storm had passed over us, but the rain had settled down to a drizzle. On descending to dinner I found that the change in the weather had already broken up our party. The Mellifonts had departed in a carriage and four, they had been followed by others, and

several vehicles had been bespoke for the morning. Blanche Adney's was one of them, and on the pretext that she had preparations to make she quitted us directly after dinner. Clare Vawdrey asked me what was the matter with her—she suddenly appeared to dislike him. I forget what answer I gave, but I did my best to comfort him by driving away with him the next day. Mrs. Adney had vanished when we came down; but they made up their quarrel in London, for he finished his play, which she produced. I must add that she is still, nevertheless, in want of the great part. I have a beautiful one in my head, but she doesn't come to see me to stir me up about it. Lady Mellifont always drops me a kind word when we meet, but that doesn't console me.

Lord Beaupré

I

Some reference had been made to Northerley, which was within an easy drive, and Firminger described how he had dined there the night before and had found a lot of people. Mrs. Ashbury, one of the two visitors, inquired who these people might be, and he mentioned half-a-dozen names, among which was that of young Raddle, which had been a good deal on people's lips, and even in the newspapers, on the occasion, still recent, of his stepping into the fortune, exceptionally vast even as the product of a patent-glue, left him by a father whose ugly name on all the vacant spaces of the world had exasperated generations of men.

"Oh, is he there?" asked Mrs. Ashbury, in a tone which might have been taken as a vocal rendering of the act of pricking up one's ears. She didn't hand on the information to her daughter, who was talking—if a beauty of so few phrases could have been said to talk—with Mary Gosselin, but in the course of a few moments she put down her teacup with a failure of suavity and, getting up, gave the girl a poke with her parasol. "Come, Maud, we must be stirring."

"You pay us a very short visit," said Mrs. Gosselin, intensely demure over the fine web of her knitting. Mrs. Ashbury looked hard for an instant into her bland eyes, then she gave poor Maud another poke. She alluded to a reason and expressed regrets; but she got her daughter into motion, and Guy Firminger passed through the garden with the two ladies to put them into their carriage. Mrs. Ashbury protested particularly against any further escort. While he was absent the other parent and child, sitting together on their pretty lawn in the yellow light of the August afternoon, talked of the frightful way Maud Ashbury had "gone off," and of something else as to which there was more to say when their third visitor came back.

"Don't think me grossly inquisitive if I ask you where they told the coachman to drive," said Mary Gosselin as the young man dropped, near her, into a low wicker chair, stretching his long legs as if he had been one of the family.

Firminger stared. "Upon my word I didn't particularly notice, but I think the old lady said 'Home'."

"There, mamma dear!" the girl exclaimed triumphantly.

But Mrs. Gosselin only knitted on, persisting in profundity. She replied that "Home" was a feint, that Mrs. Ashbury would already have given another order, and that it was her wish to hurry off to Northerley that had made her keep them from going with her to the carriage, in which they would have seen her take a suspected direction. Mary explained to Guy Firminger that her mother had perceived poor Mrs. Ashbury to be frantic to reach the house at which she had heard that Mr. Raddle was staying. The young man stared again and wanted to know what she desired to do with Mr. Raddle. Mary replied that her mother would tell him what Mrs. Ashbury desired to do with poor Maud.

"What all Christian mothers desire," said Mrs. Gosselin. "Only she doesn't know how."

"To marry the dear child to Mr. Raddle," Mary added, smiling.

Firminger's vagueness expanded with the subject. "Do you mean you want to marry *your* dear child to that little cad?" he asked of the elder lady.

"I speak of the general duty—not of the particular case," said Mrs. Gosselin.

“Mamma *does* know how,” Mary went on.

“Then why ain’t you married?”

“Because we’re not acting, like the Ashburys, with injudicious precipitation. Is that correct?” the girl demanded, laughing, of her mother.

“Laugh at me, my dear, as much as you like—it’s very lucky you’ve got me,” Mrs. Gosselin declared.

“She means I can’t manage for myself,” said Mary to the visitor.

“What nonsense you talk!” Mrs. Gosselin murmured, counting stitches.

“I can’t, mamma, I can’t; I admit it,” Mary continued.

“But injudicious precipitation and—what’s the other thing?—creeping prudence, seem to come out in very much the same place,” the young man objected.

“Do you mean since I too wither on the tree?”

“It only comes back to saying how hard it is nowadays to marry one’s daughters,” said the lucid Mrs. Gosselin, saving Firminger, however, the trouble of an ingenious answer. “I don’t contend that, at the best, it’s easy.”

But Guy Firminger would not have struck you as capable of much conversational effort as he lounged there in the summer softness, with ironic familiarities, like one of the old friends who rarely deviate into sincerity. He was a robust but loose-limbed young man, with a well-shaped head and a face smooth, fair and kind. He was in knickerbockers, and his clothes, which had seen service, were composed of articles that didn’t match. His laced boots were dusty—he had evidently walked a certain distance; an indication confirmed by the lingering, sociable way in which, in his basket-seat, he tilted himself towards Mary Gosselin. It pointed to a pleasant reason for a long walk. This young lady, of five-and-twenty, had black hair and blue eyes; a combination often associated with the effect of beauty. The beauty in this case, however, was dim and latent, not vulgarly obvious; and if her height and slenderness gave that impression of length of line which, as we know, is the fashion, Mary Gosselin had on the other hand too much expression to be generally admired. Every one thought her intellectual; a few of the most simple-minded even thought her plain. What Guy Firminger thought—or rather what he took for granted, for he was not built up on depths of reflection—will probably appear from this narrative.

“Yes indeed; things have come to a pass that’s awful for *us*” the girl announced.

“For *us*, you mean,” said Firminger. “We’re hunted like the ostrich; we’re trapped and stalked and run to earth. We go in fear—I assure you we do.”

“Are *you* hunted, Guy?” Mrs. Gosselin asked with an inflection of her own.

“Yes, Mrs. Gosselin, even *moi qui vous parle*, the ordinary male of commerce, inconceivable as it may appear. I know something about it.”

“And of whom do you go in fear?” Mary Gosselin took up an uncut book and a paper-knife which she had laid down on the advent of the other visitors.

“My dear child, of Diana and her nymphs, of the spinster at large. She’s always out with her rifle. And it isn’t only that; you know there’s always a second gun, a walking arsenal, at her heels. I forget, for the moment, who Diana’s mother was, and the genealogy of the nymphs; but not only do the old ladies know the younger ones are out, they distinctly go *with* them.”

“Who was Diana’s mother, my dear?” Mrs. Gosselin inquired of her daughter.

“She was a beautiful old lady with pink ribbons in her cap and a genius for knitting,” the girl replied, cutting her book.

“Oh, I’m not speaking of you two dears; you’re not like anyone else; you’re an immense comfort,” said Guy Firminger. “But they’ve reduced it to a science, and I assure you that if one were any one in particular, if one were not protected by one’s obscurity, one’s life would be a burden. Upon my honour one wouldn’t escape. I’ve seen it, I’ve watched them. Look at poor Beaupré—look at little Raddle over there. I object to him, but I bleed for him.”

“Lord Beaupré won’t marry again,” said Mrs. Gosselin with an air of conviction.

“So much the worse for him!”

“Come—that’s a concession to our charms!” Mary laughed.

But the ruthless young man explained away his concession. “I mean that to be married’s the only protection—or else to be engaged.”

“To be permanently engaged,—wouldn’t that do?” Mary Gosselin asked.

“Beautifully—I would try it if I were a *parti*.”

“And how’s the little boy?” Mrs. Gosselin presently inquired.

“What little boy?”

“Your little cousin—Lord Beaupré’s child: isn’t it a boy?”

“Oh, poor little beggar, he isn’t up to much. He was awfully cut up by scarlet fever.”

“You’re not the rose indeed, but you’re tolerably near it,” the elder lady presently continued.

“What do you call near it? Not even in the same garden—not in any garden at all, alas!”

“There are three lives—but after all!”

“Dear lady, don’t be homicidal!”

“What do you call the ‘rose’?” Mary asked of her mother.

“The title,” said Mrs. Gosselin, promptly but softly.

Something in her tone made Firminger laugh aloud. “You don’t mention the property.”

“Oh, I mean the whole thing.”

“Is the property very large?” said Mary Gosselin.

“Fifty thousand a year,” her mother responded; at which the young man laughed out again.

“Take care, mamma, or we shall be thought to be out with our guns!” the girl interposed; a recommendation that drew from Guy Firminger the just remark that there would be time enough for this when his prospects should be worth speaking of. He leaned over to pick up his hat and stick, as if it were his time to go, but he didn’t go for another quarter of an hour, and during these minutes his prospects received some frank consideration. He was Lord Beaupré’s first cousin, and the three intervening lives were his lordship’s own, that of his little sickly son, and that of his uncle the Major, who was also Guy’s uncle and with whom the young man was at present staying. It was from homely Trist, the Major’s house, that he had walked over to Mrs. Gosselin’s. Frank Firminger, who had married in youth a woman with something of her own and eventually left the army, had nothing but girls, but he was only of middle age and might possibly still have a son. At any rate his life was a very good one. Beaupré might marry again, and, marry or not, he was barely thirty-three and might live to a great age. The child moreover, poor little devil, would doubtless, with the growing

consciousness of an incentive (there was none like feeling you were in people's way), develop a capacity for duration; so that altogether Guy professed himself, with the best will in the world, unable to take a rosy view of the disappearance of obstacles. He treated the subject with a jocularly that, in view of the remoteness of his chance, was not wholly tasteless, and the discussion, between old friends and in the light of this extravagance, was less crude than perhaps it sounds. The young man quite declined to see any latent brilliancy in his future. They had all been lashing him up, his poor dear mother, his uncle Frank, and Beaupré as well, to make that future political; but even if he should get in (he was nursing—oh, so languidly!—a possible opening), it would only be into the shallow edge of the stream. He would stand there like a tall idiot with the water up to his ankles. He didn't know how to swim—in that element; he didn't know how to do anything.

"I think you're very perverse, my dear," said Mrs. Gosselin. "I'm sure you have great dispositions."

"For what—except for sitting here and talking with you and Mary? I revel in this sort of thing, but I scarcely like anything else."

"You'd do very well if you weren't so lazy," Mary said. "I believe you're the very laziest person in the world."

"So do I—the very laziest in the world," the young man contentedly replied. "But how can I regret it, when it keeps me so quiet, when (I might even say) it makes me so amiable?"

"You'll have, one of these days, to get over your quietness, and perhaps even a little over your amiability," Mrs. Gosselin sagaciously stated.

"I devoutly hope not."

"You'll have to perform the duties of your position."

"Do you mean keep my stump of a broom in order and my crossing irreproachable?"

"You may say what you like; you will be a *parti*," Mrs. Gosselin continued.

"Well, then, if the worst comes to the worst I shall do what I said just now: I shall get some good plausible girl to see me through."

"The proper way to 'get' her will be to marry her. After you're married you won't be a *parti*."

"Dear mamma, he'll think you're already levelling your rifle!" Mary Gosselin laughingly wailed.

Guy Firminger looked at her a moment. "I say, Mary, wouldn't *you* do?"

"For the good plausible girl? Should I be plausible enough?"

"Surely—what could be more natural? Everything would seem to contribute to the suitability of our alliance. I should be known to have known you for years—from childhood's sunny hour; I should be known to have bullied you, and even to have been bullied *by* you, in the period of pinafores. My relations from a tender age with your brother, which led to our schoolroom romps in holidays and to the happy footing on which your mother has always been so good as to receive me here, would add to all the presumptions of intimacy. People would accept such a conclusion as inevitable."

"Among all your reasons you don't mention the young lady's attractions," said Mary Gosselin.

Firminger stared a moment, his clear eye lighted by his happy thought. "I don't mention the young man's. They would be so obvious, on one side and the other, as to be taken for granted."

"And is it your idea that one should pretend to be engaged to you all one's life?"

"Oh no, simply till I should have had time to look round. I'm determined not to be hustled and bewildered into matrimony—to be dragged to the shambles before I know where I am. With such an arrangement as the one I speak of I should be able to take my time, to keep my head, to make my choice."

"And how would the young lady make hers?"

"How do you mean, hers?"

"The selfishness of men is something exquisite. Suppose the young lady—if it's conceivable that you should find one idiotic enough to be a party to such a transaction—suppose the poor girl herself should happen to wish to be *really* engaged?"

Guy Firminger thought a moment, with his slow but not stupid smile. "Do you mean to *me*?"

"To you—or to some one else."

"Oh, if she'd give me notice I'd let her off."

"Let her off till you could find a substitute?"

"Yes—but I confess it would be a great inconvenience. People wouldn't take the second one so seriously."

"She would have to make a sacrifice; she would have to wait till you should know where you were," Mrs. Gosselin suggested.

"Yes, but where would *her* advantage come in?" Mary persisted.

"Only in the pleasure of charity; the moral satisfaction of doing a fellow a good turn," said Firminger.

"You must think people are keen to oblige you!"

"Ah, but surely I could count on *you*, couldn't I?" the young man asked.

Mary had finished cutting her book; she got up and flung it down on the tea-table. "What a preposterous conversation!" she exclaimed with force, tossing the words from her as she tossed her book; and, looking round her vaguely a moment, without meeting Guy Firminger's eye, she walked away to the house.

Firminger sat watching her; then he said serenely to her mother: "Why has our Mary left us?"

"She has gone to get something, I suppose."

"What has she gone to get?"

"A little stick to beat you perhaps."

"You don't mean I've been objectionable?"

"Dear, no—I'm joking. One thing is very certain," pursued Mrs. Gosselin; "that you ought to work—to try to get on exactly as if nothing could ever happen. Oughtn't you?" She threw off the question mechanically as her visitor continued silent.

"I'm sure she doesn't like it!" he exclaimed, without heeding her appeal.

"Doesn't like what?"

“My free play of mind. It’s perhaps too much in the key of our old romps.”

“You’re very clever; she always likes *that*,” said Mrs. Gosselin. “You ought to go in for something serious, for something honourable,” she continued, “just as much as if you had nothing at all to look to.”

“Words of wisdom, dear Mrs. Gosselin,” Firminger replied, rising slowly from his relaxed attitude. “But what *have* I to look to.”

She raised her mild, deep eyes to him as he stood before her—she might have been a fairy godmother. “Everything!”

“But you know I can’t poison them!”

“That won’t be necessary.”

He looked at her an instant; then with a laugh: “One might think *you* would undertake it!”

“I almost would—for *you*. Good-bye.”

“Take care,—if they *should* be carried off!” But Mrs. Gosselin only repeated her good-bye, and the young man departed before Mary had come back.

II

Nearly two years after Guy Firminger had spent that friendly hour in Mrs. Gosselin’s little garden in Hampshire this far-seeing woman was enabled (by the return of her son, who at New York, in an English bank, occupied a position they all rejoiced over—to such great things might it duly lead), to resume possession, for the season, of the little London house which her husband had left her to inhabit, but which her native thrift, in determining her to let it for a term, had converted into a source of income. Hugh Gosselin, who was thirty years old and at twenty-three, before his father’s death, had been dispatched to America to exert himself, was understood to be doing very well—so well that his devotion to the interests of his employers had been rewarded, for the first time, with a real holiday. He was to remain in England from May to August, undertaking, as he said, to make it all right if during this time his mother should occupy (to contribute to his entertainment), the habitation in Chester Street. He was a small, preoccupied young man, with a sharpness as acquired as a new hat; he struck his mother and sister as intensely American. For the first few days after his arrival they were startled by his intonations, though they admitted that they had had an escape when he reminded them that he might have brought with him an accent embodied in a wife.

“When you do take one,” said Mrs. Gosselin, who regarded such an accident, over there, as inevitable, “you must charge her high for it.”

It was not with this question, however, that the little family in Chester Street was mainly engaged, but with the last incident in the extraordinary succession of events which, like a chapter of romance, had in the course of a few months converted their vague and impecunious friend into a personage envied and honoured. It was as if a blight had been cast on all Guy Firminger’s hindrances. On the day Hugh Gosselin sailed from New York the delicate little boy at Bosco had succumbed to an attack of diphtheria. His father had died of typhoid the previous winter at Naples; his uncle, a few weeks later, had had a fatal accident in the hunting-field. So strangely, so rapidly had the situation cleared up, had his fate and theirs worked for him. Guy had opened his eyes one morning to an earldom which carried with it a fortune not alone nominally but really great. Mrs. Gosselin and Mary had not written to him, but they knew he was at Bosco; he had remained there after the funeral of the late little lord. Mrs. Gosselin, who heard everything, had heard somehow that he was behaving with the greatest consideration, giving the guardians, the trustees, whatever they were called, plenty of

time to do everything. Everything was comparatively simple; in the absence of collaterals there were so few other people concerned. The principal relatives were poor Frank Firminger's widow and her girls, who had seen themselves so near to new honours and comforts. Probably the girls would expect their cousin Guy to marry one of them, and think it the least he could decently do; a view the young man himself (if he were very magnanimous) might possibly embrace. The question would be whether he would be very magnanimous. These young ladies exhausted in their three persons the numerous varieties of plainness. On the other hand Guy Firminger—or Lord Beaupré, as one would have to begin to call him now—was unmistakably kind. Mrs. Gosselin appealed to her son as to whether their noble friend were not unmistakably kind.

“Of course I've known him always, and that time he came out to America—when was it? four years ago—I saw him every day. I like him awfully and all that, but since you push me, you know,” said Hugh Gosselin, “I'm bound to say that the first thing to mention in any description of him would be—if you wanted to be quite correct—that he's unmistakably selfish.”

“I see—I see,” Mrs. Gosselin unblushingly replied. “Of course I know what you mean,” she added in a moment. “But is he any more so than any one else? Every one's unmistakably selfish.”

“Every one but you and Mary,” said the young man.

“And *you*, dear!” his mother smiled. “But a person may be kind, you know—mayn't he?—at the same time that he *is* selfish. There are different sorts.”

“Different sorts of kindness?” Hugh Gosselin asked with a laugh; and the inquiry undertaken by his mother occupied them for the moment, demanding a subtlety of treatment from which they were not conscious of shrinking, of which rather they had an idea that they were perhaps exceptionally capable. They came back to the temperate view that Guy would never put himself out, would probably never do anything great, but might show himself all the same a delightful member of society. Yes, he was probably selfish, like other people; but unlike most of them he was, somehow, amiably, attachingly, sociably, almost lovably selfish. Without doing anything great he would yet be a great success—a big, pleasant, gossiping, lounging and, in its way doubtless very splendid, presence. He would have no ambition, and it was ambition that made selfishness ugly. Hugh and his mother were sure of this last point until Mary, before whom the discussion, when it reached this stage, happened to be carried on, checked them by asking whether that, on the contrary, were not just what was supposed to make it fine.

“Oh, he only wants to be comfortable,” said her brother; “but he *does* want it!”

“There'll be a tremendous rush for him,” Mrs. Gosselin prophesied to her son.

“Oh, he'll never marry. It will be too much trouble.”

“It's done here without any trouble—for the men. One sees how long you've been out of the country.”

“There was a girl in New York whom he might have married—he really liked her. But he wouldn't turn round for her.”

“Perhaps she wouldn't turn round for *him*,” said Mary.

“I daresay she'll turn round *now*,” Mrs. Gosselin rejoined; on which Hugh mentioned that there was nothing to be feared from her, all her revolutions had been accomplished. He added

that nothing would make any difference—so intimate was his conviction that Beaupré would preserve his independence.

“Then I think he’s not so selfish as you say,” Mary declared; “or at any rate one will never know whether he is. Isn’t married life the great chance to show it?”

“Your father never showed it,” said Mrs. Gosselin; and as her children were silent in presence of this tribute to the departed she added, smiling: “Perhaps you think that *I* did!” They embraced her, to indicate what they thought, and the conversation ended, when she had remarked that Lord Beaupré was a man who would be perfectly easy to manage *after* marriage, with Hugh’s exclaiming that this was doubtless exactly why he wished to keep out of it.

Such was evidently his wish, as they were able to judge in Chester Street when he came up to town. He appeared there oftener than was to have been expected, not taking himself in his new character at all too seriously to find stray half-hours for old friends. It was plain that he was going to do just as he liked, that he was not a bit excited or uplifted by his change of fortune. Mary Gosselin observed that he had no imagination—she even reproached him with the deficiency to his face; an incident which showed indeed how little seriously *she* took him. He had no idea of playing a part, and yet he would have been clever enough. He wasn’t even systematic about being simple; his simplicity was a series of accidents and indifferences. Never was a man more conscientiously superficial. There were matters on which he valued Mrs. Gosselin’s judgment and asked her advice—without, as usually appeared later, ever taking it; such questions, mainly, as the claims of a predecessor’s servants, and those, in respect to social intercourse, of the clergyman’s family. He didn’t like his parson—what was a fellow to do when he didn’t like his parson? What he did like was to talk with Hugh about American investments, and it was amusing to Hugh, though he tried not to show his amusement, to find himself looking at Guy Firminger in the light of capital. To Mary he addressed from the first the oddest snatches of confidential discourse, rendered in fact, however, by the levity of his tone, considerably less confidential than in intention. He had something to tell her that he joked about, yet without admitting that it was any less important for being laughable. It was neither more nor less than that Charlotte Firminger, the eldest of his late uncle’s four girls, had designated to him in the clearest manner the person she considered he ought to marry. She appealed to his sense of justice, she spoke and wrote, or at any rate she looked and moved, she sighed and sang, in the name of common honesty. He had had four letters from her that week, and to his knowledge there were a series of people in London, people she could bully, whom she had got to promise to take her in for the season. She was going to be on the spot, she was going to follow him up. He took his stand on common honesty, but he had a mortal horror of Charlotte. At the same time, when a girl had a jaw like that and had marked you—really *marked* you, mind, you felt your safety oozing away. He had given them during the past three months, all those terrible girls, every sort of present that Bond Street could supply: but these demonstrations had only been held to constitute another pledge. Therefore what was a fellow to do? Besides, there were other portents; the air was thick with them, as the sky over battlefields was darkened by the flight of vultures. They were flocking, the birds of prey, from every quarter, and every girl in England, by Jove! was going to be thrown at his head. What had he done to deserve such a fate? He wanted to stop in England and see all sorts of things through; but how could he stand there and face such a charge? Yet what good would it do to bolt? Wherever he should go there would be fifty of them there first. On his honour he could say that he didn’t deserve it; he had never, to his own sense, been a flirt, such a flirt at least as to have given anyone a handle. He appealed candidly to Mary Gosselin to know whether his past conduct justified

such penalties. “*Have* I been a flirt?—have I given anyone a handle?” he inquired with pathetic intensity.

She met his appeal by declaring that he had been awful, committing himself right and left; and this manner of treating his affliction contributed to the sarcastic publicity (as regarded the little house in Chester Street) which presently became its natural element. Lord Beaupré’s comical and yet thoroughly grounded view of his danger was soon a frequent theme among the Gosselins, who however had their own reasons for not communicating the alarm. They had no motive for concealing their interest in their old friend, but their allusions to him among their other friends may be said on the whole to have been studied. His state of mind recalled of course to Mary and her mother the queer talk about his prospects that they had had, in the country, that afternoon on which Mrs. Gosselin had been so strangely prophetic (she confessed that she had had a flash of divination: the future had been mysteriously revealed to her), and poor Guy too had seen himself quite as he was to be. He had seen his nervousness, under inevitable pressure, deepen to a panic, and he now, in intimate hours, made no attempt to disguise that a panic had become his portion. It was a fixed idea with him that he should fall a victim to woven toils, be caught in a trap constructed with superior science. The science evolved in an enterprising age by this branch of industry, the manufacture of the trap matrimonial, he had terrible anecdotes to illustrate; and what had he on his lips but a scientific term when he declared, as he perpetually did, that it was his fate to be hypnotised?

Mary Gosselin reminded him, they each in turn reminded him that his safeguard was to fall in love: were he once to put himself under that protection all the mothers and maids in Mayfair would not prevail against him. He replied that this was just the impossibility; it took leisure and calmness and opportunity and a free mind to fall in love, and never was a man less open to such experiences. He was literally fighting his way. He reminded the girl of his old fancy for pretending already to have disposed of his hand if he could put that hand on a young person who should like him well enough to be willing to participate in the fraud. She would have to place herself in rather a false position of course—have to take a certain amount of trouble; but there would after all be a good deal of fun in it (there was always fun in duping the world,) between the pair themselves, the two happy comedians.

“Why should they both be happy?” Mary Gosselin asked. “I understand why you should; but, frankly, I don’t quite grasp the reason of *her* pleasure.”

Lord Beaupré, with his sunny human eyes, thought a moment. “Why, for the lark, as they say, and that sort of thing. I should be awfully nice to her.”

“She would require indeed to be in want of recreation!”

“Ah, but I should want a good sort—a quiet, reasonable one, you know!” he somewhat eagerly interposed.

“You’re too delightful!” Mary Gosselin exclaimed, continuing to laugh. He thanked her for this appreciation, and she returned to her point—that she didn’t really see the advantage his accomplice could hope to enjoy as her compensation for extreme disturbance.

Guy Firminger stared. “But what extreme disturbance?”

“Why, it would take a lot of time; it might become intolerable.”

“You mean I ought to pay her—to hire her for the season?”

Mary Gosselin considered him a moment. “Wouldn’t marriage come cheaper at once?” she asked with a quieter smile.

“You *are* chaffing me!” he sighed forgivingly. “Of course she would have to be good-natured enough to pity me.”

“Pity’s akin to love. If she were good-natured enough to want so to help you she’d be good-natured enough to want to marry you. That would be *her* idea of help.”

“Would it be *yours*?” Lord Beaupré asked rather eagerly.

“You’re too absurd! You must sail your own boat!” the girl answered, turning away.

That evening at dinner she stated to her companions that she had never seen a fatuity so dense, so serene, so preposterous as his lordship’s.

“Fatuity, my dear! what do you mean?” her mother inquired.

“Oh, mamma, you know perfectly.” Mary Gosselin spoke with a certain impatience.

“If you mean he’s conceited I’m bound to say I don’t agree with you,” her brother observed. “He’s too indifferent to everyone’s opinion for that.”

“He’s not vain, he’s not proud, he’s not pompous,” said Mrs. Gosselin.

Mary was silent a moment. “He takes more things for granted than anyone I ever saw.”

“What sort of things?”

“Well, one’s interest in his affairs.”

“With old friends surely a gentleman may.”

“Of course,” said Hugh Gosselin, “old friends have in turn the right to take for granted a corresponding interest on *his* part.”

“Well, who could be nicer to us than he is or come to see us oftener?” his mother asked.

“He comes exactly for the purpose I speak of—to talk about himself,” said Mary.

“There are thousands of girls who would be delighted with his talk,” Mrs. Gosselin returned.

“We agreed long ago that he’s intensely selfish,” the girl went on; “and if I speak of it to-day it’s not because that in itself is anything of a novelty. What I’m freshly struck with is simply that he more shamelessly shows it.”

“He shows it, exactly,” said Hugh; “he shows all there is. There it is, on the surface; there are not depths of it underneath.”

“He’s not hard,” Mrs. Gosselin contended; “he’s not impervious.”

“Do you mean he’s soft?” Mary asked.

“I mean he’s yielding.” And Mrs. Gosselin, with considerable expression, looked across at her daughter. She added, before they rose from dinner, that poor Beaupré had plenty of difficulties and that she thought, for her part, they ought in common loyalty to do what they could to assist him.

For a week nothing more passed between the two ladies on the subject of their noble friend, and in the course of this week they had the amusement of receiving in Chester Street a member of Hugh’s American circle, Mr. Bolton-Brown, a young man from New York. He was a person engaged in large affairs, for whom Hugh Gosselin professed the highest regard, from whom in New York he had received much hospitality, and for whose advent he had from the first prepared his companions. Mrs. Gosselin begged the amiable stranger to stay with them, and if she failed to overcome his hesitation it was because his hotel was near at hand and he should be able to see them often. It became evident that he would do so, and, to

the two ladies, as the days went by, equally evident that no objection to such a relation was likely to arise. Mr. Bolton-Brown was delightfully fresh; the most usual expressions acquired on his lips a wellnigh comical novelty, the most superficial sentiments, in the look with which he accompanied them, a really touching sincerity. He was unmarried and good-looking, clever and natural, and if he was not very rich was at least very free-handed. He literally strewed the path of the ladies in Chester Street with flowers, he choked them with French confectionery. Hugh, however, who was often rather mysterious on monetary questions, placed in a light sufficiently clear the fact that his friend had in Wall Street (they knew all about Wall Street), improved each shining hour. They introduced him to Lord Beaupré, who thought him “tremendous fun,” as Hugh said, and who immediately declared that the four must spend a Sunday at Bosco a week or two later. The date of this visit was fixed—Mrs. Gosselin had uttered a comprehensive acceptance; but after Guy Firminger had taken leave of them (this had been his first appearance since the odd conversation with Mary), our young lady confided to her mother that she should not be able to join the little party. She expressed the conviction that it would be all that was essential if Mrs. Gosselin should go with the two others. On being pressed to communicate the reason of this aloofness Mary was able to give no better one than that she never had cared for Bosco.

“What makes you hate him so?” her mother presently broke out in a tone which brought the red to the girl’s cheek. Mary denied that she entertained for Lord Beaupré any sentiment so intense; to which Mrs. Gosselin rejoined with some sternness and, no doubt, considerable wisdom: “Look out what you do then, or you’ll be thought by everyone to be in love with him!”

III

I know not whether it was this danger—that of appearing to be moved to extremes—that weighed with Mary Gosselin; at any rate when the day arrived she had decided to be perfectly colourless and take her share of Lord Beaupré’s hospitality. On perceiving that the house, when with her companions she reached it, was full of visitors, she consoled herself with the sense that such a share would be of the smallest. She even wondered whether its smallness might not be caused in some degree by the sufficiently startling presence, in this stronghold of the single life, of Maud Ashbury and her mother. It was true that during the Saturday evening she never saw their host address an observation to them; but she was struck, as she had been struck before, with the girl’s cold and magnificent beauty. It was very well to say she had “gone off”; she was still handsomer than anyone else. She had failed in everything she had tried; the campaign undertaken with so much energy against young Raddle had been conspicuously disastrous. Young Raddle had married his grandmother, or a person who might have filled such an office, and Maud was a year older, a year more disappointed and a year more ridiculous. Nevertheless one could scarcely believe that a creature with such advantages would always fail, though indeed the poor girl was stupid enough to be a warning. Perhaps it would be at Bosco, or with the master of Bosco, that fate had appointed her to succeed. Except Mary herself she was the only young unmarried woman on the scene, and Mary glowed with the generous sense of not being a competitor. She felt as much out of the question as the blooming wives, the heavy matrons, who formed the rest of the female contingent. Before the evening closed, however, her host, who, she saw, was delightful in his own house, mentioned to her that he had a couple of guests who had not been invited.

“Not invited?”

“They drove up to my door as they might have done to an inn. They asked for rooms and complained of those that were given them. Don’t pretend not to know who they are.”

“Do you mean the Ashburys? How amusing!”

“Don’t laugh; it freezes my blood.”

“Do you really mean you’re afraid of them?”

“I tremble like a leaf. Some monstrous ineluctable fate seems to look at me out of their eyes.”

“That’s because you secretly admire Maud. How can you help it? She’s extremely good-looking, and if you get rid of her mother she’ll become a very nice girl.”

“It’s an odious thing, no doubt, to say about a young person under one’s own roof, but I don’t think I ever saw any one who happened to be less to my taste,” said Guy Firminger. “I don’t know why I don’t turn them out even now.”

Mary persisted in sarcasm. “Perhaps you can make her have a worse time by letting her stay.”

“*Please* don’t laugh,” her interlocutor repeated. “Such a fact as I have mentioned to you seems to me to speak volumes—to show you what my life is.”

“Oh, your life, your life!” Mary Gosselin murmured, with her mocking note.

“Don’t you agree that at such a rate it may easily become impossible?”

“Many people would change with you. I don’t see what there is for you to do but to bear your cross!”

“That’s easy talk!” Lord Beaupré sighed.

“Especially from me, do you mean? How do you know I don’t bear mine?”

“Yours?” he asked vaguely.

“How do you know that *I*’m not persecuted, that *my* footsteps are not dogged, that *my* life isn’t a burden?”

They were walking in the old gardens, the proprietor of which, at this, stopped short. “Do you mean by fellows who want to marry you?”

His tone produced on his companion’s part an irrepressible peal of hilarity; but she walked on as she exclaimed: “You speak as if there couldn’t *be* such madmen!”

“Of course such a charming girl must be made up to,” Guy Firminger conceded as he overtook her.

“I don’t speak of it; I keep quiet about it.”

“You realise then, at any rate, that it’s all horrid when you don’t care for them.”

“I suffer in silence, because I know there are worse tribulations. It seems to me you ought to remember that,” Mary continued. “Your cross is small compared with your crown. You’ve everything in the world that most people most desire, and I’m bound to say I think your life is made very comfortable for you. If you’re oppressed by the quantity of interest and affection you inspire you ought simply to make up your mind to bear up and be cheerful under it.”

Lord Beaupré received this admonition with perfect good humour; he professed himself able to do it full justice. He remarked that he would gladly give up some of his material advantages to be a little less badgered, and that he had been quite content with his former insignificance. No doubt, however, such annoyances were the essential drawbacks of ponderous promotions; one had to pay for everything. Mary was quite right to rebuke him; her own attitude, as a young woman much admired, was a lesson to his irritability. She cut this appreciation short, speaking of something else; but a few minutes later he broke out

irrelevantly: "Why, if you are hunted as well as I, that dodge I proposed to you would be just the thing for us *both!*" He had evidently been reasoning it out.

Mary Gosselin was silent at first; she only paused gradually in their walk at a point where four long alleys met. In the centre of the circle, on a massive pedestal, rose in Italian bronze a florid, complicated image, so that the place made a charming old-world picture. The grounds of Bosco were stately without stiffness and full of marble terraces and misty avenues. The fountains in particular were royal. The girl had told her mother in London that she disliked this fine residence, but she now looked round her with a vague pleased sigh, holding up her glass (she had been condemned to wear one, with a long handle, since she was fifteen), to consider the weather-stained garden group. "What a perfect place of its kind!" she musingly exclaimed.

"Wouldn't it really be just the thing?" Lord Beaupré went on, with the eagerness of his idea.

"Wouldn't what be just the thing?"

"Why, the defensive alliance we've already talked of. You wanted to know the good it would do *you*. Now you see the good it would do *you!*"

"I don't like practical jokes," said Mary. "The remedy's worse than the disease," she added; and she began to follow one of the paths that took the direction of the house.

Poor Lord Beaupré was absurdly in love with his invention; he had all an inventor's impertunity. He kept up his attempt to place his "dodge" in a favourable light, in spite of a further objection from his companion, who assured him that it was one of those contrivances which break down in practice in just the proportion in which they make a figure in theory. At last she said: "I was not sincere just now when I told you I'm worried. I'm not worried!"

"They *don't* buzz about you?" Guy Firminger asked.

She hesitated an instant. "They buzz about me; but at bottom it's flattering and I don't mind it. Now please drop the subject."

He dropped the subject, though not without congratulating her on the fact that, unlike his infirm self, she could keep her head and her temper. His infirmity found a trap laid for it before they had proceeded twenty yards, as was proved by his sudden exclamation of horror. "Good Heavens—if there isn't Lottie!"

Mary perceived, in effect, in the distance a female figure coming towards them over a stretch of lawn, and she simultaneously saw, as a gentleman passed from behind a clump of shrubbery, that it was not unattended. She recognized Charlotte Firminger, and she also distinguished the gentleman. She was moved to larger mirth at the dismay expressed by poor Firminger, but she was able to articulate: "Walking with Mr. Brown."

Lord Beaupré stopped again before they were joined by the pair. "Does *he* buzz about you?"

"Mercy, what questions you ask!" his companion exclaimed.

"Does he—*please?*" the young man repeated with odd intensity.

Mary looked at him an instant; she was puzzled by the deep annoyance that had flushed through the essential good-humour of his face. Then she saw that this annoyance had exclusive reference to poor Charlotte; so that it left her free to reply, with another laugh: "Well, yes—he does. But you know I like it!"

"I don't, then!" Before she could have asked him, even had she wished to, in what manner such a circumstance concerned him, he added with his droll agitation: "I never invited *her*, either! Don't let her get at me!"

“What can I do?” Mary demanded as the others advanced.

“Please take her away; keep her yourself! I’ll take the American, I’ll keep *him*,” he murmured, inconsequently, as a bribe.

“But I don’t object to him.”

“Do you like him so much?”

“Very much indeed,” the girl replied.

The reply was perhaps lost upon her interlocutor, whose eye now fixed itself gloomily on the dauntless Charlotte. As Miss Firminger came nearer he exclaimed almost loud enough for her to hear: “I think I shall *murder* her some day!”

Mary Gosselin’s first impression had been that, in his panic, under the empire of that fixed idea to which he confessed himself subject, he attributed to his kinswoman machinations and aggressions of which she was incapable; an impression that might have been confirmed by this young lady’s decorous placidity, her passionless eyes, her expressionless cheeks and colourless tones. She was ugly, yet she was orthodox; she was not what writers of books called intense. But after Mary, to oblige their host, had tried, successfully enough, to be crafty, had drawn her on to stroll a little in advance of the two gentlemen, she became promptly aware, by the mystical influence of propinquity, that Miss Firminger was indeed full of views, of a purpose single, simple and strong, which gave her the effect of a person carrying with a stiff, steady hand, with eyes fixed and lips compressed, a cup charged to the brim. She had driven over to lunch, driven from somewhere in the neighbourhood; she had picked up some weak woman as an escort. Mary, though she knew the neighbourhood, failed to recognize her base of operations, and, as Charlotte was not specific, ended by suspecting that, far from being entertained by friends, she had put up at an inn and hired a fly. This suspicion startled her; it gave her for the first time something of the measure of the passions engaged, and she wondered to what the insecurity complained of by Guy might lead.

Charlotte, on arriving, had gone through a part of the house in quest of its master (the servants being unable to tell her where he was), and she had finally come upon Mr. Bolton-Brown, who was looking at old books in the library. He had placed himself at her service, as if he had been trained immediately to recognize in such a case his duty, and informing her that he believed Lord Beaupré to be in the grounds, had come out with her to help to find him. Lottie Firminger questioned her companion about this accommodating person; she intimated that he was rather odd but rather nice. Mary mentioned to her that Lord Beaupré thought highly of him; she believed they were going somewhere together. At this Miss Firminger turned round to look for them, but they had already disappeared, and the girl became ominously dumb.

Mary wondered afterwards what profit she could hope to derive from such proceedings; they struck her own sense, naturally, as disreputable and desperate. She was equally unable to discover the compensation they offered, in another variety, to poor Maud Ashbury, whom Lord Beaupré, the greater part of the day, neglected as conscientiously as he neglected his cousin. She asked herself if he should be blamed, and replied that the others should be blamed first. He got rid of Charlotte somehow after tea; she had to fall back to her mysterious lines. Mary knew this method would have been detestable to him—he hated to force his friendly nature; she was sorry for him and wished to lose sight of him. She wished not to be mixed up even indirectly with his tribulations, and the fevered faces of the Ashburys were particularly dreadful to her. She spent as much of the long summer afternoon as possible out of the house, which indeed on such an occasion emptied itself of most of its inmates. Mary Gosselin asked her brother to join her in a devious ramble; she might have had other society,

but she was in a mood to prefer his. These two were “great chums,” and they had been separated so long that they had arrears of talk to make up. They had been at Bosco more than once, and though Hugh Gosselin said that the land of the free (which he had assured his sister was even more enslaved than dear old England) made one forget there were such spots on earth, they both remembered, a couple of miles away, a little ancient church to which the walk across the fields would be the right thing. They talked of other things as they went, and among them they talked of Mr. Bolton-Brown, in regard to whom Hugh, as scantily addicted to enthusiasm as to bursts of song (he was determined not to be taken in), became, in commendation, almost lyrical. Mary asked what he had done with his paragon, and he replied that he believed him to have gone out stealthily to sketch: they might come across him. He was extraordinarily clever at water-colours, but haunted with the fear that the public practice of such an art on Sunday was viewed with disfavour in England. Mary exclaimed that this was the respectable fact, and when her brother ridiculed the idea she told him she had already noticed he had lost all sense of things at home, so that Mr. Bolton-Brown was apparently a better Englishman than he. “He is indeed—he’s awfully artificial!” Hugh returned; but it must be added that in spite of this rigour their American friend, when they reached the goal of their walk, was to be perceived in an irregular attitude in the very churchyard. He was perched on an old flat tomb, with a box of colours beside him and a sketch half completed. Hugh asserted that this exercise was the only thing that Mr. Bolton-Brown really cared for, but the young man protested against the imputation in the face of an achievement so modest. He showed his sketch to Mary however, and it consoled her for not having kept up her own experiments; she never could make her trees so leafy. He had found a lovely bit on the other side of the hill, a bit he should like to come back to, and he offered to show it to his friends. They were on the point of starting with him to look at it when Hugh Gosselin, taking out his watch, remembered the hour at which he had promised to be at the house again to give his mother, who wanted a little mild exercise, his arm. His sister, at this, said she would go back with him; but Bolton-Brown interposed an earnest inquiry. Mightn’t she let Hugh keep his appointment and let *him* take her over the hill and bring her home?

“Happy thought—*do* that!” said Hugh, with a crudity that showed the girl how completely he had lost his English sense. He perceived however in an instant that she was embarrassed, whereupon he went on: “My dear child, I’ve walked with girls so often in America that we really ought to let poor Brown walk with one in England.” I know not if it was the effect of this plea or that of some further eloquence of their friend; at any rate Mary Gosselin in the course of another minute had accepted the accident of Hugh’s secession, had seen him depart with an injunction to her to render it clear to poor Brown that he had made quite a monstrous request. As she went over the hill with her companion she reflected that since she had granted the request it was not in her interest to pretend she had gone out of her way. She wondered moreover whether her brother had wished to throw them together: it suddenly occurred to her that the whole incident might have been prearranged. The idea made her a little angry with Hugh; it led her however to entertain no resentment against the other party (if party Mr. Brown had been) to the transaction. He told her all the delight that certain sweet old corners of rural England excited in his mind, and she liked him for hovering near some of her own secrets.

Hugh Gosselin meanwhile, at Bosco, strolling on the terrace with his mother, who preferred walks that were as slow as conspiracies and had had much to say to him about his extraordinary indiscretion, repeated over and over (it ended by irritating her), that as he himself had been out for hours with American girls it was only fair to let their friend have a turn with an English one.

“Pay as much as you like, but don’t pay with your sister!” Mrs. Gosselin replied; while Hugh submitted that it was just his sister who was required to make the payment *his*. She turned his logic to easy scorn and she waited on the terrace till she had seen the two explorers reappear. When the ladies went to dress for dinner she expressed to her daughter her extreme disapproval of such conduct, and Mary did nothing more to justify herself than to exclaim at first “Poor dear man!” and then to say “I was afraid you wouldn’t like it.” There were reservations in her silence that made Mrs. Gosselin uneasy, and she was glad that at dinner Mr. Bolton-Brown had to take in Mrs. Ashbury; it served him so right. This arrangement had in Mrs. Gosselin’s eyes the added merit of serving Mrs. Ashbury right. She was more uneasy than ever when after dinner, in the drawing-room, she saw Mary sit for a period on the same small sofa with the culpable American. This young couple leaned back together familiarly, and their conversation had the air of being desultory without being in the least difficult. At last she quitted her place and went over to them, remarking to Mr. Bolton-Brown that she wanted him to come and talk a bit to *her*. She conducted him to another part of the room, which was vast and animated by scattered groups, and held him there very persuasively, quite maternally, till the approach of the hour at which the ladies would exchange looks and murmur good-nights. She made him talk about America, though he wanted to talk about England, and she judged that she gave him an impression of the kindest attention, though she was really thinking, in alternation, of three important things. One of these was a circumstance of which she had become conscious only just after sitting down with him—the prolonged absence of Lord Beaupré from the drawing-room; the second was the absence, equally marked (to her imagination) of Maud Ashbury; the third was a matter different altogether. “England gives one such a sense of immemorial continuity, something that drops like a plummet-line into the past,” said the young American, ingeniously exerting himself while Mrs. Gosselin, rigidly contemporaneous, strayed into deserts of conjecture. Had the fact that their host was out of the room any connection with the fact that the most beautiful, even though the most suicidal, of his satellites had quitted it? Yet if poor Guy was taking a turn by starlight on the terrace with the misguided girl, what had he done with his resentment at her invasion and by what inspiration of despair had Maud achieved such a triumph? The good lady studied Mrs. Ashbury’s face across the room; she decided that triumph, accompanied perhaps with a shade of nervousness, looked out of her insincere eyes. An intelligent consciousness of ridicule was at any rate less present in them than ever. While Mrs. Gosselin had her infallible finger on the pulse of the occasion one of the doors opened to readmit Lord Beaupré, who struck her as pale and who immediately approached Mrs. Ashbury with a remark evidently intended for herself alone. It led this lady to rise with a movement of dismay and, after a question or two, leave the room. Lord Beaupré left it again in her company. Mr. Bolton-Brown had also noticed the incident; his conversation languished and he asked Mrs. Gosselin if she supposed anything had happened. She turned it over a moment and then she said: “Yes, something will have happened to Miss Ashbury.”

“What do you suppose? Is she ill?”

“I don’t know; we shall see. They’re capable of anything.”

“Capable of anything?”

“I’ve guessed it,—she wants to have a grievance.”

“A grievance?” Mr. Bolton-Brown was mystified.

“Of course you don’t understand; how should you? Moreover it doesn’t signify. But I’m so vexed with them (he’s a very old friend of ours) that really, though I dare say I’m indiscreet, I can’t speak civilly of them.”

“Miss Ashbury’s a wonderful type,” said the young American.

This remark appeared to irritate his companion. “I see perfectly what has happened; she has made a scene.”

“A scene?” Mr. Bolton-Brown was terribly out of it.

“She has tried to be injured—to provoke him, I mean, to some act of impatience, to some failure of temper, of courtesy. She has asked him if he wishes her to leave the house at midnight, and he may have answered——But no, he wouldn’t!” Mrs. Gosselin suppressed the wild supposition.

“How you read it! She looks so quiet.”

“Her mother has coached her, and (I won’t pretend to say *exactly* what has happened) they’ve done, somehow, what they wanted; they’ve got him to do something to them that he’ll have to make up for.”

“What an evolution of ingenuity!” the young man laughed.

“It often answers.”

“Will it in this case?”

Mrs. Gosselin was silent a moment. “It *may*.”

“Really, you think?”

“I mean it might if it weren’t for something else.”

“I’m too judicious to ask what that is.”

“I’ll tell you when we’re back in town,” said Mrs. Gosselin, getting up.

Lord Beaupré was restored to them, and the ladies prepared to withdraw. Before she went to bed Mrs. Gosselin asked him if there had been anything the matter with Maud; to which he replied with abysmal blankness (she had never seen him wear just that face) that he was afraid Miss Ashbury was ill. She proved in fact in the morning too unwell to return to London: a piece of news communicated to Mrs. Gosselin at breakfast.

“She’ll have to stay; I can’t turn her out of the house,” said Guy Firminger.

“Very well; let her stay her fill!”

“I wish you would stay too,” the young man went on.

“Do you mean to nurse her?”

“No, her mother must do that. I mean to keep me company.”

“*You*? You’re not going up?”

“I think I had better wait over to-day, or long enough to see what’s the matter.”

“Don’t you *know* what’s the matter?”

He was silent a moment. “I may have been nasty last night.”

“You have compunctions? You’re too good-natured.”

“I dare say I hit rather wild. It will look better for me to stop over twenty-four hours.”

Mrs. Gosselin fixed her eyes on a distant object. “Let no one ever say you’re selfish!”

“*Does* anyone ever say it?”

“You’re too generous, you’re too soft, you’re too foolish. But if it will give you any pleasure Mary and I will wait till to-morrow.”

“And Hugh, too, won’t he, and Bolton-Brown?”

“Hugh will do as he pleases. But don’t keep the American.”

“Why not? He’s all right.”

“That’s why I want him to go,” said Mrs. Gosselin, who could treat a matter with candour, just as she could treat it with humour, at the right moment.

The party at Bosco broke up and there was a general retreat to town. Hugh Gosselin pleaded pressing business, he accompanied the young American to London. His mother and sister came back on the morrow, and Bolton-Brown went in to see them, as he often did, at tea-time. He found Mrs. Gosselin alone in the drawing-room, and she took such a convenient occasion to mention to him, what she had withheld on the eve of their departure from Bosco, the reason why poor Maud Ashbury’s frantic assault on the master of that property would be vain. He was greatly surprised, the more so that Hugh hadn’t told him. Mrs. Gosselin replied that Hugh didn’t know: she had not seen him all day and it had only just come out. Hugh’s friend at any rate was deeply interested, and his interest took for several minutes the form of throbbing silence. At last Mrs. Gosselin heard a sound below, on which she said quickly: “That’s Hugh—I’ll tell him now!” She left the room with the request that their visitor would wait for Mary, who would be down in a moment. During the instants that he spent alone the visitor lurched, as if he had been on a deck in a blow, to the window, and stood there with his hands in his pockets, staring vacantly into Chester Street; then, turning away, he gave himself, with an odd ejaculation, an impatient shake which had the effect of enabling him to meet Mary Gosselin composedly enough when she came in. It took her mother apparently some time to communicate the news to Hugh, so that Bolton-Brown had a considerable margin for nervousness and hesitation before he could say to the girl, abruptly, but with an attempt at a voice properly gay: “You must let me very heartily congratulate you!”

Mary stared. “On what?”

“On your engagement.”

“My engagement?”

“To Lord Beaupré.”

Mary Gosselin looked strange; she coloured. “Who told you I’m engaged?”

“Your mother—just now.”

“Oh!” the girl exclaimed, turning away. She went and rang the bell for fresh tea, rang it with noticeable force. But she said “Thank you very much!” before the servant came.

IV

Bolton-Brown did something that evening toward disseminating the news: he told it to the first people he met socially after leaving Chester Street; and this although he had to do himself a certain violence in speaking. He would have preferred to hold his peace; therefore if he resisted his inclination it was for an urgent purpose. This purpose was to prove to himself that he didn’t mind. A perfect indifference could be for him the only result of any understanding Mary Gosselin might arrive at with anyone, and he wanted to be more and more conscious of his indifference. He was aware indeed that it required demonstration, and this was why he was almost feverishly active. He could mentally concede at least that he had been surprised, for he had suspected nothing at Bosco. When a fellow was attentive in

America everyone knew it, and judged by this standard Lord Beaupré made no show: how otherwise should *he* have achieved that sweet accompanied ramble? Everything at any rate was lucid now, except perhaps a certain ambiguity in Hugh Gosselin, who on coming into the drawing-room with his mother had looked flushed and grave and had stayed only long enough to kiss Mary and go out again. There had been nothing effusive in the scene; but then there was nothing effusive in any English scene. This helped to explain why Miss Gosselin had been so blank during the minutes she spent with him before her mother came back.

He himself wanted to cultivate tranquillity, and he felt that he did so the next day in not going again to Chester Street. He went instead to the British Museum, where he sat quite like an elderly gentleman, with his hands crossed on the top of his stick and his eyes fixed on an Assyrian bull. When he came away, however, it was with the resolution to move briskly; so that he walked westward the whole length of Oxford Street and arrived at the Marble Arch. He stared for some minutes at this monument, as in the national collection he had stared at even less intelligible ones; then brushing away the apprehension that he should meet two persons riding together, he passed into the park. He didn't care a straw whom he met. He got upon the grass and made his way to the southern expanse, and when he reached the Row he dropped into a chair, rather tired, to watch the capering procession of riders. He watched it with a lustreless eye, for what he seemed mainly to extract from it was a vivification of his disappointment. He had had a hope that he should not be forced to leave London without inducing Mary Gosselin to ride with him; but that prospect failed, for what he had accomplished in the British Museum was the determination to go to Paris. He tried to think of the attractions supposed to be evoked by that name, and while he was so engaged he recognised that a gentleman on horseback, close to the barrier of the Row, was making a sign to him. The gentleman was Lord Beaupré, who had pulled up his horse and whose sign the young American lost no time in obeying. He went forward to speak to his late host, but during the instant of the transit he was able both to observe that Mary Gosselin was not in sight and to ask himself why she was not. She rode with her brother; why then didn't she ride with her future husband? It was singular at such a moment to see her future husband disporting himself alone. This personage conversed a few moments with Bolton-Brown, said it was too hot to ride, but that he ought to be mounted (*he* would give him a mount if he liked) and was on the point of turning away when his interlocutor succumbed to the temptation to put his modesty to the test.

"Good-bye, but let me congratulate you first," said Bolton-Brown.

"Congratulate me? On what?" His look, his tone were very much what Mary Gosselin's had been.

"Why, on your engagement. Haven't you heard of it?"

Lord Beaupré stared a moment while his horse shifted uneasily. Then he laughed and said: "Which of them do you mean?"

"There's only one I know anything about. To Miss Gosselin," Brown added, after a puzzled pause.

"Oh yes, I see—thanks so much!" With this, letting his horse go, Lord Beaupré broke off, while Bolton-Brown stood looking after him and saying to himself that perhaps he *didn't* know! The chapter of English oddities was long.

But on the morrow the announcement was in "The Morning Post," and that surely made it authentic. It was doubtless only superficially singular that Guy Firminger should have found himself unable to achieve a call in Chester Street until this journal had been for several hours in circulation. He appeared there just before luncheon, and the first person who received him

was Mrs. Gosselin. He had always liked her, finding her infallible on the question of behaviour; but he was on this occasion more than ever struck with her ripe astuteness, her independent wisdom.

"I knew what you wanted, I knew what you needed, I knew the subject on which you had pressed her," the good lady said; "and after Sunday I found myself really haunted with your dangers. There was danger in the air at Bosco, in your own defended house; it seemed to me too monstrous. I said to myself 'We *can* help him, poor dear, and we *must*. It's the least one can do for so old and so good a friend.' I decided what to do: I simply put this other story about. In London that always answers. I knew that Mary pitied you really as much as I do, and that what she saw at Bosco had been a revelation—had at any rate brought your situation home to her. Yet of course she would be shy about saying out for herself: 'Here I am—I'll do what you want.' The thing was for me to say it *for* her; so I said it first to that chattering American. He repeated it to several others, and there you are! I just forced her hand a little, but it's all right. All she has to do is not to contradict it. It won't be any trouble and you'll be comfortable. That will be our reward!" smiled Mrs. Gosselin.

"Yes, all she has to do is not to contradict it," Lord Beaupré replied, musing a moment. "It *won't* be any trouble," he added, "and I *hope* I shall be comfortable." He thanked Mrs. Gosselin formally and liberally, and expressed all his impatience to assure Mary herself of his deep obligation to her; upon which his hostess promised to send her daughter to him on the instant: she would go and call her, so that they might be alone. Before Mrs. Gosselin left him however she touched on one or two points that had their little importance. Guy Firminger had asked for Hugh, but Hugh had gone to the City, and his mother mentioned candidly that he didn't take part in the game. She even disclosed his reason: he thought there was a want of dignity in it. Lord Beaupré stared at this and after a moment exclaimed: "Dignity? Dignity be hanged! One must save one's life!"

"Yes, but the point poor Hugh makes is that one must save it by the use of one's *own* wits, or one's *own* arms and legs. But do you know what I said to him?" Mrs. Gosselin continued.

"Something very clever, I daresay."

"That if *we* were drowning you'd be the very first to jump in. And we may fall overboard yet!" Fidgeting there with his hands in his pockets Lord Beaupré gave a laugh at this, but assured her that there was nothing in the world for which they mightn't count upon him. None the less she just permitted herself another warning, a warning, it is true, that was in his own interest, a reminder of a peril that he ought beforehand to look in the face. Wasn't there always the chance—just the bare chance—that a girl in Mary's position would, in the event, decline to let him off, decline to release him even on the day he should wish to marry? She wasn't speaking of Mary, but there were of course girls who would play him that trick. Guy Firminger considered this contingency; then he declared that it wasn't a question of 'girls,' it was simply a question of dear old Mary! If *she* should wish to hold him, so much the better: he would do anything in the world that she wanted. "Don't let us dwell on such vulgarities; but I had it on my conscience!" Mrs. Gosselin wound up.

She left him, but at the end of three minutes Mary came in, and the first thing she said was: "Before you speak a word, please understand this, that it's wholly mamma's doing. I hadn't dreamed of it, but she suddenly began to tell people."

"It was charming of her, and it's charming of you!" the visitor cried.

"It's not charming of any one, I think," said Mary Gosselin, looking at the carpet. "It's simply idiotic."

“Don’t be nasty about it. It will be tremendous fun.”

“I’ve only consented because mamma says we owe it to you,” the girl went on.

“Never mind your reason—the end justifies the means. I can never thank you enough nor tell you what a weight it lifts off my shoulders. Do you know I feel the difference already?—a peace that passeth understanding!” Mary replied that this was childish; how could such a feeble fiction last? At the very best it could live but an hour, and then he would be no better off than before. It would bristle moreover with difficulties and absurdities; it would be so much more trouble than it was worth. She reminded him that so ridiculous a service had never been asked of any girl, and at this he seemed a little struck; he said: “Ah, well, if it’s positively disagreeable to you we’ll instantly drop the idea. But I—I thought you really liked me enough——!” She turned away impatiently, and he went on to argue imperturbably that she had always treated him in the kindest way in the world. He added that the worst was over, the start, they were off: the thing would be in all the evening papers. Wasn’t it much simpler to accept it? That was all they would have to do; and all *she* would have to do would be not to gainsay it and to smile and thank people when she was congratulated. She would have to *act* a little, but that would just be part of the fun. Oh, he hadn’t the shadow of a scruple about taking the world in; the world deserved it richly, and she couldn’t deny that this was what she had felt for him, that she had really been moved to compassion. He grew eloquent and charged her with having recognised in his predicament a genuine motive for charity. Their little plot would last what it could—it would be a part of their amusement to *make* it last. Even if it should be but a thing of a day there would have been always so much gained. But they would be ingenious, they would find ways, they would have no end of sport.

“*You* must be ingenious; I can’t,” said Mary. “If people scarcely ever see us together they’ll guess we’re trying to humbug them.”

“But they *will* see us together. We *are* together. We’ve been together—I mean we’ve seen a lot of each other—all our lives.”

“Ah, not *that* way!”

“Oh, trust me to work it right!” cried the young man, whose imagination had now evidently begun to glow in the air of their pious fraud.

“You’ll find it a dreadful bore,” said Mary Gosselin.

“Then I’ll drop it, don’t you see? And *you*’ll drop it, of course, the moment *you*’ve had enough,” Lord Beaupré punctually added. “But as soon as you begin to realise what a lot of good you do me you won’t *want* to drop it. That is if you’re what I take you for!” laughed his lordship.

If a third person had been present at this conversation—and there was nothing in it surely that might not have been spoken before a trusty listener—that person would perhaps have thought, from the immediate expression of Mary Gosselin’s face, that she was on the point of exclaiming “You take me for too big a fool!” No such ungracious words in fact however passed her lips; she only said after an instant: “What reason do you propose to give, on the day you need one, for our rupture?”

Her interlocutor stared. “To you, do you mean?”

“I sha’n’t ask you for one. I mean to other people.”

“Oh, I’ll tell them you’re sick of me. I’ll put everything on you, and you’ll put everything on me.”

“You *have* worked it out!” Mary exclaimed.

“Oh, I shall be intensely considerate.”

“Do you call that being considerate—publicly accusing me?”

Guy Firminger stared again. “Why, isn’t that the reason *you*’ll give?”

She looked at him an instant. “I won’t tell you the reason I shall give.”

“Oh, I shall learn it from others.”

“I hope you’ll like it when you do!” said Mary, with sudden gaiety; and she added frankly though kindly the hope that he might soon light upon some young person who would really meet his requirements. He replied that he shouldn’t be in a hurry—that was now just the comfort; and she, as if thinking over to the end the list of arguments against his clumsy contrivance, broke out: “And of course you mustn’t dream of giving me anything—any tokens or presents.”

“Then it won’t look natural.”

“That’s exactly what I say. You can’t make it deceive anybody.”

“I *must* give you something—something that people can see. There must be some evidence! You can simply put my offerings away after a little and give them back.” But about this Mary was visibly serious; she declared that she wouldn’t touch anything that came from his hand, and she spoke in such a tone that he coloured a little and hastened to say: “Oh, all right, I shall be thoroughly careful!” This appeared to complete their understanding; so that after it was settled that for the deluded world they were engaged, there was obviously nothing for him to do but to go. He therefore shook hands with her very gratefully and departed.

V

He was able promptly to assure his accomplice that their little plot was working to a charm; it already made such a difference for the better. Only a week had elapsed, but he felt quite another man; his life was no longer spent in springing to arms and he had ceased to sleep in his boots. The ghost of his great fear was laid, he could follow out his inclinations and attend to his neglected affairs. The news had been a bomb in the enemy’s camp, and there were plenty of blank faces to testify to the confusion it had wrought. Every one was “sold” and every one made haste to clap him on the back. Lottie Firminger only had written in terms of which no notice could be taken, though of course he expected, every time he came in, to find her waiting in his hall. Her mother was coming up to town and he should have the family at his ears; but, taking them as a single body, he could manage them, and that was a detail. The Ashburys had remained at Bosco till that establishment was favoured with the tidings that so nearly concerned it (they were communicated to Maud’s mother by the housekeeper), and then the beautiful sufferer had found in her defeat strength to seek another asylum. The two ladies had departed for a destination unknown; he didn’t think they had turned up in London. Guy Firminger averred that there were precious portable objects which he was sure he should miss on returning to his country home.

He came every day to Chester Street, and was evidently much less bored than Mary had prefigured by this regular tribute to verisimilitude. It was amusement enough to see the progress of their comedy and to invent new touches for some of its scenes. The girl herself was amused; it was an opportunity like another for cleverness such as hers and had much in common with private theatricals, especially with the rehearsals, the most amusing part. Moreover she was good-natured enough to be really pleased at the service it was impossible for her not to acknowledge that she had rendered. Each of the parties to this queer contract

had anecdotes and suggestions for the other, and each reminded the other duly that they must at every step keep their story straight. Except for the exercise of this care Mary Gosselin found her duties less onerous than she had feared and her part in general much more passive than active. It consisted indeed largely of murmuring thanks and smiling and looking happy and handsome; as well as perhaps also in saying in answer to many questions that nothing as yet was fixed and of trying to remain humble when people expressed without ceremony that such a match was a wonder for such a girl. Her mother on the other hand was devotedly active. She treated the situation with private humour but with public zeal and, making it both real and ideal, told so many fibs about it that there were none left for Mary. The girl had failed to understand Mrs. Gosselin's interest in this elaborate pleasantry; the good lady had seen in it from the first more than she herself had been able to see. Mary performed her task mechanically, sceptically, but Mrs. Gosselin attacked hers with conviction and had really the air at moments of thinking that their fable had crystallised into fact. Mary allowed her as little of this attitude as possible and was ironical about her duplicity; warnings which the elder lady received with gaiety until one day when repetition had made them act on her nerves. Then she begged her daughter, with sudden asperity, not to talk to her as if she were a fool. She had already had words with Hugh about some aspects of the affair—so much as this was evident in Chester Street; a smothered discussion which at the moment had determined the poor boy to go to Paris with Bolton-Brown. The young men came back together after Mary had been “engaged” three weeks, but she remained in ignorance of what passed between Hugh and his mother the night of his return. She had gone to the opera with Lady Whiteroy, after one of her invariable comments on Mrs. Gosselin's invariable remark that of course Guy Firminger would spend his evening in their box. The remedy for his trouble, Lord Beaupré's prospective bride had said, was surely worse than the disease; she was in perfect good faith when she wondered that his lordship's sacrifices, his laborious cultivation of appearances should “pay.”

Hugh Gosselin dined with his mother and at dinner talked of Paris and of what he had seen and done there; he kept the conversation superficial and after he had heard how his sister, at the moment, was occupied, asked no question that might have seemed to denote an interest in the success of the experiment for which in going abroad he had declined responsibility. His mother could not help observing that he never mentioned Guy Firminger by either of his names, and it struck her as a part of the same detachment that later, up stairs (she sat with him while he smoked), he should suddenly say as he finished a cigar:

“I return to New York next week.”

“Before your time? What for?” Mrs. Gosselin was horrified.

“Oh, mamma, you know what for!”

“Because you still resent poor Mary's good-nature?”

“I don't understand it, and I don't like things I don't understand; therefore I'd rather not be here to see it. Besides I really can't tell a pack of lies.”

Mrs. Gosselin exclaimed and protested; she had arguments to prove that there was no call at present for the least deflection from the truth; all that any one had to reply to any question (and there could be none that was embarrassing save the ostensible determination of the date of the marriage) was that nothing was settled as yet—a form of words in which for the life of her she couldn't see any perjury. “Why, then, go in for anything in such bad taste, to culminate only in something so absurd?” Hugh demanded. “If the essential part of the matter can't be spoken of as fixed nothing is fixed, the deception becomes transparent and they give the whole idea away. It's child's play.”

“That’s why it’s so innocent. All I can tell you is that practically their attitude answers; he’s delighted with its success. Those dreadful women have given him up; they’ve already found some other victim.”

“And how is it all to end, please?”

Mrs. Gosselin was silent a moment. “Perhaps it won’t end.”

“Do you mean that the engagement will become real?”

Again the good lady said nothing until she broke out: “My dear boy, can’t you trust your poor old mummy?”

“Is *that* your speculation? Is that Mary’s? I never heard of anything so odious!” Hugh Gosselin cried. But she defended his sister with eagerness, with a gloss of coaxing, maternal indignation, declaring that Mary’s disinterestedness was complete—she had the perfect proof of it. Hugh was conscious as he lighted another cigar that the conversation was more fundamental than any that he had ever had with his mother, who however hung fire but for an instant when he asked her what this “perfect proof” might be. He didn’t doubt of his sister, he admitted that; but the perfect proof would make the whole thing more luminous. It took finally the form of a confession from Mrs. Gosselin that the girl evidently liked—well, greatly liked—Mr. Bolton-Brown. Yes, the good lady had seen for herself at Bosco that the smooth young American was making up to her and that, time and opportunity aiding, something might very well happen which could not be regarded as satisfactory. She had been very frank with Mary, had besought her not to commit herself to a suitor who in the very nature of the case couldn’t meet the most legitimate of their views. Mary, who pretended not to know what their “views” were, had denied that she was in danger; but Mrs. Gosselin had assured her that she had all the air of it and had said triumphantly: “Agree to what Lord Beaupré asks of you, and I’ll *believe* you.” Mary had wished to be believed—so she had agreed. That was all the witchcraft any one had used.

Mrs. Gosselin out-talked her son, but there were two or three plain questions that he came back to; and the first of these bore upon the ground of her aversion to poor Bolton-Brown. He told her again, as he had told her before, that his friend was that rare bird a maker of money who was also a man of culture. He was a gentleman to his finger-tips, accomplished, capable, kind, with a charming mother and two lovely sisters (she should see them!) the sort of fellow in short whom it was stupid not to appreciate.

“I believe it all, and if I had three daughters he should be very welcome to one of them.”

“You might easily have had three daughters who wouldn’t attract him at all! You’ve had the good fortune to have one who does, and I think you do wrong to interfere with it.”

“My eggs are in one basket then, and that’s a reason the more for preferring Lord Beaupré,” said Mrs. Gosselin.

“Then it *is* your calculation—?” stammered Hugh in dismay; on which she coloured and requested that he would be a little less rough with his mother. She would rather part with him immediately, sad as that would be, than that he should attempt to undo what she had done. When Hugh replied that it was not to Mary but to Beaupré himself that he judged it important he should speak, she informed him that a rash remonstrance might do his sister a cruel wrong. Dear Guy was *most* attentive.

“If you mean that he really cares for her there’s the less excuse for his taking such a liberty with her. He’s either in love with her or he isn’t. If he is, let him make her a serious offer; if he isn’t, let him leave her alone.”

Mrs. Gosselin looked at her son with a kind of patient joy. "He's in love with her, but he doesn't know it."

"He ought to know it, and if he's so idiotic I don't see that we ought to consider him."

"Don't worry—he *shall* know it!" Mrs. Gosselin cried; and, continuing to struggle with Hugh, she insisted on the delicacy of the situation. She made a certain impression on him, though on confused grounds; she spoke at one moment as if he was to forbear because the matter was a make-believe that happened to contain a convenience for a distressed friend, and at another as if one ought to strain a point because there were great possibilities at stake. She was most lucid when she pictured the social position and other advantages of a peer of the realm. What had those of an American stockbroker, however amiable and with whatever shrill belongings in the background, to compare with them? She was inconsistent, but she was diplomatic, and the result of the discussion was that Hugh Gosselin became conscious of a dread of "injuring" his sister. He became conscious at the same time of a still greater apprehension, that of seeing her arrive at the agreeable in a tortuous, a second-rate manner. He might keep the peace to please his mother, but he couldn't enjoy it, and he actually took his departure, travelling in company with Bolton-Brown, who of course before going waited on the ladies in Chester Street to thank them for the kindness they had shown him. It couldn't be kept from Guy Firminger that Hugh was not happy, though when they met, which was only once or twice before he quitted London, Mary Gosselin's brother flattered himself that he was too proud to show it. He had always liked old loafing Guy and it was disagreeable to him not to like him now; but he was aware that he must either quarrel with him definitely or not at all and that he had passed his word to his mother. Therefore his attitude was strictly negative; he took with the parties to it no notice whatever of the "engagement," and he couldn't help it if to other people he had the air of not being initiated. They doubtless thought him strangely fastidious. Perhaps he was; the tone of London struck him in some respects as very horrid; he had grown in a manner away from it. Mary was impenetrable; tender, gay, charming, but with no patience, as she said, for his premature flight. Except when Lord Beaupré was present you would not have dreamed that he existed for her. In his company—he had to be present more or less of course—she was simply like any other English girl who disliked effusiveness. They had each the same manner, that of persons of rather a shy tradition who were on their guard against public "spooning." They practised their fraud with good taste, a good taste mystifying to Bolton-Brown, who thought their precautions excessive. When he took leave of Mary Gosselin her eyes consented for a moment to look deep down into his. He had been from the first of the opinion that they were beautiful, and he was more mystified than ever.

If Guy Firminger had failed to ask Hugh Gosselin whether he had a fault to find with what they were doing, this was, in spite of old friendship, simply because he was too happy now to care much whom he didn't please, to care at any rate for criticism. He had ceased to be critical himself, and his high prosperity could take his blamelessness for granted. His happiness would have been offensive if people generally hadn't liked him, for it consisted of a kind of monstrous candid comfort. To take all sorts of things for granted was still his great, his delightful characteristic; but it didn't prevent his showing imagination and tact and taste in particular circumstances. He made, in their little comedy, all the right jokes and none of the wrong ones: the girl had an acute sense that there were some jokes that would have been detestable. She gathered that it was universally supposed she was having an unprecedented season, and something of the glory of an enviable future seemed indeed to hang about her. People no doubt thought it odd that she didn't go about more with her future husband; but those who knew anything about her knew that she had never done exactly as other girls did. She had her own ways, her own freedoms and her own scruples. Certainly he made the

London weeks much richer than they had ever been for a subordinate young person; he put more things into them, so that they grew dense and complicated. This frightened her at moments, especially when she thought with compunction that she was deceiving her very friends. She didn't mind taking the vulgar world in, but there were people she hated not to enlighten, to reassure. She could undeceive no one now, and indeed she would have been ashamed. There were hours when she wanted to stop—she had such a dread of doing too much; hours when she thought with dismay that the fiction of the rupture was still to come, with its horrid train of new untrue things. She spoke of it repeatedly to her confederate, who only postponed and postponed, told her she would never dream of forsaking him if she measured the good she was doing him. She did measure it however when she met him in the great world; she was of course always meeting him: that was the only way appearances were kept up. There was a certain attitude she could allow him to take on these occasions; it covered and carried off their subterfuge. He could talk to her unmolested; for herself she never spoke of anything but the charming girls, everywhere present, among whom he could freely choose. He didn't protest, because to choose freely was what he wanted, and they discussed these young ladies one by one. Some she recommended, some she disparaged, but it was almost the only subject she tolerated. It was her system in short, and she wondered he didn't get tired of it; she was so tired of it herself.

She tried other things that she thought he might find wearisome, but his good-humour was magnificent. He was now really for the first time enjoying his promotion, his wealth, his insight into the terms on which the world offered itself to the happy few, and these terms made a mixture healing to irritation. Once, at some glittering ball, he asked her if she should be jealous if he were to dance again with Lady Whiteroy, with whom he had danced already, and this was the only occasion on which he had come near making a joke of the wrong sort. She showed him what she thought of it and made him feel that the way to be forgiven was to spend the rest of the evening with that lovely creature. Now that the phalanx of the pressingly nubile was held in check there was accordingly nothing to prevent his passing his time pleasantly. Before he had taken this effective way the diplomatic mother, when she spied him flirting with a married woman, felt that in urging a virgin daughter's superior claims she worked for righteousness as well as for the poor girl. But Mary Gosselin protected these scandals practically by the still greater scandal of her indifference; so that he was in the odd position of having waited to be confined to know what it was to be at large. He had in other words the maximum of security with the minimum of privation. The lovely creatures of Lady Whiteroy's order thought Mary Gosselin charming, but they were the first to see through her falsity.

All this carried our precious pair to the middle of July; but nearly a month before that, one night under the summer stars, on the deck of the steamer that was to reach New York on the morrow, something had passed between Hugh Gosselin and his brooding American friend. The night was warm and splendid; these were their last hours at sea, and Hugh, who had been playing whist in the cabin, came up very late to take an observation before turning in. It was in this way that he chanced on his companion, who was leaning over the stern of the ship and gazing off, beyond its phosphorescent track, at the muffled, moaning ocean, the backward darkness, everything he had relinquished. Hugh stood by him for a moment and then asked him what he was thinking about. Bolton-Brown gave at first no answer; after which he turned round and, with his back against the guard of the deck, looked up at the multiplied stars. "He has it badly," Hugh Gosselin mentally commented. At last his friend replied: "About something you said yesterday."

"I forget what I said yesterday."

“You spoke of your sister’s intended marriage; it was the only time you had spoken of it. You seemed to intimate that it might not after all take place.”

Hugh hesitated a little. “Well, it *won’t* take place. They’re not engaged, not really. This is a secret, a preposterous secret. I wouldn’t tell any one else, but I’m willing to tell you. It may make a difference to you.”

Bolton-Brown turned his head; he looked at Hugh a minute through the fresh darkness. “It does make a difference to me. But I don’t understand,” he added.

“Neither do I. I don’t like it. It’s a pretence, a temporary make-believe, to help Beaupré through.”

“Through what?”

“He’s so run after.”

The young American stared, ejaculated, mused. “Oh, yes—your mother told me.”

“It’s a sort of invention of my mother’s and a notion of his own (very absurd, I think) till he can see his way. Mary serves as a kind of escort for these first exposed months. It’s ridiculous, but I don’t know that it hurts her.”

“Oh!” said Bolton-Brown.

“I don’t know either that it does her any good.”

“No!” said Bolton-Brown. Then he added: “It’s certainly very kind of her.”

“It’s a case of old friends,” Hugh explained, inadequately as he felt. “He has always been in and out of our house.”

“But how will it end?”

“I haven’t the least idea.”

Bolton-Brown was silent; he faced about to the stern again and stared at the rush of the ship. Then shifting his position once more: “Won’t the engagement, before they’ve done, develop into the regular thing?”

Hugh felt as if his mother were listening. “I daresay not. If there were even a remote chance of that, Mary wouldn’t have consented.”

“But mayn’t *he* easily find that—charming as she is—he’s in love with her?”

“He’s too much taken up with himself.”

“That’s just a reason,” said Bolton-Brown. “Love is selfish.” He considered a moment longer, then he went on: “And mayn’t *she* find—?”

“Find what?” said Hugh, as he hesitated.

“Why, that she likes him.”

“She likes him of course, else she wouldn’t have come to his assistance. But her certainty about herself must have been just what made her not object to lending herself to the arrangement. She could do it decently because she doesn’t seriously care for him. If she did—!” Hugh suddenly stopped.

“If she did?” his friend repeated.

“It would have been odious.”

“I see,” said Bolton-Brown gently. “But how will they break off?”

“It will be Mary who’ll break off.”

“Perhaps she’ll find it difficult.”

“She’ll require a pretext.”

“I see,” mused Bolton-Brown, shifting his position again.

“She’ll find one,” Hugh declared.

“I hope so,” his companion responded.

For some minutes neither of them spoke; then Hugh asked: “Are you in love with her?”

“Oh, my dear fellow!” Bolton-Brown wailed. He instantly added: “Will it be any use for me to go back?”

Again Hugh felt as if his mother were listening. But he answered: “*Do* go back.”

“It’s awfully strange,” said Bolton-Brown. “I’ll go back.”

“You had better wait a couple of months, you know.”

“Mayn’t I lose her then?”

“No—they’ll drop it all.”

“I’ll go back!” the American repeated, as if he hadn’t heard. He was restless, agitated; he had evidently been much affected. He fidgeted away dimly, moved up the level length of the deck. Hugh Gosselin lingered longer at the stern; he fell into the attitude in which he had found the other, leaning over it and looking back at the great vague distance they had come. He thought of his mother.

VI

To remind her fond parent of the vanity of certain expectations which she more than suspected her of entertaining, Mary Gosselin, while she felt herself intensely watched (it had all brought about a horrid new situation at home) produced every day some fresh illustration of the fact that people were no longer imposed upon. Moreover these illustrations were not invented; the girl believed in them, and when once she had begun to note them she saw them multiply fast. Lady Whiteroy, for one, was distinctly suspicious; she had taken the liberty more than once of asking the future Lady Beaupré what in the world was the matter with her. Brilliant figure as she was and occupied with her own pleasures, which were of a very independent nature, she had nevertheless constituted herself Miss Gosselin’s social sponsor: she took a particular interest in her marriage, an interest all the greater as it rested not only on a freely-professed regard for her, but on a keen sympathy with the other party to the transaction. Lady Whiteroy, who was very pretty and very clever and whom Mary secretly but profoundly mistrusted, delighted in them both in short; so much so that Mary judged herself happy to be in a false position, so certain should she have been to be jealous had she been in a true one. This charming woman threw out inquiries that made the girl not care to meet her eyes; and Mary ended by forming a theory of the sort of marriage for Lord Beaupré that Lady Whiteroy really would have appreciated. It would have been a marriage to a fool, a marriage to Maud Ashbury or to Charlotte Firminger. She would have her reasons for preferring that; and, as regarded the actual prospect, she had only discovered that Mary was even more astute than herself.

It will be understood how much our young lady was on the crest of the wave when I mention that in spite of this complicated consciousness she was one of the ornaments (Guy Firminger was of course another) of the party entertained by her zealous friend and Lord Whiteroy

during the Goodwood week. She came back to town with the firm intention of putting an end to a comedy which had more than ever become odious to her; in consequence of which she had on this subject with her fellow-comedian a scene—the scene she had dreaded—half-pathetic, half-ridiculous. He appealed to her, wrestled with her, took his usual ground that she was saving his life without really lifting a finger. He denied that the public was not satisfied with their pretexts for postponement, their explanations of delay; what else was expected of a man who would wish to celebrate his nuptials on a suitable scale, but who had the misfortune to have had, one after another, three grievous bereavements? He promised not to molest her for the next three months, to go away till his “mourning” was over, to go abroad, to let her do as she liked. He wouldn’t come near her, he wouldn’t even write (no one would know it), if she would let him keep up the mere form of their fiction; and he would let her off the very first instant he definitely perceived that this expedient had ceased to be effective. She couldn’t judge of that—she must let *him* judge; and it was a matter in which she could surely trust to his honour.

Mary Gosselin trusted to it, but she insisted on his going away. When he took such a tone as that she couldn’t help being moved; he breathed with such frank, generous lips on the irritation she had stored up against him. Guy Firminger went to Homburg, and if his confederate consented not to clip the slender thread by which this particular engagement still hung, she made very short work with every other. A dozen invitations, for Cowes, for the country, for Scotland, shimmered there before her, made a pathway of flowers, but she sent barbarous excuses. When her mother, aghast, said to her “What then will you do?” she replied in a very conclusive manner “I’ll go home!” Mrs. Gosselin was wise enough not to struggle; she saw that the thread was delicate, that it must dangle in quiet air. She therefore travelled back with her daughter to homely Hampshire, feeling that they were people of less importance than they had been for many a week. On the August afternoons they sat again on the little lawn on which Guy Firminger had found them the day he first became eloquent about the perils of the desirable young bachelor; and it was on this very spot that, toward the end of the month, and with some surprise, they beheld Mr. Bolton-Brown once more approach. He had come back from America; he had arrived but a few days before; he was staying, of all places in the world, at the inn in the village.

His explanation of this caprice was of all explanations the oddest: he had come three thousand miles for the love of water-colour. There was nothing more sketchable than the sketchability of Hampshire—wasn’t it celebrated, classic? and he was so good as to include Mrs. Gosselin’s charming premises, and even their charming occupants, in his view of the field. He fell to work with speed, with a sort of feverish eagerness; he seemed possessed indeed by the frenzy of the brush. He sketched everything on the place, and when he had represented an object once he went straight at it again. His advent was soothing to Mary Gosselin, in spite of his nervous activity; it must be admitted indeed that at the moment he arrived she had already felt herself in quieter waters. The August afternoons, the relinquishment of London, the simplified life, had rendered her a service which, if she had freely qualified it, she would have described as a restoration of her self-respect. If poor Guy found any profit in such conditions as these there was no great reason to repudiate him. She had so completely shaken off responsibility that she took scarcely more than a languid interest in the fact, communicated to her by Lady Whiteroy, that Charlotte Firminger had also, as the newspapers said, “proceeded” to Homburg. Lady Whiteroy knew, for Lady Whiteroy had “proceeded” as well; her physician had discovered in her constitution a pressing need for the comfort imbibed in dripping matutinal tumblers. She chronicled Charlotte’s presence, and even to some extent her behaviour, among the haunters of the spring, but it was not till some time afterwards that Mary learned how Miss Firminger’s

pilgrimage had been made under her ladyship's protection. This was a further sign that, like Mrs. Gosselin, Lady Whiteroy had ceased to struggle; she had, in town, only shrugged her shoulders ambiguously on being informed that Lord Beaupré's intended was going down to her stupid home.

The fulness of Mrs. Gosselin's renunciation was apparent during the stay of the young American in the neighbourhood of that retreat. She occupied herself with her knitting, her garden and the cares of a punctilious hospitality, but she had no appearance of any other occupation. When people came to tea Bolton-Brown was always there, and she had the self-control to attempt to say nothing that could assuage their natural surprise. Mrs. Ashbury came one day with poor Maud, and the two elder ladies, as they had done more than once before, looked for some moments into each other's eyes. This time it was not a look of defiance, it was rather—or it would have been for an observer completely in the secret—a look of reciprocity, of fraternity, a look of arrangement. There was however no one completely in the secret save perhaps Mary, and Mary didn't heed. The arrangement at any rate was ineffectual; Mrs. Gosselin might mutely say, over the young American's eager, talkative shoulders, "Yes, you may have him if you can get him:" the most rudimentary experiments demonstrated that he was not to be got. Nothing passed on this subject between Mary and her mother, whom the girl none the less knew to be holding her breath and continuing to watch. She counted it more and more as one unpleasant result of her conspiracy with Guy Firminger that it almost poisoned a relation that had always been sweet. It was to show that she was independent of it that she did as she liked now, which was almost always as Bolton-Brown liked. When in the first days of September—it was in the warm, clear twilight, and they happened, amid the scent of fresh hay, to be leaning side by side on a stile—he gave her a view of the fundamental and esoteric, as distinguished from the convenient and superficial motive of his having come back to England, she of course made no allusion to a prior tie. On the other hand she insisted on his going up to London by the first train the next day. He was to wait—that was distinctly understood—for his satisfaction.

She desired meanwhile to write immediately to Guy Firminger, but as he had kept his promise of not complicating their contract with letters she was uncertain as to his actual whereabouts: she was only sure he would have left Homburg. Lady Whiteroy had become silent, so there were no more sidelights, and she was on the point of telegraphing to London for an address when she received a telegram from Bosco. The proprietor of that seat had arrived there the day before, and he found he could make trains fit if she would on the morrow allow him to come over and see her for a day or two. He had returned sooner than their agreement allowed, but she answered "Come" and she showed his missive to her mother, who at the sight of it wept with strange passion. Mary said to her "For heaven's sake, don't let him see you!" She lost no time; she told him on the morrow as soon as he entered the house that she couldn't keep it up another hour.

"All right—it *is* no use," he conceded; "they're at it again!"

"You see you've gained nothing!" she replied triumphantly. She had instantly recognised that he was different, how much had happened.

"I've gained some of the happiest days of my life."

"Oh, that was not what you tried for!"

"Indeed it was, and I got exactly what I wanted," said Guy Firminger. They were in the cool little drawing-room where the morning light was dim. Guy Firminger had a sunburnt appearance, as in England people returning from other countries are apt to have, and Mary thought he had never looked so well. It was odd, but it was noticeable, that he had grown

much handsomer since he had become a personage. He paused a moment, smiling at her while her mysterious eyes rested on him, and then he added: "Nothing ever worked better. It's no use now—people see. But I've got a start. I wanted to turn round and look about, and I *have* turned round and looked about. There are things I've escaped. I'm afraid you'll never understand how deeply I'm indebted to you."

"Oh, it's all right!" said Mary Gosselin.

There was another short silence, after which he went on: "I've come back sooner than I promised, but only to be strictly fair. I began to see that we couldn't hold out and that it was my duty to let you off. From that moment I was bound to put an end to your situation. I might have done so by letter, but that seemed scarcely decent. It's all I came back for, you know, and it's why I wired to you yesterday."

Mary hesitated an instant, she reflected intensely. What had happened, what would happen, was that if she didn't take care the signal for the end of their little arrangement would not have appeared to come from herself. She particularly wished it not to come from anyone else, she had even a horror of that; so that after an instant she hastened to say: "I was on the very point of wiring to *you*—I was only waiting for your address."

"Wiring to me?" He seemed rather blank.

"To tell you that our absurd affair really, this time, can't go on another day—to put a complete stop to it."

"Oh!" said Guy Firminger.

"So it's all right."

"You've always hated it!" Guy laughed; and his laugh sounded slightly foolish to the girl.

"I found yesterday that I hated it more than ever."

Lord Beaupré showed a quickened attention. "For what reason—yesterday?"

"I would rather not tell you, please. Perhaps some time you'll find it out."

He continued to look at her brightly and fixedly with his confused cheerfulness. Then he said with a vague, courteous alacrity: "I see, I see!" She had an impression that he didn't see; but it didn't matter, she was nervous and quite preferred that he shouldn't. They both got up, and in a moment he exclaimed: "Well, I'm intensely sorry it's over! It has been so charming."

"You've been very good about it; I mean very reasonable," Mary said, to say something. Then she felt in her nervousness that this was just what she ought not to have said: it sounded ironical and provoking, whereas she had meant it as pure good-nature. "Of course you'll stay to luncheon?" she continued. She was bound in common hospitality to speak of that, and he answered that it would give him the greatest pleasure. After this her apprehension increased, and it was confirmed in particular by the manner in which he suddenly asked:

"By the way, what reason shall we give?"

"What reason?"

"For our rupture. Don't let us seem to have quarrelled."

"We can't help that," said Mary. "Nothing else will account for our behaviour."

"Well, I sha'n't say anything about *you*."

"Do you mean you'll let people think it was yourself who were tired of it?"

“I mean I sha’n’t *blame* you.”

“You ought to behave as if you cared!” said Mary.

Guy Firminger laughed, but he looked worried and he evidently was puzzled. “You must act as if you had jilted me.”

“You’re not the sort of person unfortunately that people jilt.”

Lord Beaupré appeared to accept this statement as incontestable; not with elation however, but with candid regret, the slightly embarrassed recognition of a fundamental obstacle. “Well, it’s no one’s business, at any rate, is it?”

“No one’s, and that’s what I shall say if people question me. Besides,” Mary added, “they’ll see for themselves.”

“What will they see?”

“I mean they’ll understand. And now we had better join mamma.”

It was his evident inclination to linger in the room after he had said this that gave her complete alarm. Mrs. Gosselin was in another room, in which she sat in the morning, and Mary moved in that direction, pausing only in the hall for him to accompany her. She wished to get him into the presence of a third person. In the hall he joined her, and in doing so laid his hand gently on her arm. Then looking into her eyes with all the pleasantness of his honesty, he said: “It will be very easy for me to appear to care—for I *shall* care. I shall care immensely!” Lord Beaupré added smiling.

Anything, it struck her, was better than that—than that he should say: “We’ll keep on, if you like (*I* should!) only this time it will be serious. Hold me to it—do; don’t let me go; lead me on to the altar—really!” Some such words as these, she believed, were rising to his lips, and she had an insurmountable horror of hearing them. It was as if, well enough meant on *his* part, they would do her a sort of dishonour, so that all her impulse was quickly to avert them. That was not the way she wanted to be asked in marriage. “Thank you very much,” she said, “but it doesn’t in the least matter. You will seem to have been jilted—so it’s all right!”

“All right! You mean—?” He hesitated, he had coloured a little: his eyes questioned her.

“I’m engaged to be married—in earnest.”

“Oh!” said Lord Beaupré.

“You asked me just now if I had a special reason for having been on the point of telegraphing to you, and I said I had. That was my special reason.”

“I see!” said Lord Beaupré. He looked grave for a few seconds, then he gave an awkward smile. But he behaved with perfect tact and discretion, didn’t even ask her who the gentleman in the case might be. He congratulated her in the dark, as it were, and if the effect of this was indeed a little odd she liked him for his quick perception of the fine fitness of pulling up short. Besides, he extracted the name of the gentleman soon enough from her mother, in whose company they now immediately found themselves. Mary left Guy Firminger with the good lady for half an hour before luncheon; and when the girl came back it was to observe that she had been crying again. It was dreadful—what she might have been saying. Their guest, however, at luncheon was not lachrymose; he was natural, but he was talkative and gay. Mary liked the way he now behaved, and more particularly the way he departed immediately after the meal. As soon as he was gone Mrs. Gosselin broke out suppliantly: “Mary!” But her daughter replied:

“I know, mamma, perfectly what you’re going to say, and if you attempt to say it I shall leave the room.” With this threat (day after day, for the following time) she kept the terrible appeal unuttered until it was too late for an appeal to be of use. That afternoon she wrote to Bolton-Brown that she accepted his offer of marriage.

Guy Firminger departed altogether; he went abroad again and to far countries. He was therefore not able to be present at the nuptials of Miss Gosselin and the young American whom he had entertained at Bosco, which took place in the middle of November. Had he been in England however he probably would have felt impelled by a due regard for past verisimilitude to abstain from giving his countenance to such an occasion. His absence from the country contributed to the needed even if astonishing effect of his having been jilted; so, likewise, did the reputed vastness of Bolton-Brown’s young income, which in London was grossly exaggerated. Hugh Gosselin had perhaps a little to do with this; as he had sacrificed a part of his summer holiday, he got another month and came out to his sister’s wedding. He took public comfort in his brother-in-law; nevertheless he listened with attention to a curious communication made him by his mother after the young couple had started for Italy; even to the point of bringing out the inquiry (in answer to her assertion that poor Guy had been ready to place everything he had at Mary’s feet): “Then why the devil didn’t he do it?”

“From simple delicacy! He didn’t want to make her feel as if she had lent herself to an artifice only on purpose to get hold of him—to treat her as if she too had been at bottom one of the very harpies she helped him to elude.”

Hugh thought a moment. “That *was* delicate.”

“He’s the dearest creature in the world. He’s on his guard, he’s prudent, he tested himself by separation. Then he came back to England in love with her. She might have had it all!”

“I’m glad she didn’t get it *that* way.”

“She had only to wait—to put an end to their artifice, harmless as it was, for the present, but still wait. She might have broken off in a way that would have made it come on again better.”

“That’s exactly what she didn’t want.”

“I mean as a quite separate incident,” said Mrs. Gosselin.

“I loathed their artifice, harmless as it was!” her son observed.

Mrs. Gosselin for a moment made no answer; then she turned away from the fire into which she had been pensively gazing with the ejaculation “Poor dear Guy!”

“I can’t for the life of me see that he’s to be pitied.”

“He’ll marry Charlotte Firminger.”

“If he’s such an ass as that it’s his own affair.”

“Bessie Whiteroy will bring it about.”

“What has *she* to do with it?”

“She wants to get hold of him.”

“Then why will she marry him to another woman?”

“Because in that way she can select the other—a woman he won’t care for. It will keep him from taking some one that’s nicer.”

Hugh Gosselin stared—he laughed aloud. “Lord, mamma, you’re deep!”

“Indeed I am, I see much more.”

“What do you see?”

“Mary won’t in the least care for America. Don’t tell me she will,” Mrs. Gosselin added, “for you know perfectly you don’t believe it.”

“She’ll care for her husband, she’ll care for everything that concerns him.”

“He’s very nice, in his little way he’s delightful. But as an alternative to Lord Beaupré he’s ridiculous!”

“Mary’s in a position in which she has nothing to do with alternatives.”

“For the present, yes, but not for ever. She’ll have enough of your New York; they’ll come back here. I see the future dark,” Mrs. Gosselin pursued, inexorably musing.

“Tell me then all you see.”

“She’ll find poor Guy wretchedly married, and she’ll be very sorry for him.”

“Do you mean that he’ll make love to her? You give a queer account of your paragon.”

“He’ll value her sympathy. I see life as it is.”

“You give a queer account of your daughter.”

“I don’t give *any* account. She’ll behave perfectly,” Mrs. Gosselin somewhat inconsequently subjoined.

“Then what are you afraid of?”

“She’ll be sorry for him, and it will be all a worry.”

“A worry to whom?”

The good lady was silent a moment. “To me,” she replied. “And to you as well.”

“Then they mustn’t come back.”

“That will be a greater worry still.”

“Surely not a greater—a smaller. We’ll put up with the lesser evil.”

“Nothing will prevent her coming to a sense, eventually, of what *might* have been. And when they *both* recognize it——”

“It will be very dreadful!” Hugh exclaimed, completing gaily his mother’s phrase. “I don’t see, however,” he added, “what in all this you do with Bessie Whiteroy.”

“Oh, he’ll be tired of her; she’s hard, she’ll have become despotic. I see life as it is,” the good lady repeated.

“Then all I can say is that it’s not very nice! But they sha’n’t come back: *I*’ll attend to that!” said Hugh Gosselin, who has attended to it up to this time successfully, though the rest of his mother’s prophecy is so far accomplished (it was her second hit) as that Charlotte Firminger is now, strange as it may seem, Lady Beaupré.

The Visits

The other day, after her death, when they were discussing her, someone said in reference to the great number of years she had lived, the people she had seen and the stories she knew: “What a pity no one ever took any notes of her talk!” For a London epitaph that was almost exhaustive, and the subject presently changed. One of the listeners had taken many notes, but he didn’t confess it on the spot. The following story is a specimen of my exactitude—I took it down, *verbatim*, having that faculty, the day after I heard it. I choose it, at hazard, among those of her reminiscences that I have preserved; it’s not worse than the others. I will give you some of the others too—when occasion offers—so that you may judge.

I met in town that year a dear woman whom I had scarcely seen since I was a girl; she had dropped out of the world; she came up but once in five years. We had been together as very young creatures, and then we had married and gone our ways. It was arranged between us that after I should have paid a certain visit in August in the west of England I would take her—it would be very convenient, she was just over the Cornish border—on the way to my other engagements: I would work her in, as you say nowadays. She wanted immensely to show me her home, and she wanted still more to show me her girl, who had not come up to London, choosing instead, after much deliberation, to go abroad for a month with her brother and her brother’s coach—he had been cramming for something—and Mrs. Coach of course. All that Mrs. Chantry had been able to show me in town was her husband, one of those country gentlemen with a moderate property and an old place who are a part of the essence in their own neighbourhood and not a part of anything anywhere else.

A couple of days before my visit to Chantry Court the people to whom I had gone from town took me over to see some friends of theirs who lived, ten miles away, in a place that was supposed to be fine. As it was a long drive we stayed to luncheon; and then as there were gardens and other things that were more or less on show we struggled along to tea, so as to get home just in time for dinner. There were a good many other people present, and before luncheon a very pretty girl came into the drawing-room, a real maiden in her flower, less than twenty, fresh and fair and charming, with the expression of some one I knew. I asked who she was, and was told she was Miss Chantry, so that in a moment I spoke to her, mentioning that I was an old friend of her mother’s and that I was coming to pay them a visit. She looked rather frightened and blank, was apparently unable to say that she had ever heard of me, and hinted at no pleasure in the idea that she was to hear of me again. But this didn’t prevent my perceiving that she was lovely, for I was wise enough even then not to think it necessary to measure people by the impression that one makes on them. I saw that any I should make on Louisa Chantry would be much too clumsy a test. She had been staying at the house at which I was calling; she had come alone, as the people were old friends and to a certain extent neighbours, and was going home in a few days. It was a daughterless house, but there was inevitable young life: a couple of girls from the vicarage, a married son and his wife, a young man who had “ridden over” and another young man who was staying.

Louisa Chantry sat opposite to me at luncheon, but too far for conversation, and before we got up I had discovered that if her manner to me had been odd it was not because she was inanimate. She was on the contrary in a state of intense though carefully muffled vibration. There was some fever in her blood, but no one perceived it, no one, that is, with an exception—an exception which was just a part of the very circumstance. This single suspicion was lodged in the breast of the young man whom I have alluded to as staying in the house. He was on the same side of the table as myself and diagonally facing the girl;

therefore what I learned about him was for the moment mainly what she told me; meaning by “she” her face, her eyes, her movements, her whole perverted personality. She was extremely on her guard, and I should never have guessed her secret but for an accident. The accident was that the only time she dropped her eyes upon him during the repast I happened to notice it. It might not have been much to notice, but it led to my seeing that there was a little drama going on and that the young man would naturally be the hero. It was equally natural that in this capacity he should be the cause of my asking my left-hand neighbour, who happened to be my host, for some account of him. But “Oh, that fellow? he’s my nephew,” was a description which, to appear copious, required that I should know more about the uncle.

We had coffee on the terrace of the house; a terrace laid out in one quarter, oddly and charmingly, in grass where the servants who waited upon us seemed to tread, processionally, on soundless velvet. There I had a good look at my host’s nephew and a longer talk with my friend’s daughter, in regard to whom I had become conscious of a faint, formless anxiety. I remember saying to her, gropingly, instinctively: “My dear child, can I do anything for you? I shall perhaps see your mother before you do. Can I for instance say anything to her *from* you?” This only made her blush and turn away; and it was not till too many days had passed that I guessed that what had looked out at me unwittingly in her little gazing trepidation was something like “Oh, just take me away in spite of myself!” Superficially, conspicuously, there was nothing in the young man to take her away from. He was a person of the middle condition, and save that he didn’t look at all humble might have passed for a poor relation. I mean that he had rather a seedy, shabby air, as if he were wearing out old clothes (he had on faded things that didn’t match); and I formed vaguely the theory that he was a specimen of the numerous youthful class that goes to seek its fortune in the colonies, keeps strange company there and comes home without a penny. He had a brown, smooth, handsome face, a slightly swaggering, self-conscious ease, and was probably objected to in the house. He hung about, smoking cigarettes on the terrace, and nobody seemed to have much to say to him—a circumstance which, as he managed somehow to convey, left him absolutely indifferent. Louisa Chantry strolled away with one of the girls from the vicarage; the party on the terrace broke up and the nephew disappeared.

It was settled that my friends and I should take leave at half-past five, and I begged to be abandoned in the interval to my devices. I turned into the library and, mounted on ladders, I handled old books and old prints and soiled my gloves. Most of the others had gone to look at the church, and I was left in possession. I wandered into the rooms in which I knew there were pictures; and if the pictures were not good there was some interesting china which I followed from corner to corner and from cabinet to cabinet. At last I found myself on the threshold of a small room which appeared to terminate the series and in which, between the curtains draping the doorways, there appeared to be rows of rare old plates on velvet screens. I was on the point of going in when I became aware that there was something else beside, something which threw me back. Two persons were standing side by side at the window, looking out together with their backs to me—two persons as to whom I immediately felt that they believed themselves to be alone and unwatched. One of them was Louisa Chantry, the other was the young man whom my host had described as his nephew. They were so placed as not to see me, and when I recognized them I checked myself instinctively. I hesitated a moment; then I turned away altogether. I can’t tell you why, except that if I had gone in I should have had somehow the air of discovering them. There was no visible reason why they should have been embarrassed by discovery, inasmuch as, so far as I could see, they were doing no harm, were only standing more or less together, without touching, and for the moment apparently saying nothing. Were they watching something out of the window? I don’t know; all I know is that the observation I had made at luncheon gave me a sense of

responsibility. I might have taken my responsibility the other way and broken up their communion; but I didn't feel this to be sufficiently my business. Later on I wished I had.

I passed through the rooms again, and then out of the house. The gardens were ingenious, but they made me think (I have always that conceited habit) how much cleverer *I* should have been about them. Presently I met several of the rest of the party coming back from the church; on which my hostess took possession of me, declaring there was a point of view I must absolutely be treated to. I saw she was a walking woman and that this meant half a mile in the park. But I was good for that, and we wandered off together while the others returned to the house. It was present to me that I ought to ask my companion, for Helen Chantry's sake, a question about Louisa—whether for instance she had happened to notice the way the girl seemed to be going. But it was difficult to say anything without saying too much; so that to begin with I merely risked the observation that our young friend was remarkably pretty. As the point admitted of no discussion this didn't take us very far; nor was the subject much enlarged by our unanimity as to the fact that she was also remarkably nice. I observed that I had had very little chance to talk with her, for which I was sorry, having known her mother for years. My hostess, at this, looked vaguely round, as if she had missed her for the first time. "Sure enough, she has not been about. I daresay she's been writing to her mother—she's always writing to her mother." "Not always," I mentally reflected; but I waited discreetly, admiring everything and rising to the occasion and the views, before I inquired casually who the young man might be who had sat two or three below me at luncheon—the rather good-looking young man, with the regular features and the brownish clothes—not the one with the moustache.

"Oh, poor Jack Brandon," said my companion, in a tone calculated to make him seem no one in particular.

"Is he very poor?" I asked, with a laugh.

"Oh dear, yes. There are nine of them—fancy!—all boys; and there's nothing for anyone but the eldest. He's my husband's nephew—his poor mother's my sister-in-law. He sometimes turns up here when he has nothing better to do; but I don't think he likes us much." I saw she meant that they didn't like *him*; and I exposed myself to suspicion by asking if he had been with them long. But my friend was not very plastic, and she simplified my whole theory of the case by replying after she had thought a moment that she wasn't clear about it—she thought he had come only the morning before. It seemed to me I could safely feel a little further, so I inquired if he were likely to stay many days. "Oh dear, no; he'll go to-morrow!" said my hostess. There was nothing whatever to show that she saw a connection between my odd interest in Mr. Brandon and the subject of our former reference; there was only a quick lucidity on the subject of the young man's departure. It reassured me, for no great complications would have arisen in forty-eight hours.

In retracing our steps we passed again through a part of the gardens. Just after we had entered them my hostess, begging me to excuse her, called at a man who was raking leaves to ask him a question about his wife. I heard him reply "Oh, she's very bad, my lady," and I followed my course. Presently my lady turned round with him, as if to go to see his wife, who apparently was ill and on the place. I continued to look about me—there were such charming things; and at the end of five minutes I missed my way—I had not taken the direction of the house. Suddenly at the turn of a walk, the angle of a great clipped hedge, I found myself face to face with Jack Brandon. He was moving rapidly, looking down, with his hands in his pockets, and he started and stared at me a moment. I said "Oh, how d'ye do?" and I was on the point of adding "Won't you kindly show me the right way?" But with a summary salute and a queer expression of face he had already passed me. I looked after him an instant and I

all but stopped him; then one of the faintest voices of the air told me that Louisa Chantry would not be far off, that in fact if I were to go on a few steps I should find her. I continued and I passed through an arched aperture of the hedge, a kind of door in the partition. This corner of the place was like an old French garden, a little inclosed apartment, with statues set into the niches of the high walls of verdure. I paused in admiration; then just opposite to me I saw poor Louisa. She was on a bench, with her hands clasped in her lap, her head bent, her eyes staring down before her. I advanced on the grass, attracting her attention; and I was close to her before she looked at me, before she sprang up and showed me a face convulsed with nameless pain. She was so pale that I thought she was ill—I had a vision of her companion's having rushed off for help. She stood gazing at me with expanded eyes and parted lips, and what I was mainly conscious of was that she had become ten years older. Whatever troubled her it was something pitiful—something that prompted me to hold out my two hands to her and exclaim tenderly “My poor child, my poor child!” She wavered a moment, as if she wanted to escape me but couldn't trust herself to run; she looked away from me, turning her head this way and that. Then as I went close to her she covered her face with her two hands, she let me lay mine upon her and draw her to my breast. As she dropped her head upon it she burst into tears, sobbing soundlessly and tragically. I asked her no question, I only held her so long as she would, letting her pour out the passion which I felt at the same time she made a tremendous effort to smother. She couldn't smother it, but she could break away violently; and this she quickly did, hurrying out of the nook where our little scene—and some other greater scene, I judged, just before it—had taken place, and leaving me infinitely mystified. I sat down on the bench a moment and thought it over; then I succeeded in discovering a path to the house.

The carriage was at the door for our drive home, but my companions, who had had tea, were waiting for our hostess, of whom they wished to take leave and who had not yet come in. I reported her as engaged with the wife of one of the gardeners, but we lingered a little in the hall, a largeish group, to give her time to arrive. Two other persons were absent, one of whom was Louisa Chantry and the other the young man whom I had just seen quitting her in the garden. While I sat there, a trifle abstracted, still somewhat agitated by the sequel to that incident and at the same time impatient of our last vague dawdle, one of the footmen presented me with a little folded note. I turned away to open it, and at the very moment our hostess fortunately came in. This diverted the attention of the others from the action of the footman, whom, after I had looked at the note, I immediately followed into the drawing-room. He led me through it and through two or three others to the door of the little retreat in which, nearly an hour before, I had come upon Louisa Chantry and Mr. Brandon. The note was from Louisa, it contained the simple words “Would you very kindly speak to me an instant before you go?” She was waiting for me in the most sequestered spot she had been able to select, and there the footman left us. The girl came straight at me and in an instant she had grasped my hands. I became aware that her condition had changed; her tears were gone, she had a concentrated purpose. I could scarcely see her beautiful young face—it was pressed, beseechingly, so close to mine. I only felt, as her dry, shining eyes almost dazzled me, that a strong light had been waved back and forth before me. Her words at first seemed to me incoherent; then I understood that she was asking me for a pledge.

“Excuse me, forgive me for bringing you here—to say something I can't say before all those people. *Do* forgive me—it was so awfully kind of you to come. I couldn't think of any other way—just for two seconds. I want you to swear to me,” she went on, with her hands now raised and intensely clasped.

“To swear, dearest child?”

“I’m not your dearest child—I’m not anyone’s! But *don’t* tell mamma. Promise me—promise me,” she insisted.

“Tell her what?—I don’t understand.”

“Oh, you do—you do!” she kept on; “and if you’re going to Chantry you’ll see her, you’ll be with her, you may see her before I do. On my knees I ask you for a vow!”

She seemed on the point of throwing herself at my feet, but I stopped her, I kept her erect.

“When shall *you* see your mother?”

“As soon as I can. I want to get home—I want to get home!” With this I thought she was going to cry again, but she controlled herself and only pressed me with feverish eyes.

“You have some great trouble—for heaven’s sake tell me what it is.”

“It isn’t anything—it will pass. Only don’t breathe it to mamma!”

“How can I breathe it if I don’t know what it is?”

“You do know—you know what I mean.” Then after an instant’s pause she added: “What I did in the garden.”

“*What* did you do in the garden?”

“I threw myself on your neck and I sobbed—I behaved like a maniac.”

“Is that all you mean?”

“It’s what I don’t want mamma to know—it’s what I beseech you to keep silent about. If you don’t I’ll never, never go home. Have *mercy* on me!” the poor child quavered.

“Dear girl, I only want to be tender to you—to be perfect. But tell me first: has anyone acted wrongly to you?”

“No one—*no* one. I speak the truth.”

She looked into my eyes, and I looked far into hers. They were wild with pain and yet they were so pure that they made me confusedly believe her. I hesitated a moment; then I risked the question: “Isn’t Mr. Brandon responsible for anything?”

“For nothing—for nothing! Don’t blame *him*!” the girl passionately cried.

“He hasn’t made love to you?”

“Not a word—before God! Oh, it was too awful!” And with this she broke away from me, flung herself on her knees before a sofa, burying her face in it and in her arms. “Promise me, promise me, promise me!” she continued to wail.

I was horribly puzzled but I was immeasurably touched. I stood looking a moment at her extravagant prostration; then I said “I’m dreadfully in the dark, but I promise.”

This brought her to her feet again, and again she seized my hands. “Solemnly, sacredly?” she panted.

“Solemnly, sacredly.”

“Not a syllable—not a hint?”

“Dear Louisa,” I said kindly, “when I promise I perform.”

“You see I don’t know you. And when do you go to Chantry?”

“Day after to-morrow. And when do you?”

“To-morrow if I can.”

“Then you’ll see your mother first—it will be all right,” I said smiling.

“All right, all right!” she repeated, with her woeful eyes. “Go, go!” she added, hearing a step in the adjoining room.

The footman had come back to announce that my friends were seated in the carriage, and I was careful to say before him in a different tone: “Then there’s nothing more I can do for you?”

“Nothing—good-bye,” said Louisa, tearing herself away too abruptly to take my kiss, which, to follow the servant again, I left unbestowed. I felt awkward and guilty as I took leave of the company, murmuring something to my entertainers about having had an arrangement to make with Miss Chantry. Most of the people bade us good-bye from the steps, but I didn’t see Jack Brandon. On our drive home in the waning afternoon my other friends doubtless found me silent and stupid.

I went to Chantry two days later, and was disappointed to find that the daughter of the house had not returned, though indeed after parting with her I had been definitely of the opinion that she was much more likely to go to bed and be ill. Her mother however had not heard that she was ill, and my inquiry about the young lady was of course full of circumspection. It was a little difficult, for I had to talk about her, Helen being particularly delighted that we had already made acquaintance. No day had been fixed for her return, but it came over my friend that she oughtn’t to be absent during too much of my visit. She was the best thing they had to show—she was the flower and the charm of the place. It had other charms as well—it was a sleepy, silvery old home, exquisitely grey and exquisitely green; a house where you could have confidence in your leisure: it would be as genuine as the butter and the claret. The very look of the pleasant, prosaic drawing-room suggested long mornings of fancy work, of Berlin wool and premeditated patterns, new stitches and mild pauses. My good Helen was always in the middle of something eternal, of which the past and the future were rolled up in oilcloth and tissue paper, and the intensest moments of conversation were when it was spread out for pensive opinions. These used to drop sometimes even from Christopher Chantry when he straddled vaguely in with muddy leggings and the raw materials of a joke. He had a mind like a large, full milk-pan, and his wit was as thick as cream.

One evening I came down to dinner a little early and, to my surprise, found my troubled maiden in possession of the drawing-room. She was evidently troubled still, and had been waiting there in the hope of seeing me alone. We were too quickly interrupted by her parents, however, and I had no conversation with her till I sat down to the piano after dinner and beckoned to her to come and stand by it. Her father had gone off to smoke; her mother dozed by one of the crackling little fires of the summer’s end.

“Why didn’t you come home the day you told me you meant to?”

She fixed her eyes on my hands. “I couldn’t, I couldn’t!”

“You look to me as if you were very ill.”

“I am,” the girl said simply.

“You ought to see some one. Something ought to be done.”

She shook her head with quiet despair. “It would be no use—no one would know.”

“What do you mean—would know?”

“No one would understand.”

“You ought to make them!”

“Never—never!” she repeated. “Never!”

“I confess *I* don’t,” I replied, with a kind of angry renunciation. I played louder, with the passion of my uneasiness and the aggravation of my responsibility.

“No, you don’t indeed,” said Louisa Chantry.

I had only to accept this disadvantage, and after a moment I went on: “What became of Mr. Brandon?”

“I don’t know.”

“Did he go away?”

“That same evening.”

“Which same evening?”

“The day you were there. I never saw him again.”

I was silent a minute, then I risked: “And you never will, eh?”

“Never—never.”

“Then why shouldn’t you get better?”

She also hesitated, after which she answered: “Because I’m going to die.”

My music ceased, in spite of me, and we sat looking at each other. Helen Chantry woke up with a little start and asked what was the matter. I rose from the piano and I couldn’t help saying “Dear Helen, I haven’t the least idea.” Louisa sprang up, pressing her hand to her left side, and the next instant I cried aloud “She’s faint—she’s ill—do come to her!” Mrs. Chantry bustled over to us, and immediately afterwards the girl had thrown herself on her mother’s breast, as she had thrown herself days before on mine; only this time without tears, without cries, in the strangest, most tragic silence. She was not faint, she was only in despair—that at least is the way I really saw her. There was something in her contact that scared poor Helen, that operated a sudden revelation: I can see at this hour the queer frightened look she gave me over Louisa’s shoulder. The girl however in a moment disengaged herself, declaring that she was not ill, only tired, very tired, and wanted to go to bed. “Take her, take her—go with her,” I said to her mother; and I pushed them, got them out of the room, partly to conceal my own trepidation. A few moments after they had gone Christopher Chantry came in, having finished his cigar, and I had to mention to him—to explain their absence—that his daughter was so fatigued that she had withdrawn under her mother’s superintendence. “Didn’t she seem done up, awfully done up? What on earth, at that confounded place, did she go in for?” the dear man asked with his pointless kindness. I couldn’t tell him this was just what I myself wanted to know; and while I pretended to read I wondered inextinguishably what indeed she had “gone in” for. It had become still more difficult to keep my vow than I had expected; it was also very difficult that evening to converse with Christopher Chantry. His wife’s continued absence rendered some conversation necessary; yet it had the advantage of making him remark, after it had lasted an hour, that he must go to see what was the matter. He left me, and soon afterwards I betook myself to my room; bedtime was elastic in the early sense at Chantry. I knew I should only have to wait awhile for Helen to come to me, and in fact by eleven o’clock she arrived.

“She’s in a very strange state—something happened there.”

“And *what* happened, pray?”

“I can’t make out; she won’t tell me.”

“Then what makes you suppose so?”

“She has broken down utterly; she says there was something.”

“Then she does tell you?”

“Not a bit. She only begins and then stops short—she says it’s too dreadful.”

“Too dreadful?”

“She says it’s *horrible*,” my poor friend murmured, with tears in her eyes and tragic speculation in her mild maternal face.

“But in what way? Does she give you no facts, no clue?”

“It was something she did.”

We looked at each other a moment. “Did?” I echoed. “Did to whom?”

“She won’t tell me—she says she *can’t*. She tries to bring it out, but it sticks in her throat.”

“Nonsense. She did nothing,” I said.

“What *could* she do?” Helen asked, gazing at me.

“She’s ill, she’s in a fever, her mind’s wandering.”

“So I say to her father.”

“And what does *she* say to him?”

“Nothing—she won’t speak to him. He’s with her now, but she only lies there letting him hold her hand, with her face turned away from him and her eyes closed.”

“You must send for the doctor immediately.”

“I’ve already sent for him.”

“Should you like me to sit up with her?”

“Oh, I’ll do that!” Helen said. Then she asked: “But if you were there the other day, what did you see?”

“Nothing whatever,” I resolutely answered.

“*Really* nothing?”

“Really, my dear child.”

“But was there nobody there who could have made up to her?”

I hesitated a moment. “My poor Helen, you should have seen them!”

“She wouldn’t look at anybody that wasn’t remarkably nice,” Helen mused.

“Well—I don’t want to abuse your friends—but nobody was remarkably nice. Believe me, she hasn’t looked at anybody, and nothing whatever has occurred. She’s ill, and it’s a mere morbid fancy.”

“It’s a mere morbid fancy——!” Mrs. Chantry gobbled down this formula. I felt that I was giving her another still more acceptable, and which she as promptly adopted, when I added that Louisa would soon get over it.

I may as well say at once that Louisa never got over it. There followed an extraordinary week, which I look back upon as one of the most uncomfortable of my life. The doctor had something to say about the action of his patient's heart—it was weak and slightly irregular, and he was anxious to learn whether she had lately been exposed to any violent shock or emotion—but he could give no name to the disorder under the influence of which she had begun unmistakably to sink. She lay on the sofa in her room—she refused to go to bed, and in the absence of complications it was not insisted on—utterly white, weak and abstracted, shaking her head at all suggestion, waving away all nourishment save the infinitesimally little that enabled her to stretch out her hand from time to time (at intervals of very unequal length) and begin “Mother, mother!” as if she were mustering courage for a supreme confession. The courage never came; she was haunted by a strange impulse to speak, which in turn was checked on her lips by some deeper horror or some stranger fear. She seemed to seek relief spasmodically from some unforgettable consciousness and then to find the greatest relief of all in impenetrable silence. I knew these things only from her mother, for before me (I went gently in and out of her room two or three times a day) she gave no sign whatever. The little local doctor, after the first day, acknowledged himself at sea and expressed a desire to consult with a colleague at Exeter. The colleague journeyed down to us and shuffled and stammered: he recommended an appeal to a high authority in London. The high authority was summoned by telegraph and paid us a flying visit. He enunciated the valuable opinion that it was a very curious case and dropped the striking remark that in so charming a home a young lady ought to bloom like a flower. The young lady's late hostess came over, but she could throw no light on anything: all that she had ever noticed was that Louisa had seemed “rather blue” for a day or two before she brought her visit to a close. Our days were dismal enough and our nights were dreadful, for I took turns with Helen in sitting up with the girl. Chantry Court itself seemed conscious of the riddle that made its chambers ache; it bowed its grey old head over the fate of its daughter. The people who had been coming were put off; dinner became a ceremony enacted mainly by the servants. I sat alone with Christopher Chantry, whose honest hair, in his mystification, stuck out as if he had been overhauling accounts. My hours with Louisa were even more intensely silent, for she almost never looked at me. In the watches of the night however I at last saw more clearly into what she was thinking of. Once when I caught her wan eyes resting upon me I took advantage of it to kneel down by her bed and speak to her with the utmost tenderness.

“If you can't say it to your mother, can you say it perhaps to *me*?”

She gazed at me for some time. “What does it matter now—if I'm dying?”

I shook my head and smiled. “You won't die if you get it off your mind.”

“You'd be cruel to him,” she said. “He's innocent—he's innocent.”

“Do you mean *you're* guilty? What trifle are you magnifying?”

“Do you call it a trifle——?” She faltered and paused.

“Certainly I do, my dear.” Then I risked a great stroke. “I've often done it myself!”

“*You*? Never, never! I was cruel to him,” she added.

This puzzled me; I couldn't work it into my conception. “How were you cruel?”

“In the garden. I changed suddenly, I drove him away, I told him he filled me with horror.”

“Why did you do that?”

“Because my shame came over me.”

“Your shame?”

“What I had done in the house.”

“And what had you done?”

She lay a few moments with her eyes closed, as if she were living it over. “I broke out to him, I told him,” she began at last. But she couldn’t continue, she was powerless to utter it.

“Yes, I know what you told him. Millions of girls have told young men that before.”

“They’ve been asked, they’ve been asked! They didn’t speak *first*! I didn’t even know him, he didn’t care for me, I had seen him for the first time the day before. I said strange things to him, and he behaved like a gentleman.”

“Well he might!”

“Then before he could turn round, when we had simply walked out of the house together and strolled in the garden—it was as if I were borne along in the air by the wonder of what I had said—it rolled over me that I was lost.”

“Lost?”

“That I had been horrible—that I had been mad. Nothing could ever unsay it. I frightened him—I almost struck him.”

“Poor fellow!” I smiled.

“Yes—pity him. He was kind. But he’ll see me that way—always!”

I hesitated as to the answer it was best to make to this; then I produced: “Don’t think he’ll remember you—he’ll see other girls.”

“Ah, he’ll *forget* me!” she softly and miserably wailed; and I saw that I had said the wrong thing. I bent over her more closely, to kiss her, and when I raised my head her mother was on the other side of the bed. She fell on her knees there for the same purpose, and when Louisa felt her lips she stretched out her arms to embrace her. She had the strength to draw her close, and I heard her begin again, for the hundredth time, “Mother, mother——”

“Yes, my own darling.”

Then for the hundredth time I heard her stop. There was an intensity in her silence. It made me wildly nervous; I got up and turned away.

“Mother, mother,” the girl repeated, and poor Helen replied with a sound of passionate solicitation. But her daughter only exhaled in the waiting hush, while I stood at the window where the dawn was faint, the most miserable moan in the world. “I’m dying,” she said, articulately; and she died that night, after an hour, unconscious. The doctor arrived almost at the moment; this time he was sure it must have been the heart. The poor parents were in stupefaction, and I gave up half my visits and stayed with them a month. But in spite of their stupefaction I kept my vow.

Sir Dominick Ferrand

I.

“There are several objections to it, but I’ll take it if you’ll alter it,” Mr. Locket’s rather curt note had said; and there was no waste of words in the postscript in which he had added: “If you’ll come in and see me, I’ll show you what I mean.” This communication had reached Jersey Villas by the first post, and Peter Baron had scarcely swallowed his leathery muffin before he got into motion to obey the editorial behest. He knew that such precipitation looked eager, and he had no desire to look eager—it was not in his interest; but how could he maintain a godlike calm, principled though he was in favour of it, the first time one of the great magazines had accepted, even with a cruel reservation, a specimen of his ardent young genius?

It was not till, like a child with a sea-shell at his ear, he began to be aware of the great roar of the “underground,” that, in his third-class carriage, the cruelty of the reservation penetrated, with the taste of acrid smoke, to his inner sense. It was really degrading to be eager in the face of having to “alter.” Peter Baron tried to figure to himself at that moment that he was not flying to betray the extremity of his need, but hurrying to fight for some of those passages of superior boldness which were exactly what the conductor of the “Promiscuous Review” would be sure to be down upon. He made believe—as if to the greasy fellow-passenger opposite—that he felt indignant; but he saw that to the small round eye of this still more downtrodden brother he represented selfish success. He would have liked to linger in the conception that he had been “approached” by the Promiscuous; but whatever might be thought in the office of that periodical of some of his flights of fancy, there was no want of vividness in his occasional suspicion that he passed there for a familiar bore. The only thing that was clearly flattering was the fact that the Promiscuous rarely published fiction. He should therefore be associated with a deviation from a solemn habit, and that would more than make up to him for a phrase in one of Mr. Locket’s inexorable earlier notes, a phrase which still rankled, about his showing no symptom of the faculty really creative. “You don’t seem able to keep a character together,” this pitiless monitor had somewhere else remarked. Peter Baron, as he sat in his corner while the train stopped, considered, in the befogged gaslight, the bookstall standard of literature and asked himself whose character had fallen to pieces now. Tormenting indeed had always seemed to him such a fate as to have the creative head without the creative hand.

It should be mentioned, however, that before he started on his mission to Mr. Locket his attention had been briefly engaged by an incident occurring at Jersey Villas. On leaving the house (he lived at No. 3, the door of which stood open to a small front garden), he encountered the lady who, a week before, had taken possession of the rooms on the ground floor, the “parlours” of Mrs. Bundy’s terminology. He had heard her, and from his window, two or three times, had even seen her pass in and out, and this observation had created in his mind a vague prejudice in her favour. Such a prejudice, it was true, had been subjected to a violent test; it had been fairly apparent that she had a light step, but it was still less to be overlooked that she had a cottage piano. She had furthermore a little boy and a very sweet voice, of which Peter Baron had caught the accent, not from her singing (for she only played), but from her gay admonitions to her child, whom she occasionally allowed to amuse himself—under restrictions very publicly enforced—in the tiny black patch which, as a forecourt to each house, was held, in the humble row, to be a feature. Jersey Villas stood in pairs, semi-detached, and Mrs. Ryves—such was the name under which the new lodger

presented herself—had been admitted to the house as confessedly musical. Mrs. Bundy, the earnest proprietress of No. 3, who considered her “parlours” (they were a dozen feet square), even more attractive, if possible, than the second floor with which Baron had had to content himself—Mrs. Bundy, who reserved the drawing-room for a casual dressmaking business, had threshed out the subject of the new lodger in advance with our young man, reminding him that her affection for his own person was a proof that, other things being equal, she positively preferred tenants who were clever.

This was the case with Mrs. Ryves; she had satisfied Mrs. Bundy that she was not a simple strummer. Mrs. Bundy admitted to Peter Baron that, for herself, she had a weakness for a pretty tune, and Peter could honestly reply that his ear was equally sensitive. Everything would depend on the “touch” of their inmate. Mrs. Ryves’s piano would blight his existence if her hand should prove heavy or her selections vulgar; but if she played agreeable things and played them in an agreeable way she would render him rather a service while he smoked the pipe of “form.” Mrs. Bundy, who wanted to let her rooms, guaranteed on the part of the stranger a first-class talent, and Mrs. Ryves, who evidently knew thoroughly what she was about, had not falsified this somewhat rash prediction. She never played in the morning, which was Baron’s working-time, and he found himself listening with pleasure at other hours to her discreet and melancholy strains. He really knew little about music, and the only criticism he would have made of Mrs. Ryves’s conception of it was that she seemed devoted to the dismal. It was not, however, that these strains were not pleasant to him; they floated up, on the contrary, as a sort of conscious response to some of his broodings and doubts. Harmony, therefore, would have reigned supreme had it not been for the singularly bad taste of No. 4. Mrs. Ryves’s piano was on the free side of the house and was regarded by Mrs. Bundy as open to no objection but that of their own gentleman, who was so reasonable. As much, however, could not be said of the gentleman of No. 4, who had not even Mr. Baron’s excuse of being “littery” (he kept a bull-terrier and had five hats—the street could count them), and whom, if you had listened to Mrs. Bundy, you would have supposed to be divided from the obnoxious instrument by walls and corridors, obstacles and intervals, of massive structure and fabulous extent. This gentleman had taken up an attitude which had now passed into the phase of correspondence and compromise; but it was the opinion of the immediate neighbourhood that he had not a leg to stand upon, and on whatever subject the sentiment of Jersey Villas might have been vague, it was not so on the rights and the wrongs of landladies.

Mrs. Ryves’s little boy was in the garden as Peter Baron issued from the house, and his mother appeared to have come out for a moment, bareheaded, to see that he was doing no harm. She was discussing with him the responsibility that he might incur by passing a piece of string round one of the iron palings and pretending he was in command of a “geegee”; but it happened that at the sight of the other lodger the child was seized with a finer perception of the drivable. He rushed at Baron with a flourish of the bridle, shouting, “Ou geegee!” in a manner productive of some refined embarrassment to his mother. Baron met his advance by mounting him on a shoulder and feigning to prance an instant, so that by the time this performance was over—it took but a few seconds—the young man felt introduced to Mrs. Ryves. Her smile struck him as charming, and such an impression shortens many steps. She said, “Oh, thank you—you mustn’t let him worry you”; and then as, having put down the child and raised his hat, he was turning away, she added: “It’s very good of you not to complain of my piano.”

“I particularly enjoy it—you play beautifully,” said Peter Baron.

“I have to play, you see—it’s all I can do. But the people next door don’t like it, though my room, you know, is not against their wall. Therefore I thank you for letting me tell them that you, in the house, don’t find me a nuisance.”

She looked gentle and bright as she spoke, and as the young man’s eyes rested on her the tolerance for which she expressed herself indebted seemed to him the least indulgence she might count upon. But he only laughed and said “Oh, no, you’re not a nuisance!” and felt more and more introduced.

The little boy, who was handsome, hereupon clamoured for another ride, and she took him up herself, to moderate his transports. She stood a moment with the child in her arms, and he put his fingers exuberantly into her hair, so that while she smiled at Baron she slowly, permissively shook her head to get rid of them.

“If they really make a fuss I’m afraid I shall have to go,” she went on.

“Oh, don’t go!” Baron broke out, with a sudden expressiveness which made his voice, as it fell upon his ear, strike him as the voice of another. She gave a vague exclamation and, nodding slightly but not unsociably, passed back into the house. She had made an impression which remained till the other party to the conversation reached the railway-station, when it was superseded by the thought of his prospective discussion with Mr. Locket. This was a proof of the intensity of that interest.

The aftertaste of the later conference was also intense for Peter Baron, who quitted his editor with his manuscript under his arm. He had had the question out with Mr. Locket, and he was in a flutter which ought to have been a sense of triumph and which indeed at first he succeeded in regarding in this light. Mr. Locket had had to admit that there was an idea in his story, and that was a tribute which Baron was in a position to make the most of. But there was also a scene which scandalised the editorial conscience and which the young man had promised to rewrite. The idea that Mr. Locket had been so good as to disengage depended for clearness mainly on this scene; so it was easy to see his objection was perverse. This inference was probably a part of the joy in which Peter Baron walked as he carried home a contribution it pleased him to classify as accepted. He walked to work off his excitement and to think in what manner he should reconstruct. He went some distance without settling that point, and then, as it began to worry him, he looked vaguely into shop-windows for solutions and hints. Mr. Locket lived in the depths of Chelsea, in a little panelled, amiable house, and Baron took his way homeward along the King’s Road. There was a new amusement for him, a fresher bustle, in a London walk in the morning; these were hours that he habitually spent at his table, in the awkward attitude engendered by the poor piece of furniture, one of the rickety features of Mrs. Bundy’s second floor, which had to serve as his altar of literary sacrifice. If by exception he went out when the day was young he noticed that life seemed younger with it; there were livelier industries to profit by and shop-girls, often rosy, to look at; a different air was in the streets and a chaff of traffic for the observer of manners to catch. Above all, it was the time when poor Baron made his purchases, which were wholly of the wandering mind; his extravagances, for some mysterious reason, were all matutinal, and he had a foreknowledge that if ever he should ruin himself it would be well before noon. He felt lavish this morning, on the strength of what the Promiscuous would do for him; he had lost sight for the moment of what he should have to do for the Promiscuous. Before the old bookshops and printshops, the crowded panes of the curiosity-mongers and the desirable exhibitions of mahogany “done up,” he used, by an innocent process, to commit luxurious follies. He refurnished Mrs. Bundy with a freedom that cost her nothing, and lost himself in pictures of a transfigured second floor.

On this particular occasion the King's Road proved almost unprecedentedly expensive, and indeed this occasion differed from most others in containing the germ of real danger. For once in a way he had a bad conscience—he felt himself tempted to pick his own pocket. He never saw a commodious writing-table, with elbow-room and drawers and a fair expanse of leather stamped neatly at the edge with gilt, without being freshly reminded of Mrs. Bundy's dilapidations. There were several such tables in the King's Road—they seemed indeed particularly numerous today. Peter Baron glanced at them all through the fronts of the shops, but there was one that detained him in supreme contemplation. There was a fine assurance about it which seemed a guarantee of masterpieces; but when at last he went in and, just to help himself on his way, asked the impossible price, the sum mentioned by the voluble vendor mocked at him even more than he had feared. It was far too expensive, as he hinted, and he was on the point of completing his comedy by a pensive retreat when the shopman bespoke his attention for another article of the same general character, which he described as remarkably cheap for what it was. It was an old piece, from a sale in the country, and it had been in stock some time; but it had got pushed out of sight in one of the upper rooms—they contained such a wilderness of treasures—and happened to have but just come to light. Peter suffered himself to be conducted into an interminable dusky rear, where he presently found himself bending over one of those square substantial desks of old mahogany, raised, with the aid of front legs, on a sort of retreating pedestal which is fitted with small drawers, contracted conveniences known immemorially to the knowing as davenport. This specimen had visibly seen service, but it had an old-time solidity and to Peter Baron it unexpectedly appealed.

He would have said in advance that such an article was exactly what he didn't want, but as the shopman pushed up a chair for him and he sat down with his elbows on the gentle slope of the large, firm lid, he felt that such a basis for literature would be half the battle. He raised the lid and looked lovingly into the deep interior; he sat ominously silent while his companion dropped the striking words: "Now that's an article I personally covet!" Then when the man mentioned the ridiculous price (they were literally giving it away), he reflected on the economy of having a literary altar on which one could really kindle a fire. A davenport was a compromise, but what was all life but a compromise? He could beat down the dealer, and at Mrs. Bundy's he had to write on an insincere card-table. After he had sat for a minute with his nose in the friendly desk he had a queer impression that it might tell him a secret or two—one of the secrets of form, one of the sacrificial mysteries—though no doubt its career had been literary only in the sense of its helping some old lady to write invitations to dull dinners. There was a strange, faint odour in the receptacle, as if fragrant, hallowed things had once been put away there. When he took his head out of it he said to the shopman: "I don't mind meeting you halfway." He had been told by knowing people that that was the right thing. He felt rather vulgar, but the davenport arrived that evening at Jersey Villas.

II.

"I daresay it will be all right; he seems quiet now," said the poor lady of the "parlours" a few days later, in reference to their litigious neighbour and the precarious piano. The two lodgers had grown regularly acquainted, and the piano had had much to do with it. Just as this instrument served, with the gentleman at No. 4, as a theme for discussion, so between Peter Baron and the lady of the parlours it had become a basis of peculiar agreement, a topic, at any rate, of conversation frequently renewed. Mrs. Ryves was so prepossessing that Peter was sure that even if they had not had the piano he would have found something else to thresh out with her. Fortunately however they did have it, and he, at least, made the most of it, knowing more now about his new friend, who when, widowed and fatigued, she held her beautiful child in her arms, looked dimly like a modern Madonna. Mrs. Bundy, as a letter of furnished lodgings, was characterised in general by a familiar domestic severity in respect to

picturesque young women, but she had the highest confidence in Mrs. Ryves. She was luminous about her being a lady, and a lady who could bring Mrs. Bundy back to a gratified recognition of one of those manifestations of mind for which she had an independent esteem. She was professional, but Jersey Villas could be proud of a profession that didn't happen to be the wrong one—they had seen something of that. Mrs. Ryves had a hundred a year (Baron wondered how Mrs. Bundy knew this; he thought it unlikely Mrs. Ryves had told her), and for the rest she depended on her lovely music. Baron judged that her music, even though lovely, was a frail dependence; it would hardly help to fill a concert-room, and he asked himself at first whether she played country-dances at children's parties or gave lessons to young ladies who studied above their station.

Very soon, indeed, he was sufficiently enlightened; it all went fast, for the little boy had been almost as great a help as the piano. Sidney haunted the doorstep of No. 3 he was eminently sociable, and had established independent relations with Peter, a frequent feature of which was an adventurous visit, upstairs, to picture books criticised for not being *all* geegees and walking sticks happily more conformable. The young man's window, too, looked out on their acquaintance; through a starched muslin curtain it kept his neighbour before him, made him almost more aware of her comings and goings than he felt he had a right to be. He was capable of a shyness of curiosity about her and of dumb little delicacies of consideration. She did give a few lessons; they were essentially local, and he ended by knowing more or less what she went out for and what she came in from. She had almost no visitors, only a decent old lady or two, and, every day, poor dingy Miss Teagle, who was also ancient and who came humbly enough to governess the infant of the parlours. Peter Baron's window had always, to his sense, looked out on a good deal of life, and one of the things it had most shown him was that there is nobody so bereft of joy as not to be able to command for twopence the services of somebody less joyous. Mrs. Ryves was a struggler (Baron scarcely liked to think of it), but she occupied a pinnacle for Miss Teagle, who had lived on—and from a noble nursery—into a period of diplomas and humiliation.

Mrs. Ryves sometimes went out, like Baron himself, with manuscripts under her arm, and, still more like Baron, she almost always came back with them. Her vain approaches were to the music-sellers; she tried to compose—to produce songs that would make a hit. A successful song was an income, she confided to Peter one of the first times he took Sidney, blasé and drowsy, back to his mother. It was not on one of these occasions, but once when he had come in on no better pretext than that of simply wanting to (she had after all virtually invited him), that she mentioned how only one song in a thousand was successful and that the terrible difficulty was in getting the right words. This rightness was just a vulgar “fluke”—there were lots of words really clever that were of no use at all. Peter said, laughing, that he supposed any words he should try to produce would be sure to be too clever; yet only three weeks after his first encounter with Mrs. Ryves he sat at his delightful davenport (well aware that he had duties more pressing), trying to string together rhymes idiotic enough to make his neighbour's fortune. He was satisfied of the fineness of her musical gift—it had the touching note. The touching note was in her person as well.

The davenport was delightful, after six months of its tottering predecessor, and such a reinforcement to the young man's style was not impaired by his sense of something lawless in the way it had been gained. He had made the purchase in anticipation of the money he expected from Mr. Locket, but Mr. Locket's liberality was to depend on the ingenuity of his contributor, who now found himself confronted with the consequence of a frivolous optimism. The fruit of his labour presented, as he stared at it with his elbows on his desk, an aspect uncompromising and incorruptible. It seemed to look up at him reproachfully and to say, with its essential finish: “How could you promise anything so base; how could you pass

your word to mutilate and dishonour me?" The alterations demanded by Mr. Locket were impossible; the concessions to the platitude of his conception of the public mind were degrading. The public mind!—as if the public *had* a mind, or any principle of perception more discoverable than the stare of huddled sheep! Peter Baron felt that it concerned him to determine if he were only not clever enough or if he were simply not abject enough to rewrite his story. He might in truth have had less pride if he had had more skill, and more discretion if he had had more practice. Humility, in the profession of letters, was half of practice, and resignation was half of success. Poor Peter actually flushed with pain as he recognised that this was not success, the production of gelid prose which his editor could do nothing with on the one side and he himself could do nothing with on the other. The truth about his luckless tale was now the more bitter from his having managed, for some days, to taste it as sweet.

As he sat there, baffled and sombre, biting his pen and wondering what was meant by the "rewards" of literature, he generally ended by tossing away the composition deflowered by Mr. Locket and trying his hand at the sort of twaddle that Mrs. Ryves might be able to set to music. Success in these experiments wouldn't be a reward of literature, but it might very well become a labour of love. The experiments would be pleasant enough for him if they were pleasant for his inscrutable neighbour. That was the way he thought of her now, for he had learned enough about her, little by little, to guess how much there was still to learn. To spend his mornings over cheap rhymes for her was certainly to shirk the immediate question; but there were hours when he judged this question to be altogether too arduous, reflecting that he might quite as well perish by the sword as by famine. Besides, he did meet it obliquely when he considered that he shouldn't be an utter failure if he were to produce some songs to which Mrs. Ryves's accompaniments would give a circulation. He had not ventured to show her anything yet, but one morning, at a moment when her little boy was in his room, it seemed to him that, by an inspiration, he had arrived at the happy middle course (it was an art by itself), between sound and sense. If the sense was not confused it was because the sound was so familiar.

He had said to the child, to whom he had sacrificed barley-sugar (it had no attraction for his own lips, yet in these days there was always some of it about), he had confided to the small Sidney that if he would wait a little he should be intrusted with something nice to take down to his parent. Sidney had absorbing occupation and, while Peter copied off the song in a pretty hand, roamed, gurgling and sticky, about the room. In this manner he lurched like a little toper into the rear of the davenport, which stood a few steps out from the recess of the window, and, as he was fond of beating time to his intensest joys, began to bang on the surface of it with a paper-knife which at that spot had chanced to fall upon the floor. At the moment Sidney committed this violence his kind friend had happened to raise the lid of the desk and, with his head beneath it, was rummaging among a mass of papers for a proper envelope. "I say, I say, my boy!" he exclaimed, solicitous for the ancient glaze of his most cherished possession. Sidney paused an instant; then, while Peter still hunted for the envelope, he administered another, and this time a distinctly disobedient, rap. Peter heard it from within and was struck with its oddity of sound—so much so that, leaving the child for a moment under a demoralising impression of impunity, he waited with quick curiosity for a repetition of the stroke. It came of course immediately, and then the young man, who had at the same instant found his envelope and ejaculated "Hallo, this thing has a false back!" jumped up and secured his visitor, whom with his left arm he held in durance on his knee while with his free hand he addressed the missive to Mrs. Ryves.

As Sidney was fond of errands he was easily got rid of, and after he had gone Baron stood a moment at the window chinking pennies and keys in pockets and wondering if the charming composer would think his song as good, or in other words as bad, as he thought it. His eyes

as he turned away fell on the wooden back of the davenport, where, to his regret, the traces of Sidney's assault were visible in three or four ugly scratches. "Confound the little brute!" he exclaimed, feeling as if an altar had been desecrated. He was reminded, however, of the observation this outrage had led him to make, and, for further assurance, he knocked on the wood with his knuckle. It sounded from that position commonplace enough, but his suspicion was strongly confirmed when, again standing beside the desk, he put his head beneath the lifted lid and gave ear while with an extended arm he tapped sharply in the same place. The back was distinctly hollow; there was a space between the inner and the outer pieces (he could measure it), so wide that he was a fool not to have noticed it before. The depth of the receptacle from front to rear was so great that it could sacrifice a certain quantity of room without detection. The sacrifice could of course only be for a purpose, and the purpose could only be the creation of a secret compartment. Peter Baron was still boy enough to be thrilled by the idea of such a feature, the more so as every indication of it had been cleverly concealed. The people at the shop had never noticed it, else they would have called his attention to it as an enhancement of value. His legendary lore instructed him that where there was a hiding-place there was always a hidden spring, and he pried and pressed and fumbled in an eager search for the sensitive spot. The article was really a wonder of neat construction; everything fitted with a closeness that completely saved appearances.

It took Baron some minutes to pursue his inquiry, during which he reflected that the people of the shop were not such fools after all. They had admitted moreover that they had accidentally neglected this relic of gentility—it had been overlooked in the multiplicity of their treasures. He now recalled that the man had wanted to polish it up before sending it home, and that, satisfied for his own part with its honourable appearance and averse in general to shiny furniture, he had in his impatience declined to wait for such an operation, so that the object had left the place for Jersey Villas, carrying presumably its secret with it, two or three hours after his visit. This secret it seemed indeed capable of keeping; there was an absurdity in being baffled, but Peter couldn't find the spring. He thumped and sounded, he listened and measured again; he inspected every joint and crevice, with the effect of becoming surer still of the existence of a chamber and of making up his mind that his davenport was a rarity. Not only was there a compartment between the two backs, but there was distinctly something *in* the compartment! Perhaps it was a lost manuscript—a nice, safe, old-fashioned story that Mr. Locket wouldn't object to. Peter returned to the charge, for it had occurred to him that he had perhaps not sufficiently visited the small drawers, of which, in two vertical rows, there were six in number, of different sizes, inserted sideways into that portion of the structure which formed part of the support of the desk. He took them out again and examined more minutely the condition of their sockets, with the happy result of discovering at last, in the place into which the third on the left-hand row was fitted, a small sliding panel. Behind the panel was a spring, like a flat button, which yielded with a click when he pressed it and which instantly produced a loosening of one of the pieces of the shelf forming the highest part of the davenport—pieces adjusted to each other with the most deceptive closeness.

This particular piece proved to be, in its turn, a sliding panel, which, when pushed, revealed the existence of a smaller receptacle, a narrow, oblong box, in the false back. Its capacity was limited, but if it couldn't hold many things it might hold precious ones. Baron, in presence of the ingenuity with which it had been dissimulated, immediately felt that, but for the odd chance of little Sidney Ryves's having hammered on the outside at the moment he himself happened to have his head in the desk, he might have remained for years without suspicion of it. This apparently would have been a loss, for he had been right in guessing that the chamber was not empty. It contained objects which, whether precious or not, had at any rate been worth somebody's hiding. These objects were a collection of small flat parcels, of

the shape of packets of letters, wrapped in white paper and neatly sealed. The seals, mechanically figured, bore the impress neither of arms nor of initials; the paper looked old—it had turned faintly sallow; the packets might have been there for ages. Baron counted them—there were nine in all, of different sizes; he turned them over and over, felt them curiously and snuffed in their vague, musty smell, which affected him with the melancholy of some smothered human accent. The little bundles were neither named nor numbered—there was not a word of writing on any of the covers; but they plainly contained old letters, sorted and matched according to dates or to authorship. They told some old, dead story—they were the ashes of fires burned out.

As Peter Baron held his discoveries successively in his hands he became conscious of a queer emotion which was not altogether elation and yet was still less pure pain. He had made a find, but it somehow added to his responsibility; he was in the presence of something interesting, but (in a manner he couldn't have defined) this circumstance suddenly constituted a danger. It was the perception of the danger, for instance, which caused to remain in abeyance any impulse he might have felt to break one of the seals. He looked at them all narrowly, but he was careful not to loosen them, and he wondered uncomfortably whether the contents of the secret compartment would be held in equity to be the property of the people in the King's Road. He had given money for the davenport, but had he given money for these buried papers? He paid by a growing consciousness that a nameless chill had stolen into the air the penalty, which he had many a time paid before, of being made of sensitive stuff. It was as if an occasion had insidiously arisen for a sacrifice—a sacrifice for the sake of a fine superstition, something like honour or kindness or justice, something indeed perhaps even finer still—a difficult deciphering of duty, an impossible tantalising wisdom. Standing there before his ambiguous treasure and losing himself for the moment in the sense of a dawning complication, he was startled by a light, quick tap at the door of his sitting-room. Instinctively, before answering, he listened an instant—he was in the attitude of a miser surprised while counting his hoard. Then he answered "One moment, please!" and slipped the little heap of packets into the biggest of the drawers of the davenport, which happened to be open. The aperture of the false back was still gaping, and he had not time to work back the spring. He hastily laid a big book over the place and then went and opened his door.

It offered him a sight none the less agreeable for being unexpected—the graceful and agitated figure of Mrs. Ryves. Her agitation was so visible that he thought at first that something dreadful had happened to her child—that she had rushed up to ask for help, to beg him to go for the doctor. Then he perceived that it was probably connected with the desperate verses he had transmitted to her a quarter of an hour before; for she had his open manuscript in one hand and was nervously pulling it about with the other. She looked frightened and pretty, and if, in invading the privacy of a fellow-lodger, she had been guilty of a departure from rigid custom, she was at least conscious of the enormity of the step and incapable of treating it with levity. The levity was for Peter Baron, who endeavoured, however, to clothe his familiarity with respect, pushing forward the seat of honour and repeating that he rejoiced in such a visit. The visitor came in, leaving the door ajar, and after a minute during which, to help her, he charged her with the purpose of telling him that he ought to be ashamed to send her down such rubbish, she recovered herself sufficiently to stammer out that his song was exactly what she had been looking for and that after reading it she had been seized with an extraordinary, irresistible impulse—that of thanking him for it in person and without delay.

"It was the impulse of a kind nature," he said, "and I can't tell you what pleasure you give me."

She declined to sit down, and evidently wished to appear to have come but for a few seconds. She looked confusedly at the place in which she found herself, and when her eyes met his own they struck him as anxious and appealing. She was evidently not thinking of his song, though she said three or four times over that it was beautiful. "Well, I only wanted you to know, and now I must go," she added; but on his hearthrug she lingered with such an odd helplessness that he felt almost sorry for her.

"Perhaps I can improve it if you find it doesn't go," said Baron. "I'm so delighted to do anything for you I can."

"There may be a word or two that might be changed," she answered, rather absently. "I shall have to think it over, to live with it a little. But I like it, and that's all I wanted to say."

"Charming of you. I'm not a bit busy," said Baron.

Again she looked at him with a troubled intensity, then suddenly she demanded: "Is there anything the matter with you?"

"The matter with me?"

"I mean like being ill or worried. I wondered if there might be; I had a sudden fancy; and that, I think, is really why I came up."

"There isn't, indeed; I'm all right. But your sudden fancies are inspirations."

"It's absurd. You must excuse me. Good-by!" said Mrs. Ryves.

"What are the words you want changed?" Baron asked.

"I don't want any—if you're all right. Good-by," his visitor repeated, fixing her eyes an instant on an object on his desk that had caught them. His own glanced in the same direction and he saw that in his hurry to shuffle away the packets found in the davenport he had overlooked one of them, which lay with its seals exposed. For an instant he felt found out, as if he had been concerned in something to be ashamed of, and it was only his quick second thought that told him how little the incident of which the packet was a sequel was an affair of Mrs. Ryves's. Her conscious eyes came back to his as if they were sounding them, and suddenly this instinct of keeping his discovery to himself was succeeded by a really startled inference that, with the rarest alertness, she had guessed something and that her guess (it seemed almost supernatural), had been her real motive. Some secret sympathy had made her vibrate—had touched her with the knowledge that he had brought something to light. After an instant he saw that she also divined the very reflection he was then making, and this gave him a lively desire, a grateful, happy desire, to appear to have nothing to conceal. For herself, it determined her still more to put an end to her momentary visit. But before she had passed to the door he exclaimed: "All right? How can a fellow be anything else who has just had such a find?"

She paused at this, still looking earnest and asking: "What have you found?"

"Some ancient family papers, in a secret compartment of my writing-table." And he took up the packet he had left out, holding it before her eyes. "A lot of other things like that."

"What are they?" murmured Mrs. Ryves.

"I haven't the least idea. They're sealed."

"You haven't broken the seals?" She had come further back.

"I haven't had time; it only happened ten minutes ago."

"I knew it," said Mrs. Ryves, more gaily now.

“What did you know?”

“That you were in some predicament.”

“You’re extraordinary. I never heard of anything so miraculous; down two flights of stairs.”

“*Are* you in a quandary?” the visitor asked.

“Yes, about giving them back.” Peter Baron stood smiling at her and rapping his packet on the palm of his hand. “What do you advise?”

She herself smiled now, with her eyes on the sealed parcel. “Back to whom?”

“The man of whom I bought the table.”

“Ah then, they’re not from *your* family?”

“No indeed, the piece of furniture in which they were hidden is not an ancestral possession. I bought it at second hand—you see it’s old—the other day in the King’s Road. Obviously the man who sold it to me sold me more than he meant; he had no idea (from his own point of view it was stupid of him), that there was a hidden chamber or that mysterious documents were buried there. Ought I to go and tell him? It’s rather a nice question.”

“Are the papers of value?” Mrs. Ryves inquired.

“I haven’t the least idea. But I can ascertain by breaking a seal.”

“Don’t!” said Mrs. Ryves, with much expression. She looked grave again.

“It’s rather tantalising—it’s a bit of a problem,” Baron went on, turning his packet over.

Mrs. Ryves hesitated. “Will you show me what you have in your hand?”

He gave her the packet, and she looked at it and held it for an instant to her nose. “It has a queer, charming old fragrance,” he said.

“Charming? It’s horrid.” She handed him back the packet, saying again more emphatically “Don’t!”

“Don’t break a seal?”

“Don’t give back the papers.”

“Is it honest to keep them?”

“Certainly. They’re yours as much as the people’s of the shop. They were in the hidden chamber when the table came to the shop, and the people had every opportunity to find them out. They didn’t—therefore let them take the consequences.”

Peter Baron reflected, diverted by her intensity. She was pale, with eyes almost ardent. “The table had been in the place for years.”

“That proves the things haven’t been missed.”

“Let me show you how they were concealed,” he rejoined; and he exhibited the ingenious recess and the working of the curious spring. She was greatly interested, she grew excited and became familiar; she appealed to him again not to do anything so foolish as to give up the papers, the rest of which, in their little blank, impenetrable covers, he placed in a row before her. “They might be traced—their history, their ownership,” he argued; to which she replied that this was exactly why he ought to be quiet. He declared that women had not the smallest sense of honour, and she retorted that at any rate they have other perceptions more delicate than those of men. He admitted that the papers might be rubbish, and she conceded that nothing was more probable; yet when he offered to settle the point off-hand she caught him

by the wrist, acknowledging that, absurd as it was, she was nervous. Finally she put the whole thing on the ground of his just doing her a favour. She asked him to retain the papers, to be silent about them, simply because it would please her. That would be reason enough. Baron's acquaintance, his agreeable relations with her, advanced many steps in the treatment of this question; an element of friendly candour made its way into their discussion of it.

"I can't make out why it matters to you, one way or the other, nor why you should think it worth talking about," the young man reasoned.

"Neither can I. It's just a whim."

"Certainly, if it will give you any pleasure, I'll say nothing at the shop."

"That's charming of you, and I'm very grateful. I see now that this was why the spirit moved me to come up—to save them," Mrs. Ryves went on. She added, moving away, that now she had saved them she must really go.

"To save them for what, if I mayn't break the seals?" Baron asked.

"I don't know—for a generous sacrifice."

"Why should it be generous? What's at stake?" Peter demanded, leaning against the doorpost as she stood on the landing.

"I don't know what, but I feel as if something or other were in peril. Burn them up!" she exclaimed with shining eyes.

"Ah, you ask too much—I'm so curious about them!"

"Well, I won't ask more than I ought, and I'm much obliged to you for your promise to be quiet. I trust to your discretion. Good-by."

"You ought to *reward* my discretion," said Baron, coming out to the landing.

She had partly descended the staircase and she stopped, leaning against the baluster and smiling up at him. "Surely you've had your reward in the honour of my visit."

"That's delightful as far as it goes. But what will you do for me if I burn the papers?"

Mrs. Ryves considered a moment. "Burn them first and you'll see!"

On this she went rapidly downstairs, and Baron, to whom the answer appeared inadequate and the proposition indeed in that form grossly unfair, returned to his room. The vivacity of her interest in a question in which she had discoverably nothing at stake mystified, amused and, in addition, irresistibly charmed him. She was delicate, imaginative, inflammable, quick to feel, quick to act. He didn't complain of it, it was the way he liked women to be; but he was not impelled for the hour to commit the sealed packets to the flames. He dropped them again into their secret well, and after that he went out. He felt restless and excited; another day was lost for work—the dreadful job to be performed for Mr. Locket was still further off.

III.

Ten days after Mrs. Ryves's visit he paid by appointment another call on the editor of the *Promiscuous*. He found him in the little wainscoted Chelsea house, which had to Peter's sense the smoky brownness of an old pipebowl, surrounded with all the emblems of his office—a litter of papers, a hedge of encyclopædias, a photographic gallery of popular contributors—and he promised at first to consume very few of the moments for which so many claims competed. It was Mr. Locket himself however who presently made the interview spacious, gave it air after discovering that poor Baron had come to tell him

something more interesting than that he couldn't after all patch up his tale. Peter had begun with this, had intimated respectfully that it was a case in which both practice and principle rebelled, and then, perceiving how little Mr. Locket was affected by his audacity, had felt weak and slightly silly, left with his heroism on his hands. He had armed himself for a struggle, but the Promiscuous didn't even protest, and there would have been nothing for him but to go away with the prospect of never coming again had he not chanced to say abruptly, irrelevantly, as he got up from his chair:

"Do you happen to be at all interested in Sir Dominick Ferrand?"

Mr. Locket, who had also got up, looked over his glasses. "The late Sir Dominick?"

"The only one; you know the family's extinct."

Mr. Locket shot his young friend another sharp glance, a silent retort to the glibness of this information. "Very extinct indeed. I'm afraid the subject today would scarcely be regarded as attractive."

"Are you very sure?" Baron asked.

Mr. Locket leaned forward a little, with his fingertips on his table, in the attitude of giving permission to retire. "I might consider the question in a special connection." He was silent a minute, in a way that relegated poor Peter to the general; but meeting the young man's eyes again he asked: "Are you—a—thinking of proposing an article upon him?"

"Not exactly proposing it—because I don't yet quite see my way; but the idea rather appeals to me."

Mr. Locket emitted the safe assertion that this eminent statesman had been a striking figure in his day; then he added: "Have you been studying him?"

"I've been dipping into him."

"I'm afraid he's scarcely a question of the hour," said Mr. Locket, shuffling papers together.

"I think I could make him one," Peter Baron declared.

Mr. Locket stared again; he was unable to repress an unattenuated "You?"

"I have some new material," said the young man, colouring a little. "That often freshens up an old story."

"It buries it sometimes. It's often only another tombstone."

"That depends upon what it is. However," Peter added, "the documents I speak of would be a crushing monument."

Mr. Locket, hesitating, shot another glance under his glasses. "Do you allude to—a—revelations?"

"Very curious ones."

Mr. Locket, still on his feet, had kept his body at the bowing angle; it was therefore easy for him after an instant to bend a little further and to sink into his chair with a movement of his hand toward the seat Baron had occupied. Baron resumed possession of this convenience, and the conversation took a fresh start on a basis which such an extension of privilege could render but little less humiliating to our young man. He had matured no plan of confiding his secret to Mr. Locket, and he had really come out to make him conscientiously that other announcement as to which it appeared that so much artistic agitation had been wasted. He had indeed during the past days—days of painful indecision—appealed in imagination to the

editor of the *Promiscuous*, as he had appealed to other sources of comfort; but his scruples turned their face upon him from quarters high as well as low, and if on the one hand he had by no means made up his mind not to mention his strange knowledge, he had still more left to the determination of the moment the question of how he should introduce the subject. He was in fact too nervous to decide; he only felt that he needed for his peace of mind to communicate his discovery. He wanted an opinion, the impression of somebody else, and even in this intensely professional presence, five minutes after he had begun to tell his queer story, he felt relieved of half his burden. His story was very queer; he could take the measure of that himself as he spoke; but wouldn't this very circumstance qualify it for the *Promiscuous*?

"Of course the letters may be forgeries," said Mr. Locket at last.

"I've no doubt that's what many people will say."

"Have they been seen by any expert?"

"No indeed; they've been seen by nobody."

"Have you got any of them with you?"

"No; I felt nervous about bringing them out."

"That's a pity. I should have liked the testimony of my eyes."

"You may have it if you'll come to my rooms. If you don't care to do that without a further guarantee I'll copy you out some passages."

"Select a few of the worst!" Mr. Locket laughed. Over Baron's distressing information he had become quite human and genial. But he added in a moment more dryly: "You know they ought to be seen by an expert."

"That's exactly what I dread," said Peter.

"They'll be worth nothing to me if they're not."

Peter communed with his innermost spirit. "How much will they be worth to *me* if they *are*?"

Mr. Locket turned in his study-chair. "I should require to look at them before answering that question."

"I've been to the British museum—there are many of his letters there. I've obtained permission to see them, and I've compared everything carefully. I repudiate the possibility of forgery. No sign of genuineness is wanting; there are details, down to the very postmarks, that no forger could have invented. Besides, whose interest could it conceivably have been? A labor of unspeakable difficulty, and all for what advantage? There are so many letters, too—twenty-seven in all."

"Lord, what an ass!" Mr. Locket exclaimed.

"It will be one of the strangest post-mortem revelations of which history preserves the record."

Mr. Locket, grave now, worried with a paper-knife the crevice of a drawer. "It's very odd. But to be worth anything such documents should be subjected to a searching criticism—I mean of the historical kind."

"Certainly; that would be the task of the writer introducing them to the public."

Again Mr. Locket considered; then with a smile he looked up. "You had better give up original composition and take to buying old furniture."

"Do you mean because it will pay better?"

"For you, I should think, original composition couldn't pay worse. The creative faculty's so rare."

"I do feel tempted to turn my attention to real heroes," Peter replied.

"I'm bound to declare that Sir Dominick Ferrand was never one of mine. Flashy, crafty, second-rate—that's how I've always read him. It was never a secret, moreover, that his private life had its weak spots. He was a mere flash in the pan."

"He speaks to the people of this country," said Baron.

"He did; but his voice—the voice, I mean, of his prestige—is scarcely audible now."

"They're still proud of some of the things he did at the Foreign Office—the famous 'exchange' with Spain, in the Mediterranean, which took Europe so by surprise and by which she felt injured, especially when it became apparent how much we had the best of the bargain. Then the sudden, unexpected show of force by which he imposed on the United States our interpretation of that tiresome treaty—I could never make out what it was about. These were both matters that no one really cared a straw about, but he made every one feel as if they cared; the nation rose to the way he played his trumps—it was uncommon. He was one of the few men we've had, in our period, who took Europe, or took America, by surprise, made them jump a bit; and the country liked his doing it—it was a pleasant change. The rest of the world considered that they knew in any case exactly what we would do, which was usually nothing at all. Say what you like, he's still a high name; partly also, no doubt, on account of other things his early success and early death, his political 'cheek' and wit; his very appearance—he certainly was handsome—and the possibilities (of future personal supremacy) which it was the fashion at the time, which it's the fashion still, to say had passed away with him. He had been twice at the Foreign Office; that alone was remarkable for a man dying at forty-four. What therefore will the country think when it learns he was venal?"

Peter Baron himself was not angry with Sir Dominick Ferrand, who had simply become to him (he had been "reading up" feverishly for a week) a very curious subject of psychological study; but he could easily put himself in the place of that portion of the public whose memory was long enough for their patriotism to receive a shock. It was some time fortunately since the conduct of public affairs had wanted for men of disinterested ability, but the extraordinary documents concealed (of all places in the world—it was as fantastic as a nightmare) in a "bargain" picked up at second-hand by an obscure scribbler, would be a calculable blow to the retrospective mind. Baron saw vividly that if these relics should be made public the scandal, the horror, the chatter would be immense. Immense would be also the contribution to truth, the rectification of history. He had felt for several days (and it was exactly what had made him so nervous) as if he held in his hand the key to public attention.

"There are too many things to explain," Mr. Locket went on, "and the singular *provenance* of your papers would count almost overwhelmingly against them even if the other objections were met. There would be a perfect and probably a very complicated pedigree to trace. How did they get into your davenport, as you call it, and how long had they been there? What hands secreted them? what hands had, so incredibly, clung to them and preserved them? Who are the persons mentioned in them? who are the correspondents, the parties to the nefarious transactions? You say the transactions appear to be of two distinct kinds—

some of them connected with public business and others involving obscure personal relations.”

“They all have this in common,” said Peter Baron, “that they constitute evidence of uneasiness, in some instances of painful alarm, on the writer’s part, in relation to exposure—the exposure in the one case, as I gather, of the fact that he had availed himself of official opportunities to promote enterprises (public works and that sort of thing) in which he had a pecuniary stake. The dread of the light in the other connection is evidently different, and these letters are the earliest in date. They are addressed to a woman, from whom he had evidently received money.”

Mr. Locket wiped his glasses. “What woman?”

“I haven’t the least idea. There are lots of questions I can’t answer, of course; lots of identities I can’t establish; lots of gaps I can’t fill. But as to two points I’m clear, and they are the essential ones. In the first place the papers in my possession are genuine; in the second place they’re compromising.”

With this Peter Baron rose again, rather vexed with himself for having been led on to advertise his treasure (it was his interlocutor’s perfectly natural scepticism that produced this effect), for he felt that he was putting himself in a false position. He detected in Mr. Locket’s studied detachment the fermentation of impulses from which, unsuccessful as he was, he himself prayed to be delivered.

Mr. Locket remained seated; he watched Baron go across the room for his hat and umbrella. “Of course, the question would come up of whose property today such documents would legally be. There are heirs, descendants, executors to consider.”

“In some degree perhaps; but I’ve gone into that a little. Sir Dominick Ferrand had no children, and he left no brothers and no sisters. His wife survived him, but she died ten years ago. He can have had no heirs and no executors to speak of, for he left no property.”

“That’s to his honour and against your theory,” said Mr. Locket.

“I *have* no theory. He left a largeish mass of debt,” Peter Baron added. At this Mr. Locket got up, while his visitor pursued: “So far as I can ascertain, though of course my inquiries have had to be very rapid and superficial, there is no one now living, directly or indirectly related to the personage in question, who would be likely to suffer from any steps in the direction of publicity. It happens to be a rare instance of a life that had, as it were, no loose ends. At least there are none perceptible at present.”

“I see, I see,” said Mr. Locket. “But I don’t think I should care much for your article.”

“What article?”

“The one you seem to wish to write, embodying this new matter.”

“Oh, I don’t wish to write it!” Peter exclaimed. And then he bade his host good-by.

“Good-by,” said Mr. Locket. “Mind you, I don’t say that I think there’s nothing in it.”

“You would think there was something in it if you were to see my documents.”

“I should like to see the secret compartment,” the caustic editor rejoined. “Copy me out some extracts.”

“To what end, if there’s no question of their being of use to you?”

“I don’t say that—I might like the letters themselves.”

“Themselves?”

“Not as the basis of a paper, but just to publish—for a sensation.”

“They’d sell your number!” Baron laughed.

“I daresay I should like to look at them,” Mr. Locket conceded after a moment. “When should I find you at home?”

“Don’t come,” said the young man. “I make you no offer.”

“I might make *you* one,” the editor hinted. “Don’t trouble yourself; I shall probably destroy them.” With this Peter Baron took his departure, waiting however just afterwards, in the street near the house, as if he had been looking out for a stray hansom, to which he would not have signalled had it appeared. He thought Mr. Locket might hurry after him, but Mr. Locket seemed to have other things to do, and Peter Baron returned on foot to Jersey Villas.

IV.

On the evening that succeeded this apparently pointless encounter he had an interview more conclusive with Mrs. Bundy, for whose shrewd and philosophic view of life he had several times expressed, even to the good woman herself, a considerable relish. The situation at Jersey Villas (Mrs. Ryves had suddenly flown off to Dover) was such as to create in him a desire for moral support, and there was a kind of domestic determination in Mrs. Bundy which seemed, in general, to advertise it. He had asked for her on coming in, but had been told she was absent for the hour; upon which he had addressed himself mechanically to the task of doing up his dishonoured manuscript—the ingenious fiction about which Mr. Locket had been so stupid—for further adventures and not improbable defeats. He passed a restless, ineffective afternoon, asking himself if his genius were a horrid delusion, looking out of his window for something that didn’t happen, something that seemed now to be the advent of a persuasive Mr. Locket and now the return, from an absence more disappointing even than Mrs. Bundy’s, of his interesting neighbour of the parlours. He was so nervous and so depressed that he was unable even to fix his mind on the composition of the note with which, on its next peregrination, it was necessary that his manuscript should be accompanied. He was too nervous to eat, and he forgot even to dine; he forgot to light his candles, he let his fire go out, and it was in the melancholy chill of the late dusk that Mrs. Bundy, arriving at last with his lamp, found him extended moodily upon his sofa. She had been informed that he wished to speak to her, and as she placed on the malodorous luminary an oily shade of green pasteboard she expressed the friendly hope that there was nothing wrong with his ‘ealth.

The young man rose from his couch, pulling himself together sufficiently to reply that his health was well enough but that his spirits were down in his hoots. He had a strong disposition to “draw” his landlady on the subject of Mrs. Ryves, as well as a vivid conviction that she constituted a theme as to which Mrs. Bundy would require little pressure to tell him even more than she knew. At the same time he hated to appear to pry into the secrets of his absent friend; to discuss her with their bustling hostess resembled too much for his taste a gossip with a tattling servant about an unconscious employer. He left out of account however Mrs. Bundy’s knowledge of the human heart, for it was this fine principle that broke down the barriers after he had reflected reassuringly that it was not meddling with Mrs. Ryves’s affairs to try and find out if she struck such an observer as happy. Crudely, abruptly, even a little blushing, he put the direct question to Mrs. Bundy, and this led tolerably straight to another question, which, on his spirit, sat equally heavy (they were indeed but different phases of the same), and which the good woman answered with expression when she ejaculated: “Think it a liberty for you to run down for a few hours? If she do, my dear sir, just send her to me to talk to!” As regards happiness indeed she warned Baron against

imposing too high a standard on a young thing who had been through so much, and before he knew it he found himself, without the responsibility of choice, in submissive receipt of Mrs. Bundy's version of this experience. It was an interesting picture, though it had its infirmities, one of them congenital and consisting of the fact that it had sprung essentially from the virginal brain of Miss Teagle. Amplified, edited, embellished by the richer genius of Mrs. Bundy, who had incorporated with it and now liberally introduced copious interleavings of Miss Teagle's own romance, it gave Peter Baron much food for meditation, at the same time that it only half relieved his curiosity about the causes of the charming woman's underlying strangeness. He sounded this note experimentally in Mrs. Bundy's ear, but it was easy to see that it didn't reverberate in her fancy. She had no idea of the picture it would have been natural for him to desire that Mrs. Ryves should present to him, and she was therefore unable to estimate the points in respect to which his actual impression was irritating. She had indeed no adequate conception of the intellectual requirements of a young man in love. She couldn't tell him why their faultless friend was so isolated, so unrelated, so nervously, shrinkingly proud. On the other hand she could tell him (he knew it already) that she had passed many years of her life in the acquisition of accomplishments at a seat of learning no less remote than Boulogne, and that Miss Teagle had been intimately acquainted with the late Mr. Everard Ryves, who was a "most rising" young man in the city, not making any year less than his clear twelve hundred. "Now that he isn't there to make them, his mourning widow can't live as she had then, can she?" Mrs. Bundy asked.

Baron was not prepared to say that she could, but he thought of another way she might live as he sat, the next day, in the train which rattled him down to Dover. The place, as he approached it, seemed bright and breezy to him; his roamings had been neither far enough nor frequent enough to make the cockneyfied coast insipid. Mrs. Bundy had of course given him the address he needed, and on emerging from the station he was on the point of asking what direction he should take. His attention however at this moment was drawn away by the bustle of the departing boat. He had been long enough shut up in London to be conscious of refreshment in the mere act of turning his face to Paris. He wandered off to the pier in company with happier tourists and, leaning on a rail, watched enviously the preparation, the agitation of foreign travel. It was for some minutes a foretaste of adventure; but, ah, when was he to have the very draught? He turned away as he dropped this interrogative sigh, and in doing so perceived that in another part of the pier two ladies and a little boy were gathered with something of the same wistfulness. The little boy indeed happened to look round for a moment, upon which, with the keenness of the predatory age, he recognised in our young man a source of pleasures from which he lately had been weaned. He bounded forward with irrepressible cries of "Geegee!" and Peter lifted him aloft for an embrace. On putting him down the pilgrim from Jersey Villas stood confronted with a sensibly severe Miss Teagle, who had followed her little charge. "What's the matter with the old woman?" he asked himself as he offered her a hand which she treated as the merest detail. Whatever it was, it was (and very properly, on the part of a loyal *sui-vante*) the same complaint as that of her employer, to whom, from a distance, for Mrs. Ryves had not advanced an inch, he flourished his hat as she stood looking at him with a face that he imagined rather white. Mrs. Ryves's response to this salutation was to shift her position in such a manner as to appear again absorbed in the Calais boat. Peter Baron, however, kept hold of the child, whom Miss Teagle artfully endeavoured to wrest from him—a policy in which he was aided by Sidney's own rough but instinctive loyalty; and he was thankful for the happy effect of being dragged by his jubilant friend in the very direction in which he had tended for so many hours. Mrs. Ryves turned once more as he came near, and then, from the sweet, strained smile with which she asked him if he were on his way to France, he saw that if she had been angry at his having followed her she had quickly got over it.

“No, I’m not crossing; but it came over me that you might be, and that’s why I hurried down—to catch you before you were off.”

“Oh, we can’t go—more’s the pity; but why, if we could,” Mrs. Ryves inquired, “should you wish to prevent it?”

“Because I’ve something to ask you first, something that may take some time.” He saw now that her embarrassment had really not been resentful; it had been nervous, tremulous, as the emotion of an unexpected pleasure might have been. “That’s really why I determined last night, without asking your leave first to pay you this little visit—that and the intense desire for another bout of horse-play with Sidney. Oh, I’ve come to see you,” Peter Baron went on, “and I won’t make any secret of the fact that I expect you to resign yourself gracefully to the trial and give me all your time. The day’s lovely, and I’m ready to declare that the place is as good as the day. Let me drink deep of these things, drain the cup like a man who hasn’t been out of London for months and months. Let me walk with you and talk with you and lunch with you—I go back this afternoon. Give me all your hours in short, so that they may live in my memory as one of the sweetest occasions of life.”

The emission of steam from the French packet made such an uproar that Baron could breathe his passion into the young woman’s ear without scandalising the spectators; and the charm which little by little it scattered over his fleeting visit proved indeed to be the collective influence of the conditions he had put into words. “What is it you wish to ask me?” Mrs. Ryves demanded, as they stood there together; to which he replied that he would tell her all about it if she would send Miss Teagle off with Sidney. Miss Teagle, who was always anticipating her cue, had already begun ostentatiously to gaze at the distant shores of France and was easily enough induced to take an earlier start home and rise to the responsibility of stopping on her way to contend with the butcher. She had however to retire without Sidney, who clung to his recovered prey, so that the rest of the episode was seasoned, to Baron’s sense, by the importunate twitch of the child’s little, plump, cool hand. The friends wandered together with a conjugal air and Sidney not between them, hanging wistfully, first, over the lengthened picture of the Calais boat, till they could look after it, as it moved rumbling away, in a spell of silence which seemed to confess—especially when, a moment later, their eyes met—that it produced the same fond fancy in each. The presence of the boy moreover was no hindrance to their talking in a manner that they made believe was very frank. Peter Baron presently told his companion what it was he had taken a journey to ask, and he had time afterwards to get over his discomfiture at her appearance of having fancied it might be something greater. She seemed disappointed (but she was forgiving) on learning from him that he had only wished to know if she judged ferociously his not having complied with her request to respect certain seals.

“How ferociously do you suspect me of having judged it?” she inquired.

“Why, to the extent of leaving the house the next moment.”

They were still lingering on the great granite pier when he touched on this matter, and she sat down at the end while the breeze, warmed by the sunshine, ruffled the purple sea. She coloured a little and looked troubled, and after an instant she repeated interrogatively: “The next moment?”

“As soon as I told you what I had done. I was scrupulous about this, you will remember; I went straight downstairs to confess to you. You turned away from me, saying nothing; I couldn’t imagine—as I vow I can’t imagine now—why such a matter should appear so closely to touch you. I went out on some business and when I returned you had quitted the house. It had all the look of my having offended you, of your wishing to get away from

me. You didn't even give me time to tell you how it was that, in spite of your advice, I determined to see for myself what my discovery represented. You must do me justice and hear what determined me."

Mrs. Ryves got up from her seat and asked him, as a particular favour, not to allude again to his discovery. It was no concern of hers at all, and she had no warrant for prying into his secrets. She was very sorry to have been for a moment so absurd as to appear to do so, and she humbly begged his pardon for her meddling. Saying this she walked on with a charming colour in her cheek, while he laughed out, though he was really bewildered, at the endless capriciousness of women. Fortunately the incident didn't spoil the hour, in which there were other sources of satisfaction, and they took their course to her lodgings with such pleasant little pauses and excursions by the way as permitted her to show him the objects of interest at Dover. She let him stop at a wine-merchant's and buy a bottle for luncheon, of which, in its order, they partook, together with a pudding invented by Miss Teagle, which, as they hypocritically swallowed it, made them look at each other in an intimacy of indulgence. They came out again and, while Sidney grubbed in the gravel of the shore, sat selfishly on the Parade, to the disappointment of Miss Teagle, who had fixed her hopes on a fly and a ladylike visit to the castle. Baron had his eye on his watch—he had to think of his train and the dismal return and many other melancholy things; but the sea in the afternoon light was a more appealing picture; the wind had gone down, the Channel was crowded, the sails of the ships were white in the purple distance. The young man had asked his companion (he had asked her before) when she was to come back to Jersey Villas, and she had said that she should probably stay at Dover another week. It was dreadfully expensive, but it was doing the child all the good in the world, and if Miss Teagle could go up for some things she should probably be able to manage an extension. Earlier in the day she had said that she perhaps wouldn't return to Jersey Villas at all, or only return to wind up her connection with Mrs. Bundy. At another moment she had spoken of an early date, an immediate reoccupation of the wonderful parlours. Baron saw that she had no plan, no real reasons, that she was vague and, in secret, worried and nervous, waiting for something that didn't depend on herself. A silence of several minutes had fallen upon them while they watched the shining sails; to which Mrs. Ryves put an end by exclaiming abruptly, but without completing her sentence: "Oh, if you had come to tell me you had destroyed them—"

"Those terrible papers? I like the way you talk about 'destroying!' You don't even know what they are."

"I don't want to know; they put me into a state."

"What sort of a state?"

"I don't know; they haunt me."

"They haunted me; that was why, early one morning, suddenly, I couldn't keep my hands off them. I had told you I wouldn't touch them. I had deferred to your whim, your superstition (what is it?) but at last they got the better of me. I had lain awake all night threshing about, itching with curiosity. It made me ill; my own nerves (as I may say) were irritated, my capacity to work was gone. It had come over me in the small hours in the shape of an obsession, a fixed idea, that there was nothing in the ridiculous relics and that my exaggerated scruples were making a fool of me. It was ten to one they were rubbish, they were vain, they were empty; that they had been even a practical joke on the part of some weak-minded gentleman of leisure, the former possessor of the confounded davenport. The longer I hovered about them with such precautions the longer I was taken in, and the sooner I exposed their insignificance the sooner I should get back to my usual occupations. This

conviction made my hand so uncontrollable that that morning before breakfast I broke one of the seals. It took me but a few minutes to perceive that the contents were not rubbish; the little bundle contained old letters—very curious old letters.”

“I know—I know; ‘private and confidential.’ So you broke the other seals?” Mrs. Ryves looked at him with the strange apprehension he had seen in her eyes when she appeared at his door the moment after his discovery.

“You know, of course, because I told you an hour later, though you would let me tell you very little.”

Baron, as he met this queer gaze, smiled hard at her to prevent her guessing that he smarted with the fine reproach conveyed in the tone of her last words; but she appeared able to guess everything, for she reminded him that she had not had to wait that morning till he came downstairs to know what had happened above, but had shown him at the moment how she had been conscious of it an hour before, had passed on her side the same tormented night as he, and had had to exert extraordinary self-command not to rush up to his rooms while the study of the open packets was going on. “You’re so sensitively organised and you’ve such mysterious powers that you’re uncanny,” Baron declared.

“I feel what takes place at a distance; that’s all.”

“One would think somebody you liked was in danger.”

“I told you that that was what was present to me the day I came up to see you.”

“Oh, but you don’t like me so much as that,” Baron argued, laughing.

She hesitated. “No, I don’t know that I do.”

“It must be for someone else—the other person concerned. The other day, however, you wouldn’t let me tell you that person’s name.”

Mrs. Ryves, at this, rose quickly. “I don’t want to know it; it’s none of my business.”

“No, fortunately, I don’t think it is,” Baron rejoined, walking with her along the Parade. She had Sidney by the hand now, and the young man was on the other side of her. They moved toward the station—she had offered to go part of the way. “But with your miraculous gift it’s a wonder you haven’t divined.”

“I only divine what I want,” said Mrs. Ryves.

“That’s very convenient!” exclaimed Peter, to whom Sidney had presently come round again. “Only, being thus in the dark, it’s difficult to see your motive for wishing the papers destroyed.”

Mrs. Ryves meditated, looking fixedly at the ground. “I thought you might do it to oblige me.”

“Does it strike you that such an expectation, formed in such conditions, is reasonable?”

Mrs. Ryves stopped short, and this time she turned on him the clouded clearness of her eyes. “What do you mean to do with them?”

It was Peter Baron’s turn to meditate, which he did, on the empty asphalt of the Parade (the “season,” at Dover, was not yet), where their shadows were long in the afternoon light. He was under such a charm as he had never known, and he wanted immensely to be able to reply: “I’ll do anything you like if you’ll love me.” These words, however, would have represented a responsibility and have constituted what was vulgarly termed an offer. An offer of what? he quickly asked himself here, as he had already asked himself after making in

spirit other awkward dashes in the same direction—of what but his poverty, his obscurity, his attempts that had come to nothing, his abilities for which there was nothing to show? Mrs. Ryves was not exactly a success, but she was a greater success than Peter Baron. Poor as he was he hated the sordid (he knew she didn't love it), and he felt small for talking of marriage. Therefore he didn't put the question in the words it would have pleased him most to hear himself utter, but he compromised, with an angry young pang, and said to her: "What will you do for me if I put an end to them?"

She shook her head sadly—it was always her prettiest movement. "I can promise nothing—oh, no, I can't promise! We must part now," she added. "You'll miss your train."

He looked at his watch, taking the hand she held out to him. She drew it away quickly, and nothing then was left him, before hurrying to the station, but to catch up Sidney and squeeze him till he uttered a little shriek. On the way back to town the situation struck him as grotesque.

V.

It tormented him so the next morning that after threshing it out a little further he felt he had something of a grievance. Mrs. Ryves's intervention had made him acutely uncomfortable, for she had taken the attitude of exerting pressure without, it appeared, recognising on his part an equal right. She had imposed herself as an influence, yet she held herself aloof as a participant; there were things she looked to him to do for her, yet she could tell him of no good that would come to him from the doing. She should either have had less to say or have been willing to say more, and he asked himself why he should be the sport of her moods and her mysteries. He perceived her knack of punctual interference to be striking, but it was just this apparent infallibility that he resented. Why didn't she set up at once as a professional clairvoyant and eke out her little income more successfully? In purely private life such a gift was disconcerting; her divinations, her evasions disturbed at any rate his own tranquillity.

What disturbed it still further was that he received early in the day a visit from Mr. Locket, who, leaving him under no illusion as to the grounds of such an honour, remarked as soon as he had got into the room or rather while he still panted on the second flight and the smudged little slavey held open Baron's door, that he had taken up his young friend's invitation to look at Sir Dominick Ferrand's letters for himself. Peter drew them forth with a promptitude intended to show that he recognised the commercial character of the call and without attenuating the inconsequence of this departure from the last determination he had expressed to Mr. Locket. He showed his visitor the davenport and the hidden recess, and he smoked a cigarette, humming softly, with a sense of unwonted advantage and triumph, while the cautious editor sat silent and handled the papers. For all his caution Mr. Locket was unable to keep a warmer light out of his judicial eye as he said to Baron at last with sociable brevity—a tone that took many things for granted: "I'll take them home with me—they require much attention."

The young man looked at him a moment. "Do you think they're genuine?" He didn't mean to be mocking, he meant not to be; but the words sounded so to his own ear, and he could see that they produced that effect on Mr. Locket.

"I can't in the least determine. I shall have to go into them at my leisure, and that's why I ask you to lend them to me."

He had shuffled the papers together with a movement charged, while he spoke, with the air of being preliminary to that of thrusting them into a little black bag which he had brought with him and which, resting on the shelf of the davenport, struck Peter, who viewed it askance, as an object darkly editorial. It made our young man, somehow, suddenly apprehensive; the

advantage of which he had just been conscious was about to be transferred by a quiet process of legerdemain to a person who already had advantages enough. Baron, in short, felt a deep pang of anxiety; he couldn't have said why. Mr. Locket took decidedly too many things for granted, and the explorer of Sir Dominick Ferrand's irregularities remembered afresh how clear he had been after all about his indisposition to traffic in them. He asked his visitor to what end he wished to remove the letters, since on the one hand there was no question now of the article in the *Promiscuous* which was to reveal their existence, and on the other he himself, as their owner, had a thousand insurmountable scruples about putting them into circulation.

Mr. Locket looked over his spectacles as over the battlements of a fortress. "I'm not thinking of the end—I'm thinking of the beginning. A few glances have assured me that such documents ought to be submitted to some competent eye."

"Oh, you mustn't show them to anyone!" Baron exclaimed.

"You may think me presumptuous, but the eye that I venture to allude to in those terms—"

"Is the eye now fixed so terribly on *me*?" Peter laughingly interrupted. "Oh, it would be interesting, I confess, to know how they strike a man of your acuteness!" It had occurred to him that by such a concession he might endear himself to a literary umpire hitherto implacable. There would be no question of his publishing Sir Dominick Ferrand, but he might, in due acknowledgment of services rendered, form the habit of publishing Peter Baron. "How long would it be your idea to retain them?" he inquired, in a manner which, he immediately became aware, was what incited Mr. Locket to begin stuffing the papers into his bag. With this perception he came quickly closer and, laying his hand on the gaping receptacle, lightly drew its two lips together. In this way the two men stood for a few seconds, touching, almost in the attitude of combat, looking hard into each other's eyes.

The tension was quickly relieved however by the surprised flush which mantled on Mr. Locket's brow. He fell back a few steps with an injured dignity that might have been a protest against physical violence. "Really, my dear young sir, your attitude is tantamount to an accusation of intended bad faith. Do you think I want to steal the confounded things?" In reply to such a challenge Peter could only hastily declare that he was guilty of no discourteous suspicion—he only wanted a limit named, a pledge of every precaution against accident. Mr. Locket admitted the justice of the demand, assured him he would restore the property within three days, and completed, with Peter's assistance, his little arrangements for removing it discreetly. When he was ready, his treacherous reticule distended with its treasures, he gave a lingering look at the inscrutable davenport. "It's how they ever got into that thing that puzzles one's brain!"

"There was some concatenation of circumstances that would doubtless seem natural enough if it were explained, but that one would have to remount the stream of time to ascertain. To one course I have definitely made up my mind: not to make any statement or any inquiry at the shop. I simply accept the mystery," said Peter, rather grandly.

"That would be thought a cheap escape if you were to put it into a story," Mr. Locket smiled.

"Yes, I shouldn't offer the story to *you*. I shall be impatient till I see my papers again," the young man called out, as his visitor hurried downstairs.

That evening, by the last delivery, he received, under the Dover postmark, a letter that was not from Miss Teagle. It was a slightly confused but altogether friendly note, written that morning after breakfast, the ostensible purpose of which was to thank him for the amiability of his visit, to express regret at any appearance the writer might have had of meddling with

what didn't concern her, and to let him know that the evening before, after he had left her, she had in a moment of inspiration got hold of the tail of a really musical idea—a perfect accompaniment for the song he had so kindly given her. She had scrawled, as a specimen, a few bars at the end of her note, mystic, mocking musical signs which had no sense for her correspondent. The whole letter testified to a restless but rather pointless desire to remain in communication with him. In answering her, however, which he did that night before going to bed, it was on this bright possibility of their collaboration, its advantages for the future of each of them, that Baron principally expatiated. He spoke of this future with an eloquence of which he would have defended the sincerity, and drew of it a picture extravagantly rich. The next morning, as he was about to settle himself to tasks for some time terribly neglected, with a sense that after all it was rather a relief not to be sitting so close to Sir Dominick Ferrand, who had become dreadfully distracting; at the very moment at which he habitually addressed his preliminary invocation to the muse, he was agitated by the arrival of a telegram which proved to be an urgent request from Mr. Locket that he would immediately come down and see him. This represented, for poor Baron, whose funds were very low, another morning sacrificed, but somehow it didn't even occur to him that he might impose his own time upon the editor of the *Promiscuous*, the keeper of the keys of renown. He had some of the plasticity of the raw contributor. He gave the muse another holiday, feeling she was really ashamed to take it, and in course of time found himself in Mr. Locket's own chair at Mr. Locket's own table—so much nobler an expanse than the slippery slope of the davenport—considering with quick intensity, in the white flash of certain words just brought out by his host, the quantity of happiness, of emancipation that might reside in a hundred pounds.

Yes, that was what it meant: Mr. Locket, in the twenty-four hours, had discovered so much in Sir Dominick's literary remains that his visitor found him primed with an offer. A hundred pounds would be paid him that day, that minute, and no questions would be either asked or answered. "I take all the risks, I take all the risks," the editor of the *Promiscuous* repeated. The letters were out on the table, Mr. Locket was on the hearthrug, like an orator on a platform, and Peter, under the influence of his sudden ultimatum, had dropped, rather weakly, into the seat which happened to be nearest and which, as he became conscious it moved on a pivot, he whirled round so as to enable himself to look at his tempter with an eye intended to be cold. What surprised him most was to find Mr. Locket taking exactly the line about the expediency of publication which he would have expected Mr. Locket not to take. "Hush it all up; a barren scandal, an offence that can't be remedied, is the thing in the world that least justifies an airing—" some such line as that was the line he would have thought natural to a man whose life was spent in weighing questions of propriety and who had only the other day objected, in the light of this virtue, to a work of the most disinterested art. But the author of that incorruptible masterpiece had put his finger on the place in saying to his interlocutor on the occasion of his last visit that, if given to the world in the pages of the *Promiscuous*, Sir Dominick's aberrations would sell the edition. It was not necessary for Mr. Locket to reiterate to his young friend his phrase about their making a sensation. If he wished to purchase the "rights," as theatrical people said, it was not to protect a celebrated name or to lock them up in a cupboard. That formula of Baron's covered all the ground, and one edition was a low estimate of the probable performance of the magazine.

Peter left the letters behind him and, on withdrawing from the editorial presence, took a long walk on the Embankment. His impressions were at war with each other—he was flurried by possibilities of which he yet denied the existence. He had consented to trust Mr. Locket with the papers a day or two longer, till he should have thought out the terms on which he might—in the event of certain occurrences—be induced to dispose of them. A hundred pounds were not this gentleman's last word, nor perhaps was mere unreasoning intractability Peter's

own. He sighed as he took no note of the pictures made by barges—sighed because it all might mean money. He needed money bitterly; he owed it in disquieting quarters. Mr. Locket had put it before him that he had a high responsibility—that he might vindicate the disfigured truth, contribute a chapter to the history of England. “You haven’t a right to suppress such momentous facts,” the hungry little editor had declared, thinking how the series (he would spread it into three numbers) would be the talk of the town. If Peter had money he might treat himself to ardour, to bliss. Mr. Locket had said, no doubt justly enough, that there were ever so many questions one would have to meet should one venture to play so daring a game. These questions, embarrassments, dangers—the danger, for instance, of the cropping-up of some lurking litigious relative—he would take over unreservedly and bear the brunt of dealing with. It was to be remembered that the papers were discredited, vitiated by their childish pedigree; such a preposterous origin, suggesting, as he had hinted before, the feeble ingenuity of a third-rate novelist, was a thing he should have to place himself at the positive disadvantage of being silent about. He would rather give no account of the matter at all than expose himself to the ridicule that such a story would infallibly excite. Couldn’t one see them in advance, the clever, taunting things the daily and weekly papers would say? Peter Baron had his guileless side, but he felt, as he worried with a stick that betrayed him the granite parapets of the Thames, that he was not such a fool as not to know how Mr. Locket would “work” the mystery of his marvellous find. Nothing could help it on better with the public than the impenetrability of the secret attached to it. If Mr. Locket should only be able to kick up dust enough over the circumstances that had guided his hand his fortune would literally be made. Peter thought a hundred pounds a low bid, yet he wondered how the Promiscuous could bring itself to offer such a sum—so large it loomed in the light of literary remuneration as hitherto revealed to our young man. The explanation of this anomaly was of course that the editor shrewdly saw a dozen ways of getting his money back. There would be in the “sensation,” at a later stage, the making of a book in large type—the book of the hour; and the profits of this scandalous volume or, if one preferred the name, this reconstruction, before an impartial posterity, of a great historical humbug, the sum “down,” in other words, that any lively publisher would give for it, figured vividly in Mr. Locket’s calculations. It was therefore altogether an opportunity of dealing at first hand with the lively publisher that Peter was invited to forego. Peter gave a masterful laugh, rejoicing in his heart that, on the spot, in the *repaire* he had lately quitted, he had not been tempted by a figure that would have approximately represented the value of his property. It was a good job, he mentally added as he turned his face homeward, that there was so little likelihood of his having to struggle with that particular pressure.

VI.

When, half an hour later, he approached Jersey Villas, he noticed that the house-door was open; then, as he reached the gate, saw it make a frame for an unexpected presence. Mrs. Ryves, in her bonnet and jacket, looked out from it as if she were expecting something—as if she had been passing to and fro to watch. Yet when he had expressed to her that it was a delightful welcome she replied that she had only thought there might possibly be a cab in sight. He offered to go and look for one, upon which it appeared that after all she was not, as yet at least, in need. He went back with her into her sitting-room, where she let him know that within a couple of days she had seen clearer what was best; she had determined to quit Jersey Villas and had come up to take away her things, which she had just been packing and getting together.

“I wrote you last night a charming letter in answer to yours,” Baron said. “You didn’t mention in yours that you were coming up.”

“It wasn’t your answer that brought me. It hadn’t arrived when I came away.”

“You’ll see when you get back that my letter is charming.”

“I daresay.” Baron had observed that the room was not, as she had intimated, in confusion—Mrs. Ryves’s preparations for departure were not striking. She saw him look round and, standing in front of the fireless grate with her hands behind her, she suddenly asked: “Where have you come from now?”

“From an interview with a literary friend.”

“What are you concocting between you?”

“Nothing at all. We’ve fallen out—we don’t agree.”

“Is he a publisher?”

“He’s an editor.”

“Well, I’m glad you don’t agree. I don’t know what he wants, but, whatever it is, don’t do it.”

“He must do what *I* want!” said Baron.

“And what’s that?”

“Oh, I’ll tell you when he has done it!” Baron begged her to let him hear the “musical idea” she had mentioned in her letter; on which she took off her hat and jacket and, seating herself at her piano, gave him, with a sentiment of which the very first notes thrilled him, the accompaniment of his song. She phrased the words with her sketchy sweetness, and he sat there as if he had been held in a velvet vise, throbbing with the emotion, irrecoverable ever after in its freshness, of the young artist in the presence for the first time of “production”—the proofs of his book, the hanging of his picture, the rehearsal of his play. When she had finished he asked again for the same delight, and then for more music and for more; it did him such a world of good, kept him quiet and safe, smoothed out the creases of his spirit. She dropped her own experiments and gave him immortal things, and he lounged there, pacified and charmed, feeling the mean little room grow large and vague and happy possibilities come back. Abruptly, at the piano, she called out to him: “Those papers of yours—the letters you found—are not in the house?”

“No, they’re not in the house.”

“I was sure of it! No matter—it’s all right!” she added. She herself was pacified—trouble was a false note. Later he was on the point of asking her how she knew the objects she had mentioned were not in the house; but he let it pass. The subject was a profitless riddle—a puzzle that grew grotesquely bigger, like some monstrosity seen in the darkness, as one opened one’s eyes to it. He closed his eyes—he wanted another vision. Besides, she had shown him that she had extraordinary senses—her explanation would have been stranger than the fact. Moreover they had other things to talk about, in particular the question of her putting off her return to Dover till the morrow and dispensing meanwhile with the valuable protection of Sidney. This was indeed but another face of the question of her dining with him somewhere that evening (where else should she dine?)—accompanying him, for instance, just for an hour of Bohemia, in their deadly respectable lives, to a jolly little place in Soho. Mrs. Ryves declined to have her life abused, but in fact, at the proper moment, at the jolly little place, to which she did accompany him—it dealt in macaroni and Chianti—the pair put their elbows on the crumpled cloth and, face to face, with their little emptied coffee-cups pushed away and the young man’s cigarette lighted by her command, became increasingly

confidential. They went afterwards to the theatre, in cheap places, and came home in “busses” and under umbrellas.

On the way back Peter Baron turned something over in his mind as he had never turned anything before; it was the question of whether, at the end, she would let him come into her sitting-room for five minutes. He felt on this point a passion of suspense and impatience, and yet for what would it be but to tell her how poor he was? This was literally the moment to say it, so supremely depleted had the hour of Bohemia left him. Even Bohemia was too expensive, and yet in the course of the day his whole temper on the subject of certain fitnesses had changed. At Jersey Villas (it was near midnight, and Mrs. Ryves, scratching a light for her glimmering taper, had said: “Oh, yes, come in for a minute if you like!”), in her precarious parlour, which was indeed, after the brilliances of the evening, a return to ugliness and truth, she let him stand while he explained that he had certainly everything in the way of fame and fortune still to gain, but that youth and love and faith and energy—to say nothing of her supreme dearness—were all on his side. Why, if one’s beginnings were rough, should one add to the hardness of the conditions by giving up the dream which, if she would only hear him out, would make just the blessed difference? Whether Mrs. Ryves heard him out or not is a circumstance as to which this chronicle happens to be silent; but after he had got possession of both her hands and breathed into her face for a moment all the intensity of his tenderness—in the relief and joy of utterance he felt it carry him like a rising flood—she checked him with better reasons, with a cold, sweet afterthought in which he felt there was something deep. Her procrastinating head-shake was prettier than ever, yet it had never meant so many fears and pains—impossibilities and memories, independences and pieties, and a sort of uncomplaining ache for the ruin of a friendship that had been happy. She had liked him—if she hadn’t she wouldn’t have let him think so!—but she protested that she had not, in the odious vulgar sense, “encouraged” him. Moreover she couldn’t talk of such things in that place, at that hour, and she begged him not to make her regret her good-nature in staying over. There were peculiarities in her position, considerations insurmountable. She got rid of him with kind and confused words, and afterwards, in the dull, humiliated night, he felt that he had been put in his place. Women in her situation, women who after having really loved and lost, usually lived on into the new dawns in which old ghosts steal away. But there was something in his whimsical neighbour that struck him as terribly invulnerable.

VII.

“I’ve had time to look a little further into what we’re prepared to do, and I find the case is one in which I should consider the advisability of going to an extreme length,” said Mr. Locket. Jersey Villas the next morning had had the privilege of again receiving the editor of the *Promiscuous*, and he sat once more at the davenport, where the bone of contention, in the shape of a large, loose heap of papers that showed how much they had been handled, was placed well in view. “We shall see our way to offering you three hundred, but we shouldn’t, I must positively assure you, see it a single step further.”

Peter Baron, in his dressing-gown and slippers, with his hands in his pockets, crept softly about the room, repeating, below his breath and with inflections that for his own sake he endeavoured to make humorous: “Three hundred—three hundred.” His state of mind was far from hilarious, for he felt poor and sore and disappointed; but he wanted to prove to himself that he was gallant—was made, in general and in particular, of undiscourageable stuff. The first thing he had been aware of on stepping into his front room was that a four-wheeled cab, with Mrs. Ryves’s luggage upon it, stood at the door of No. 3. Permitting himself, behind his curtain, a pardonable peep, he saw the mistress of his thoughts come out of the house, attended by Mrs. Bundy, and take her place in the modest vehicle. After this his eyes rested

for a long time on the sprigged cotton back of the landlady, who kept bobbing at the window of the cab an endlessly moralising old head. Mrs. Ryves had really taken flight—he had made Jersey Villas impossible for her—but Mrs. Bundy, with a magnanimity unprecedented in the profession, seemed to express a belief in the purity of her motives. Baron felt that his own separation had been, for the present at least, effected; every instinct of delicacy prompted him to stand back.

Mr. Locket talked a long time, and Peter Baron listened and waited. He reflected that his willingness to listen would probably excite hopes in his visitor—hopes which he himself was ready to contemplate without a scruple. He felt no pity for Mr. Locket and had no consideration for his suspense or for his possible illusions; he only felt sick and forsaken and in want of comfort and of money. Yet it was a kind of outrage to his dignity to have the knife held to his throat, and he was irritated above all by the ground on which Mr. Locket put the question—the ground of a service rendered to historical truth. It might be—he wasn't clear; it might be—the question was deep, too deep, probably, for his wisdom; at any rate he had to control himself not to interrupt angrily such dry, interested palaver, the false voice of commerce and of cant. He stared tragically out of the window and saw the stupid rain begin to fall; the day was duller even than his own soul, and Jersey Villas looked so sordidly hideous that it was no wonder Mrs. Ryves couldn't endure them. Hideous as they were he should have to tell Mrs. Bundy in the course of the day that he was obliged to seek humbler quarters. Suddenly he interrupted Mr. Locket; he observed to him: "I take it that if I should make you this concession the hospitality of the Promiscuous would be by that very fact unrestrictedly secured to me."

Mr. Locket stared. "Hospitality—secured?" He thumbed the proposition as if it were a hard peach.

"I mean that of course you wouldn't—in courtsey, in gratitude—keep on declining my things."

"I should give them my best attention—as I've always done in the past."

Peter Baron hesitated. It was a case in which there would have seemed to be some chance for the ideally shrewd aspirant in such an advantage as he possessed; but after a moment the blood rushed into his face with the shame of the idea of pleading for his productions in the name of anything but their merit. It was as if he had stupidly uttered evil of them. Nevertheless he added the interrogation:

"Would you for instance publish my little story?"

"The one I read (and objected to some features of) the other day? Do you mean—a—with the alteration?" Mr. Locket continued.

"Oh, no, I mean utterly without it. The pages you want altered contain, as I explained to you very lucidly, I think, the very *raison d'être* of the work, and it would therefore, it seems to me, be an imbecility of the first magnitude to cancel them." Peter had really renounced all hope that his critic would understand what he meant, but, under favour of circumstances, he couldn't forbear to taste the luxury, which probably never again would come within his reach, of being really plain, for one wild moment, with an editor.

Mr. Locket gave a constrained smile. "Think of the scandal, Mr. Baron."

"But isn't this other scandal just what you're going in for?"

"It will be a great public service."

“You mean it will be a big scandal, whereas my poor story would be a very small one, and that it’s only out of a big one that money’s to be made.”

Mr. Locket got up—he too had his dignity to vindicate. “Such a sum as I offer you ought really to be an offset against all claims.”

“Very good—I don’t mean to make any, since you don’t really care for what I write. I take note of your offer,” Peter pursued, “and I engage to give you to-night (in a few words left by my own hand at your house) my absolutely definite and final reply.”

Mr. Locket’s movements, as he hovered near the relics of the eminent statesman, were those of some feathered parent fluttering over a threatened nest. If he had brought his huddled brood back with him this morning it was because he had felt sure enough of closing the bargain to be able to be graceful. He kept a glittering eye on the papers and remarked that he was afraid that before leaving them he must elicit some assurance that in the meanwhile Peter would not place them in any other hands. Peter, at this, gave a laugh of harsher cadence than he intended, asking, justly enough, on what privilege his visitor rested such a demand and why he himself was disqualified from offering his wares to the highest bidder. “Surely you wouldn’t hawk such things about?” cried Mr. Locket; but before Baron had time to retort cynically he added: “I’ll publish your little story.”

“Oh, thank you!”

“I’ll publish anything you’ll send me,” Mr. Locket continued, as he went out. Peter had before this virtually given his word that for the letters he would treat only with the Promiscuous.

The young man passed, during a portion of the rest of the day, the strangest hours of his life. Yet he thought of them afterwards not as a phase of temptation, though they had been full of the emotion that accompanies an intense vision of alternatives. The struggle was already over; it seemed to him that, poor as he was, he was not poor enough to take Mr. Locket’s money. He looked at the opposed courses with the self-possession of a man who has chosen, but this self-possession was in itself the most exquisite of excitements. It was really a high revulsion and a sort of noble pity. He seemed indeed to have his finger upon the pulse of history and to be in the secret of the gods. He had them all in his hand, the tablets and the scales and the torch. He couldn’t keep a character together, but he might easily pull one to pieces. That would be “creative work” of a kind—he could reconstruct the character less pleasingly, could show an unknown side of it. Mr. Locket had had a good deal to say about responsibility; and responsibility in truth sat there with him all the morning, while he revolved in his narrow cage and, watching the crude spring rain on the windows, thought of the dismalness to which, at Dover, Mrs. Ryves was going back. This influence took in fact the form, put on the physiognomy of poor Sir Dominick Ferrand; he was at present as perceptible in it, as coldly and strangely personal, as if he had been a haunting ghost and had risen beside his own old hearthstone. Our friend was accustomed to his company and indeed had spent so many hours in it of late, following him up at the museum and comparing his different portraits, engravings and lithographs, in which there seemed to be conscious, pleading eyes for the betrayer, that their queer intimacy had grown as close as an embrace. Sir Dominick was very dumb, but he was terrible in his dependence, and Peter would not have encouraged him by so much curiosity nor reassured him by so much deference had it not been for the young man’s complete acceptance of the impossibility of getting out of a tight place by exposing an individual. It didn’t matter that the individual was dead; it didn’t matter that he was dishonest. Peter felt him sufficiently alive to suffer; he perceived the rectification of history so conscientiously desired by Mr. Locket to be somehow

for himself not an imperative task. It had come over him too definitely that in a case where one's success was to hinge upon an act of extradition it would minister most to an easy conscience to let the success go. No, no—even should he be starving he couldn't make money out of Sir Dominick's disgrace. He was almost surprised at the violence of the horror with which, as he shuffled mournfully about, the idea of any such profit inspired him. What was Sir Dominick to him after all? He wished he had never come across him.

In one of his brooding pauses at the window—the window out of which never again apparently should he see Mrs. Ryves glide across the little garden with the step for which he had liked her from the first—he became aware that the rain was about to intermit and the sun to make some grudging amends. This was a sign that he might go out; he had a vague perception that there were things to be done. He had work to look for, and a cheaper lodging, and a new idea (every idea he had ever cherished had left him), in addition to which the promised little word was to be dropped at Mr. Locket's door. He looked at his watch and was surprised at the hour, for he had nothing but a heartache to show for so much time. He would have to dress quickly, but as he passed to his bedroom his eye was caught by the little pyramid of letters which Mr. Locket had constructed on his davenport. They startled him and, staring at them, he stopped for an instant, half-amused, half-annoyed at their being still in existence. He had so completely destroyed them in spirit that he had taken the act for granted, and he was now reminded of the orderly stages of which an intention must consist to be sincere. Baron went at the papers with all his sincerity, and at his empty grate (where there lately had been no fire and he had only to remove a horrible ornament of tissue-paper dear to Mrs. Bundy) he burned the collection with infinite method. It made him feel happier to watch the worst pages turn to illegible ashes—if happiness be the right word to apply to his sense, in the process, of something so crisp and crackling that it suggested the death-rustle of bank-notes.

When ten minutes later he came back into his sitting-room, he seemed to himself oddly, unexpectedly in the presence of a bigger view. It was as if some interfering mass had been so displaced that he could see more sky and more country. Yet the opposite houses were naturally still there, and if the grimy little place looked lighter it was doubtless only because the rain had indeed stopped and the sun was pouring in. Peter went to the window to open it to the altered air, and in doing so beheld at the garden gate the humble “growler” in which a few hours before he had seen Mrs. Ryves take her departure. It was unmistakable—he remembered the knock-kneed white horse; but this made the fact that his friend's luggage no longer surmounted it only the more mystifying. Perhaps the cabman had already removed the luggage—he was now on his box smoking the short pipe that derived relish from inaction paid for. As Peter turned into the room again his ears caught a knock at his own door, a knock explained, as soon as he had responded, by the hard breathing of Mrs. Bundy.

“Please, sir, it's to say she've come back.”

“What has she come back for?” Baron's question sounded ungracious, but his heartache had given another throb, and he felt a dread of another wound. It was like a practical joke.

“I think it's for you, sir,” said Mrs. Bundy. “She'll see you for a moment, if you'll be so good, in the old place.”

Peter followed his hostess downstairs, and Mrs. Bundy ushered him, with her company flourish, into the apartment she had fondly designated.

“I went away this morning, and I've only returned for an instant,” said Mrs. Ryves, as soon as Mrs. Bundy had closed the door. He saw that she was different now; something had happened that had made her indulgent.

“Have you been all the way to Dover and back?”

“No, but I’ve been to Victoria. I’ve left my luggage there—I’ve been driving about.”

“I hope you’ve enjoyed it.”

“Very much. I’ve been to see Mr. Morrish.”

“Mr. Morrish?”

“The musical publisher. I showed him our song. I played it for him, and he’s delighted with it. He declares it’s just the thing. He has given me fifty pounds. I think he believes in us,” Mrs. Ryves went on, while Baron stared at the wonder—too sweet to be safe, it seemed to him as yet—of her standing there again before him and speaking of what they had in common. “Fifty pounds! fifty pounds!” she exclaimed, fluttering at him her happy cheque. She had come back, the first thing, to tell him, and of course his share of the money would be the half. She was rosy, jubilant, natural, she chattered like a happy woman. She said they must do more, ever so much more. Mr. Morrish had practically promised he would take anything that was as good as that. She had kept her cab because she was going to Dover; she couldn’t leave the others alone. It was a vehicle infirm and inert, but Baron, after a little, appreciated its pace, for she had consented to his getting in with her and driving, this time in earnest, to Victoria. She had only come to tell him the good news—she repeated this assurance more than once. They talked of it so profoundly that it drove everything else for the time out of his head—his duty to Mr. Locket, the remarkable sacrifice he had just achieved, and even the odd coincidence, matching with the oddity of all the others, of her having reverted to the house again, as if with one of her famous divinations, at the very moment the trumpery papers, the origin really of their intimacy, had ceased to exist. But she, on her side, also had evidently forgotten the trumpery papers: she never mentioned them again, and Peter Baron never boasted of what he had done with them. He was silent for a while, from curiosity to see if her fine nerves had really given her a hint; and then later, when it came to be a question of his permanent attitude, he was silent, prodigiously, religiously, tremulously silent, in consequence of an extraordinary conversation that he had with her.

This conversation took place at Dover, when he went down to give her the money for which, at Mr. Morrish’s bank, he had exchanged the cheque she had left with him. That cheque, or rather certain things it represented, had made somehow all the difference in their relations. The difference was huge, and Baron could think of nothing but this confirmed vision of their being able to work fruitfully together that would account for so rapid a change. She didn’t talk of impossibilities now—she didn’t seem to want to stop him off; only when, the day following his arrival at Dover with the fifty pounds (he had after all to agree to share them with her—he couldn’t expect her to take a present of money from him), he returned to the question over which they had had their little scene the night they dined together—on this occasion (he had brought a portmanteau and he was staying) she mentioned that there was something very particular she had it on her conscience to tell him before letting him commit himself. There dawned in her face as she approached the subject a light of warning that frightened him; it was charged with something so strange that for an instant he held his breath. This flash of ugly possibilities passed however, and it was with the gesture of taking still tenderer possession of her, checked indeed by the grave, important way she held up a finger, that he answered: “Tell me everything—tell me!”

“You must know what I am—who I am; you must know especially what I’m not! There’s a name for it, a hideous, cruel name. It’s not my fault! Others have known, I’ve had to speak of it—it has made a great difference in my life. Surely you must have guessed!” she went on, with the thinnest quaver of irony, letting him now take her hand, which felt as cold as her

hard duty. “Don’t you see I’ve no belongings, no relations, no friends, nothing at all, in all the world, of my own? I was only a poor girl.”

“A poor girl?” Baron was mystified, touched, distressed, piecing dimly together what she meant, but feeling, in a great surge of pity, that it was only something more to love her for.

“My mother—my poor mother,” said Mrs. Ryves.

She paused with this, and through gathering tears her eyes met his as if to plead with him to understand. He understood, and drew her closer, but she kept herself free still, to continue: “She was a poor girl—she was only a governess; she was alone, she thought he loved her. He did—I think it was the only happiness she ever knew. But she died of it.”

“Oh, I’m so glad you tell me—it’s so grand of you!” Baron murmured. “Then—your father?” He hesitated, as if with his hands on old wounds.

“He had his own troubles, but he was kind to her. It was all misery and folly—he was married. He wasn’t happy—there were good reasons, I believe, for that. I know it from letters, I know it from a person who’s dead. Everyone is dead now—it’s too far off. That’s the only good thing. He was very kind to me; I remember him, though I didn’t know then, as a little girl, who he was. He put me with some very good people—he did what he could for me. I think, later, his wife knew—a lady who came to see me once after his death. I was a very little girl, but I remember many things. What he could he did—something that helped me afterwards, something that helps me now. I think of him with a strange pity—I *see* him!” said Mrs. Ryves, with the faint past in her eyes. “You mustn’t say anything against him,” she added, gently and gravely.

“Never—never; for he has only made it more of a rapture to care for you.”

“You must wait, you must think; we must wait together,” she went on. “You can’t tell, and you must give me time. Now that you know, it’s all right; but you had to know. Doesn’t it make us better friends?” asked Mrs. Ryves, with a tired smile which had the effect of putting the whole story further and further away. The next moment, however, she added quickly, as if with the sense that it couldn’t be far enough: “You don’t know, you can’t judge, you must let it settle. Think of it, think of it; oh you will, and leave it so. I must have time myself, oh I must! Yes, you must believe me.”

She turned away from him, and he remained looking at her a moment. “Ah, how I shall work for you!” he exclaimed.

“You must work for yourself; I’ll help you.” Her eyes had met his eyes again, and she added, hesitating, thinking: “You had better know, perhaps, who he was.”

Baron shook his head, smiling confidently. “I don’t care a straw.”

“I do—a little. He was a great man.”

“There must indeed have been some good in him.”

“He was a high celebrity. You’ve often heard of him.”

Baron wondered an instant. “I’ve no doubt you’re a princess!” he said with a laugh. She made him nervous.

“I’m not ashamed of him. He was Sir Dominick Ferrand.”

Baron saw in her face, in a few seconds, that she had seen something in his. He knew that he stared, then turned pale; it had the effect of a powerful shock. He was cold for an instant, as he had just found her, with the sense of danger, the confused horror of having dealt a

blow. But the blood rushed back to its courses with his still quicker consciousness of safety, and he could make out, as he recovered his balance, that his emotion struck her simply as a violent surprise. He gave a muffled murmur: "Ah, it's you, my beloved!" which lost itself as he drew her close and held her long, in the intensity of his embrace and the wonder of his escape. It took more than a minute for him to say over to himself often enough, with his hidden face: "Ah, she must never, never know!"

She never knew; she only learned, when she asked him casually, that he had in fact destroyed the old documents she had had such a comic caprice about. The sensibility, the curiosity they had had the queer privilege of exciting in her had lapsed with the event as irresponsibly as they had arisen, and she appeared to have forgotten, or rather to attribute now to other causes, the agitation and several of the odd incidents that accompanied them. They naturally gave Peter Baron rather more to think about, much food, indeed, for clandestine meditation, some of which, in spite of the pains he took not to be caught, was noted by his friend and interpreted, to his knowledge, as depression produced by the long probation she succeeded in imposing on him. He was more patient than she could guess, with all her guessing, for if he was put to the proof she herself was not left undissected. It came back to him again and again that if the documents he had burned proved anything they proved that Sir Dominick Ferrand's human errors were not all of one order. The woman he loved was the daughter of her father, he couldn't get over that. What was more to the point was that as he came to know her better and better—for they did work together under Mr. Morrish's protection—his affection was a quantity still less to be neglected. He sometimes wondered, in the light of her general straightness (their marriage had brought out even more than he believed there was of it) whether the relics in the davenport were genuine. That piece of furniture is still almost as useful to him as Mr. Morrish's patronage. There is a tremendous run, as this gentlemen calls it, on several of their songs. Baron nevertheless still tries his hand also at prose, and his offerings are now not always declined by the magazines. But he has never approached the *Promiscuous* again. This periodical published in due course a highly eulogistic study of the remarkable career of Sir Dominick Ferrand.

Greville Fane

Coming in to dress for dinner, I found a telegram: "Mrs. Stormer dying; can you give us half a column for to-morrow evening? Let her off easy, but not too easy." I was late; I was in a hurry; I had very little time to think, but at a venture I dispatched a reply: "Will do what I can." It was not till I had dressed and was rolling away to dinner that, in the hansom, I bethought myself of the difficulty of the condition attached. The difficulty was not of course in letting her off easy but in qualifying that indulgence. "I simply won't qualify it," I said to myself. I didn't admire her, but I liked her, and I had known her so long that I almost felt heartless in sitting down at such an hour to a feast of indifference. I must have seemed abstracted, for the early years of my acquaintance with her came back to me. I spoke of her to the lady I had taken down, but the lady I had taken down had never heard of Greville Fane. I tried my other neighbour, who pronounced her books "too vile." I had never thought them very good, but I should let her off easier than that.

I came away early, for the express purpose of driving to ask about her. The journey took time, for she lived in the north-west district, in the neighbourhood of Primrose Hill. My apprehension that I should be too late was justified in a fuller sense than I had attached to it—I had only feared that the house would be shut up. There were lights in the windows, and the temperate tinkle of my bell brought a servant immediately to the door, but poor Mrs. Stormer had passed into a state in which the resonance of no earthly knocker was to be feared. A lady, in the hall, hovering behind the servant, came forward when she heard my voice. I recognised Lady Luard, but she had mistaken me for the doctor.

"Excuse my appearing at such an hour," I said; "it was the first possible moment after I heard."

"It's all over," Lady Luard replied. "Dearest mamma!"

She stood there under the lamp with her eyes on me; she was very tall, very stiff, very cold, and always looked as if these things, and some others beside, in her dress, her manner and even her name, were an implication that she was very admirable. I had never been able to follow the argument, but that is a detail. I expressed briefly and frankly what I felt, while the little mottled maidservant flattened herself against the wall of the narrow passage and tried to look detached without looking indifferent. It was not a moment to make a visit, and I was on the point of retreating when Lady Luard arrested me with a queer, casual, drawling "Would you—a—would you, perhaps, be *writing* something?" I felt for the instant like an interviewer, which I was not. But I pleaded guilty to this intention, on which she rejoined: "I'm so very glad—but I think my brother would like to see you." I detested her brother, but it wasn't an occasion to act this out; so I suffered myself to be inducted, to my surprise, into a small back room which I immediately recognised as the scene, during the later years, of Mrs. Stormer's imperturbable industry. Her table was there, the battered and blotted accessory to innumerable literary lapses, with its contracted space for the arms (she wrote only from the elbow down) and the confusion of scrappy, scribbled sheets which had already become literary remains. Leolin was also there, smoking a cigarette before the fire and looking impudent even in his grief, sincere as it well might have been.

To meet him, to greet him, I had to make a sharp effort; for the air that he wore to me as he stood before me was quite that of his mother's murderer. She lay silent for ever upstairs—as dead as an unsuccessful book, and his swaggering erectness was a kind of symbol of his having killed her. I wondered if he had already, with his sister, been calculating what they

could get for the poor papers on the table; but I had not long to wait to learn, for in reply to the scanty words of sympathy I addressed him he puffed out: "It's miserable, miserable, yes; but she has left three books complete." His words had the oddest effect; they converted the cramped little room into a seat of trade and made the "book" wonderfully feasible. He would certainly get all that could be got for the three. Lady Luard explained to me that her husband had been with them but had had to go down to the House. To her brother she explained that I was going to write something, and to me again she made it clear that she hoped I would "do mamma justice." She added that she didn't think this had ever been done. She said to her brother: "Don't you think there are some things he ought thoroughly to understand?" and on his instantly exclaiming "Oh, thoroughly—thoroughly!" she went on, rather austere: "I mean about mamma's birth."

"Yes, and her connections," Leolin added.

I professed every willingness, and for five minutes I listened, but it would be too much to say that I understood. I don't even now, but it is not important. My vision was of other matters than those they put before me, and while they desired there should be no mistake about their ancestors I became more and more lucid about themselves. I got away as soon as possible, and walked home through the great dusky, empty London—the best of all conditions for thought. By the time I reached my door my little article was practically composed—ready to be transferred on the morrow from the polished plate of fancy. I believe it attracted some notice, was thought "graceful" and was said to be by some one else. I had to be pointed without being lively, and it took some tact. But what I said was much less interesting than what I thought—especially during the half-hour I spent in my armchair by the fire, smoking the cigar I always light before going to bed. I went to sleep there, I believe; but I continued to moralise about Greville Fane. I am reluctant to lose that retrospect altogether, and this is a dim little memory of it, a document not to "serve." The dear woman had written a hundred stories, but none so curious as her own.

When first I knew her she had published half-a-dozen fictions, and I believe I had also perpetrated a novel. She was more than a dozen years older than I, but she was a person who always acknowledged her relativity. It was not so very long ago, but in London, amid the big waves of the present, even a near horizon gets hidden. I met her at some dinner and took her down, rather flattered at offering my arm to a celebrity. She didn't look like one, with her matronly, mild, inanimate face, but I supposed her greatness would come out in her conversation. I gave it all the opportunities I could, but I was not disappointed when I found her only a dull, kind woman. This was why I liked her—she rested me so from literature. To myself literature was an irritation, a torment; but Greville Fane slumbered in the intellectual part of it like a Creole in a hammock. She was not a woman of genius, but her faculty was so special, so much a gift out of hand, that I have often wondered why she fell below that distinction. This was doubtless because the transaction, in her case, had remained incomplete; genius always pays for the gift, feels the debt, and she was placidly unconscious of obligation. She could invent stories by the yard, but she couldn't write a page of English. She went down to her grave without suspecting that though she had contributed volumes to the diversion of her contemporaries she had not contributed a sentence to the language. This had not prevented bushels of criticism from being heaped upon her head; she was worth a couple of columns any day to the weekly papers, in which it was shown that her pictures of life were dreadful but her style really charming. She asked me to come and see her, and I went. She lived then in Montpellier Square; which helped me to see how dissociated her imagination was from her character.

An industrious widow, devoted to her daily stint, to meeting the butcher and baker and making a home for her son and daughter, from the moment she took her pen in her hand she became a creature of passion. She thought the English novel deplorably wanting in that element, and the task she had cut out for herself was to supply the deficiency. Passion in high life was the general formula of this work, for her imagination was at home only in the most exalted circles. She adored, in truth, the aristocracy, and they constituted for her the romance of the world or, what is more to the point, the prime material of fiction. Their beauty and luxury, their loves and revenges, their temptations and surrenders, their immoralities and diamonds were as familiar to her as the blots on her writing-table. She was not a belated producer of the old fashionable novel, she had a cleverness and a modernness of her own, she had freshened up the fly-blown tinsel. She turned off plots by the hundred and—so far as her flying quill could convey her—was perpetually going abroad. Her types, her illustrations, her tone were nothing if not cosmopolitan. She recognised nothing less provincial than European society, and her fine folk knew each other and made love to each other from Doncaster to Bucharest. She had an idea that she resembled Balzac, and her favourite historical characters were Lucien de Rubempré and the Vidame de Pamiers. I must add that when I once asked her who the latter personage was she was unable to tell me. She was very brave and healthy and cheerful, very abundant and innocent and wicked. She was clever and vulgar and snobbish, and never so intensely British as when she was particularly foreign.

This combination of qualities had brought her early success, and I remember having heard with wonder and envy of what she “got,” in those days, for a novel. The revelation gave me a pang: it was such a proof that, practising a totally different style, I should never make my fortune. And yet when, as I knew her better she told me her real tariff and I saw how rumour had quadrupled it, I liked her enough to be sorry. After a while I discovered too that if she got less it was not that *I* was to get any more. My failure never had what Mrs. Stormer would have called the banality of being relative—it was always admirably absolute. She lived at ease however in those days—ease is exactly the word, though she produced three novels a year. She scorned me when I spoke of difficulty—it was the only thing that made her angry. If I hinted that a work of art required a tremendous licking into shape she thought it a pretension and a *pose*. She never recognised the “torment of form”; the furthest she went was to introduce into one of her books (in satire her hand was heavy) a young poet who was always talking about it. I couldn’t quite understand her irritation on this score, for she had nothing at stake in the matter. She had a shrewd perception that form, in prose at least, never recommended any one to the public we were condemned to address, and therefore she lost nothing (putting her private humiliation aside) by not having any. She made no pretence of producing works of art, but had comfortable tea-drinking hours in which she freely confessed herself a common pastrycook, dealing in such tarts and puddings as would bring customers to the shop. She put in plenty of sugar and of cochineal, or whatever it is that gives these articles a rich and attractive colour. She had a serene superiority to observation and opportunity which constituted an inexpugnable strength and would enable her to go on indefinitely. It is only real success that wanes, it is only solid things that melt. Greville Fane’s ignorance of life was a resource still more unailing than the most approved receipt. On her saying once that the day would come when she should have written herself out I answered: “Ah, you look into fairyland, and the fairies love you, and *they* never change. Fairyland is always there; it always was from the beginning of time, and it always will be to the end. They’ve given you the key and you can always open the door. With me it’s different; I try, in my clumsy way, to be in some direct relation to life.” “Oh, bother your direct relation to life!” she used to reply, for she was always annoyed by the phrase—which would not in the least prevent her from using it when she wished to try for style. With no more prejudices than an old sausage-mill, she would give forth again with patient punctuality

any poor verbal scrap that had been dropped into her. I cheered her with saying that the dark day, at the end, would be for the like of *me*; inasmuch as, going in our small way by experience and observation, we depended not on a revelation, but on a little tiresome process. Observation depended on opportunity, and where should we be when opportunity failed?

One day she told me that as the novelist's life was so delightful and during the good years at least such a comfortable support (she had these staggering optimisms) she meant to train up her boy to follow it. She took the ingenious view that it was a profession like another and that therefore everything was to be gained by beginning young and serving an apprenticeship. Moreover the education would be less expensive than any other special course, inasmuch as she could administer it herself. She didn't profess to keep a school, but she could at least teach her own child. It was not that she was so very clever, but (she confessed to me as if she were afraid I would laugh at her) that *he* was. I didn't laugh at her for that, for I thought the boy sharp—I had seen him at sundry times. He was well grown and good-looking and unabashed, and both he and his sister made me wonder about their defunct papa, concerning whom the little I knew was that he had been a clergyman. I explained them to myself by suppositions and imputations possibly unjust to the departed; so little were they—superficially at least—the children of their mother. There used to be, on an easel in her drawing-room, an enlarged photograph of her husband, done by some horrible posthumous “process” and draped, as to its florid frame, with a silken scarf, which testified to the candour of Greville Fane's bad taste. It made him look like an unsuccessful tragedian; but it was not a thing to trust. He may have been a successful comedian. Of the two children the girl was the elder, and struck me in all her younger years as singularly colourless. She was only very long, like an undecipherable letter. It was not till Mrs. Stormer came back from a protracted residence abroad that Ethel (which was this young lady's name) began to produce the effect, which was afterwards remarkable in her, of a certain kind of high resolution. She made one apprehend that she meant to do something for herself. She was long-necked and near-sighted and striking, and I thought I had never seen sweet seventeen in a form so hard and high and dry. She was cold and affected and ambitious, and she carried an eyeglass with a long handle, which she put up whenever she wanted not to see. She had come out, as the phrase is, immensely; and yet I felt as if she were surrounded with a spiked iron railing. What she meant to do for herself was to marry, and it was the only thing, I think, that she meant to do for any one else; yet who would be inspired to clamber over that bristling barrier? What flower of tenderness or of intimacy would such an adventurer conceive as his reward?

This was for Sir Baldwin Luard to say; but he naturally never confided to me the secret. He was a joyless, jokeless young man, with the air of having other secrets as well, and a determination to get on politically that was indicated by his never having been known to commit himself—as regards any proposition whatever—beyond an exclamatory “Oh!” His wife and he must have conversed mainly in prim ejaculations, but they understood sufficiently that they were kindred spirits. I remember being angry with Greville Fane when she announced these nuptials to me as magnificent; I remember asking her what splendour there was in the union of the daughter of a woman of genius with an irredeemable mediocrity. “Oh! he's awfully clever,” she said; but she blushed for the maternal fib. What she meant was that though Sir Baldwin's estates were not vast (he had a dreary house in South Kensington and a still drearier “Hall” somewhere in Essex, which was let), the connection was a “smarter” one than a child of hers could have aspired to form. In spite of the social bravery of her novels she took a very humble and dingy view of herself, so that of all her productions “my daughter Lady Luard” was quite the one she was proudest of. That

personage thought her mother very vulgar and was distressed and perplexed by the occasional license of her pen, but had a complicated attitude in regard to this indirect connection with literature. So far as it was lucrative her ladyship approved of it, and could compound with the inferiority of the pursuit by doing practical justice to some of its advantages. I had reason to know (my reason was simply that poor Mrs. Stormer told me) that she suffered the inky fingers to press an occasional bank-note into her palm. On the other hand she deplored the “peculiar style” to which Greville Fane had devoted herself, and wondered where an author who had the convenience of so lady-like a daughter could have picked up such views about the best society. “She might know better, with Leolin and me,” Lady Luard had been known to remark; but it appeared that some of Greville Fane’s superstitions were incurable. She didn’t live in Lady Luard’s society, and the best was not good enough for her—she must make it still better.

I could see that this necessity grew upon her during the years she spent abroad, when I had glimpses of her in the shifting sojourns that lay in the path of my annual ramble. She betook herself from Germany to Switzerland and from Switzerland to Italy; she favoured cheap places and set up her desk in the smaller capitals. I took a look at her whenever I could, and I always asked how Leolin was getting on. She gave me beautiful accounts of him, and whenever it was possible the boy was produced for my edification. I had entered from the first into the joke of his career—I pretended to regard him as a consecrated child. It had been a joke for Mrs. Stormer at first, but the boy himself had been shrewd enough to make the matter serious. If his mother accepted the principle that the intending novelist cannot begin too early to see life, Leolin was not interested in hanging back from the application of it. He was eager to qualify himself, and took to cigarettes at ten, on the highest literary grounds. His poor mother gazed at him with extravagant envy and, like Desdemona, wished heaven had made *her* such a man. She explained to me more than once that in her profession she had found her sex a dreadful drawback. She loved the story of Madame George Sand’s early rebellion against this hindrance, and believed that if she had worn trousers she could have written as well as that lady. Leolin had for the career at least the qualification of trousers, and as he grew older he recognised its importance by laying in an immense assortment. He grew up in gorgeous apparel, which was his way of interpreting his mother’s system. Whenever I met her I found her still under the impression that she was carrying this system out and that Leolin’s training was bearing fruit. She was giving him experience, she was giving him impressions, she was putting a *gagnepain* into his hand. It was another name for spoiling him with the best conscience in the world. The queerest pictures come back to me of this period of the good lady’s life and of the extraordinarily virtuous, muddled, bewildering tenor of it. She had an idea that she was seeing foreign manners as well as her petticoats would allow; but, in reality she was not seeing anything, least of all fortunately how much she was laughed at. She drove her whimsical pen at Dresden and at Florence, and produced in all places and at all times the same romantic and ridiculous fictions. She carried about her box of properties and fished out promptly the familiar, tarnished old puppets. She believed in them when others couldn’t, and as they were like nothing that was to be seen under the sun it was impossible to prove by comparison that they were wrong. You can’t compare birds and fishes; you could only feel that, as Greville Fane’s characters had the fine plumage of the former species, human beings must be of the latter.

It would have been droll if it had not been so exemplary to see her tracing the loves of the duchesses beside the innocent cribs of her children. The immoral and the maternal lived together in her diligent days on the most comfortable terms, and she stopped curling the mustaches of her Guardsmen to pat the heads of her babes. She was haunted by solemn spinsters who came to tea from continental *pensions*, and by unsophisticated Americans who

told her she was just loved in *their* country. "I had rather be just paid there," she usually replied; for this tribute of transatlantic opinion was the only thing that galled her. The Americans went away thinking her coarse; though as the author of so many beautiful love-stories she was disappointing to most of these pilgrims, who had not expected to find a shy, stout, ruddy lady in a cap like a crumbled pyramid. She wrote about the affections and the impossibility of controlling them, but she talked of the price of *pension* and the convenience of an English chemist. She devoted much thought and many thousands of francs to the education of her daughter, who spent three years at a very superior school at Dresden, receiving wonderful instruction in sciences, arts and tongues, and who, taking a different line from Leolin, was to be brought up wholly as a *femme du monde*. The girl was musical and philological; she made a specialty of languages and learned enough about them to be inspired with a great contempt for her mother's artless accents. Greville Fane's French and Italian were droll; the imitative faculty had been denied her, and she had an unequalled gift, especially pen in hand, of squeezing big mistakes into small opportunities. She knew it, but she didn't care; correctness was the virtue in the world that, like her heroes and heroines, she valued least. Ethel, who had perceived in her pages some remarkable lapses, undertook at one time to revise her proofs; but I remember her telling me a year after the girl had left school that this function had been very briefly exercised. "She can't read me," said Mrs. Stormer; "I offend her taste. She tells me that at Dresden—at school—I was never allowed." The good lady seemed surprised at this, having the best conscience in the world about her lucubrations. She had never meant to fly in the face of anything, and considered that she grovelled before the Rhadamanthus of the English literary tribunal, the celebrated and awful Young Person. I assured her, as a joke, that she was frightfully indecent (she hadn't in fact that reality any more than any other) my purpose being solely to prevent her from guessing that her daughter had dropped her not because she was immoral but because she was vulgar. I used to figure her children closeted together and asking each other while they exchanged a gaze of dismay: "Why should she *be* so—and so *fearfully* so—when she has the advantage of our society? Shouldn't *we* have taught her better?" Then I imagined their recognising with a blush and a shrug that she was unteachable, irreformable. Indeed she was, poor lady; but it is never fair to read by the light of taste things that were not written by it. Greville Fane had, in the topsy-turvy, a serene good faith that ought to have been safe from allusion, like a stutter or a *faux pas*.

She didn't make her son ashamed of the profession to which he was destined, however; she only made him ashamed of the way she herself exercised it. But he bore his humiliation much better than his sister, for he was ready to take for granted that he should one day restore the balance. He was a canny and far-seeing youth, with appetites and aspirations, and he had not a scruple in his composition. His mother's theory of the happy knack he could pick up deprived him of the wholesome discipline required to prevent young idlers from becoming cads. He had, abroad, a casual tutor and a snatch or two of a Swiss school, but no consecutive study, no prospect of a university or a degree. It may be imagined with what zeal, as the years went on, he entered into the pleasantries of there being no manual so important to him as the massive book of life. It was an expensive volume to peruse, but Mrs. Stormer was willing to lay out a sum in what she would have called her *premiers frais*. Ethel disapproved—she thought this education far too unconventional for an English gentleman. Her voice was for Eton and Oxford, or for any public school (she would have resigned herself) with the army to follow. But Leolin never was afraid of his sister, and they visibly disliked, though they sometimes agreed to assist, each other. They could combine to work the oracle—to keep their mother at her desk.

When she came back to England, telling me she had got all the continent could give her, Leolin was a broad-shouldered, red-faced young man, with an immense wardrobe and an extraordinary assurance of manner. She was fondly obstinate about her having taken the right course with him, and proud of all that he knew and had seen. He was now quite ready to begin, and a little while later she told me he *had* begun. He had written something tremendously clever, and it was coming out in the *Cheapside*. I believe it came out; I had no time to look for it; I never heard anything about it. I took for granted that if this contribution had passed through his mother's hands it had practically become a specimen of her own genius, and it was interesting to consider Mrs. Stormer's future in the light of her having to write her son's novels as well as her own. This was not the way she looked at it herself; she took the charming ground that he would help her to write hers. She used to tell me that he supplied passages of the greatest value to her own work—all sorts of technical things, about hunting and yachting and wine—that she couldn't be expected to get very straight. It was all so much practice for him and so much alleviation for her. I was unable to identify these pages, for I had long since ceased to "keep up" with Greville Fane; but I was quite able to believe that the wine-question had been put, by Leolin's good offices, on a better footing, for the dear lady used to mix her drinks (she was perpetually serving the most splendid suppers) in the queerest fashion. I could see that he was willing enough to accept a commission to look after that department. It occurred to me indeed, when Mrs. Stormer settled in England again, that by making a shrewd use of both her children she might be able to rejuvenate her style. Ethel had come back to gratify her young ambition, and if she couldn't take her mother into society she would at least go into it herself. Silently, stiffly, almost grimly, this young lady held up her head, clenched her long teeth, squared her lean elbows and made her way up the staircases she had elected. The only communication she ever made to me, the only effusion of confidence with which she ever honoured me, was when she said: "I don't want to know the people mamma knows; I mean to know others." I took due note of the remark, for I was not one of the "others." I couldn't trace therefore the steps of her process; I could only admire it at a distance and congratulate her mother on the results. The results were that Ethel went to "big" parties and got people to take her. Some of them were people she had met abroad, and others were people whom the people she had met abroad had met. They ministered alike to Miss Ethel's convenience, and I wondered how she extracted so many favours without the expenditure of a smile. Her smile was the dimmest thing in the world, diluted lemonade, without sugar, and she had arrived precociously at social wisdom, recognising that if she was neither pretty enough nor rich enough nor clever enough, she could at least in her muscular youth be rude enough. Therefore if she was able to tell her mother what really took place in the mansions of the great, give her notes to work from, the quill could be driven at home to better purpose and precisely at a moment when it would have to be more active than ever. But if she did tell, it would appear that poor Mrs. Stormer didn't believe. As regards many points this was not a wonder; at any rate I heard nothing of Greville Fane's having developed a new manner. She had only one manner from start to finish, as Leolin would have said.

She was tired at last, but she mentioned to me that she couldn't afford to pause. She continued to speak of Leolin's work as the great hope of their future (she had saved no money) though the young man wore to my sense an aspect more and more professional if you like, but less and less literary. At the end of a couple of years there was something monstrous in the impudence with which he played his part in the comedy. When I wondered how she could play *her* part I had to perceive that her good faith was complete and that what kept it so was simply her extravagant fondness. She loved the young impostor with a simple, blind, benighted love, and of all the heroes of romance who had passed before her eyes he was by far the most brilliant.

He was at any rate the most real—she could touch him, pay for him, suffer for him, worship him. He made her think of her princes and dukes, and when she wished to fix these figures in her mind's eye she thought of her boy. She had often told me she was carried away by her own creations, and she was certainly carried away by Leolin. He vivified, by potentialities at least, the whole question of youth and passion. She held, not unjustly, that the sincere novelist should feel the whole flood of life; she acknowledged with regret that she had not had time to feel it herself, and it was a joy to her that the deficiency might be supplied by the sight of the way it was rushing through this magnificent young man. She exhorted him, I suppose, to let it rush; she wrung her own flaccid little sponge into the torrent. I knew not what passed between them in her hours of tuition, but I gathered that she mainly impressed on him that the great thing was to live, because that gave you material. He asked nothing better; he collected material, and the formula served as a universal pretext. You had only to look at him to see that, with his rings and breastpins, his cross-barred jackets, his early *embonpoint*, his eyes that looked like imitation jewels, his various indications of a dense, full-blown temperament, his idea of life was singularly vulgar; but he was not so far wrong as that his response to his mother's expectations was not in a high degree practical. If she had imposed a profession on him from his tenderest years it was exactly a profession that he followed. The two were not quite the same, inasmuch as *his* was simply to live at her expense; but at least she couldn't say that he hadn't taken a line. If she insisted on believing in him he offered himself to the sacrifice. My impression is that her secret dream was that he should have a *liaison* with a countess, and he persuaded her without difficulty that he had one. I don't know what countesses are capable of, but I have a clear notion of what Leolin was.

He didn't persuade his sister, who despised him—she wished to work her mother in her own way, and I asked myself why the girl's judgment of him didn't make me like her better. It was because it didn't save her after all from a mute agreement with him to go halves. There were moments when I couldn't help looking hard into his atrocious young eyes, challenging him to confess his fantastic fraud and give it up. Not a little tacit conversation passed between us in this way, but he had always the best of it. If I said: "Oh, come now, with *me* you needn't keep it up; plead guilty, and I'll let you off," he wore the most ingenuous, the most candid expression, in the depths of which I could read: "Oh, yes, I know it exasperates you—that's just why I do it." He took the line of earnest inquiry, talked about Balzac and Flaubert, asked me if I thought Dickens *did* exaggerate and Thackeray *ought* to be called a pessimist. Once he came to see me, at his mother's suggestion he declared, on purpose to ask me how far, in my opinion, in the English novel, one really might venture to "go." He was not resigned to the usual pruderies—he suffered under them already. He struck out the brilliant idea that nobody knew how far we might go, for nobody had ever tried. Did I think *he* might safely try—would it injure his mother if he did? He would rather disgrace himself by his timidities than injure his mother, but certainly some one ought to try. Wouldn't *I* try—couldn't I be prevailed upon to look at it as a duty? Surely the ultimate point ought to be fixed—he was worried, haunted by the question. He patronised me unblushingly, made me feel like a foolish amateur, a helpless novice, inquired into my habits of work and conveyed to me that I was utterly *vieux jeu* and had not had the advantage of an early training. I had not been brought up from the germ, I knew nothing of life—didn't go at it on *his* system. He had dipped into French feuilletons and picked up plenty of phrases, and he made a much better show in talk than his poor mother, who never had time to read anything and could only be vivid with her pen. If I didn't kick him downstairs it was because he would have alighted on her at the bottom.

When she went to live at Primrose Hill I called upon her and found her weary and wasted. It had waned a good deal, the elation caused the year before by Ethel's marriage; the foam on the cup had subsided and there was a bitterness in the draught.

She had had to take a cheaper house and she had to work still harder to pay even for that. Sir Baldwin was obliged to be close; his charges were fearful, and the dream of her living with her daughter (a vision she had never mentioned to me) must be renounced. "I would have helped with things, and I could have lived perfectly in one room," she said; "I would have paid for everything, and—after all—I'm some one, ain't I? But I don't fit in, and Ethel tells me there are tiresome people she *must* receive. I can help them from here, no doubt, better than from there. She told me once, you know, what she thinks of my picture of life. 'Mamma, your picture of life is preposterous!' No doubt it is, but she's vexed with me for letting my prices go down; and I had to write three novels to pay for all her marriage cost me. I did it very well—I mean the outfit and the wedding; but that's why I'm here. At any rate she doesn't want a dingy old woman in her house. I should give it an atmosphere of literary glory, but literary glory is only the eminence of nobodies. Besides, she doubts my glory—she knows I'm glorious only at Peckham and Hackney. She doesn't want her friends to ask if I've never known nice people. She can't tell them I've never been in society. She tried to teach me better once, but I couldn't learn. It would seem too as if Peckham and Hackney had had enough of me; for (don't tell any one!) I've had to take less for my last than I ever took for anything." I asked her how little this had been, not from curiosity, but in order to upbraid her, more disinterestedly than Lady Luard had done, for such concessions. She answered "I'm ashamed to tell you," and then she began to cry.

I had never seen her break down, and I was proportionately moved; she sobbed, like a frightened child, over the extinction of her vogue and the exhaustion of her vein. Her little workroom seemed indeed a barren place to grow flowers, and I wondered, in the after years (for she continued to produce and publish) by what desperate and heroic process she dragged them out of the soil. I remember asking her on that occasion what had become of Leolin, and how much longer she intended to allow him to amuse himself at her cost. She rejoined with spirit, wiping her eyes, that he was down at Brighton hard at work—he was in the midst of a novel—and that he *felt* life so, in all its misery and mystery, that it was cruel to speak of such experiences as a pleasure. "He goes beneath the surface," she said, "and he *forces* himself to look at things from which he would rather turn away. Do you call that amusing yourself? You should see his face sometimes! And he does it for me as much as for himself. He tells me everything—he comes home to me with his *trouvailles*. We are artists together, and to the artist all things are pure. I've often heard you say so yourself." The novel that Leolin was engaged in at Brighton was never published, but a friend of mine and of Mrs. Stormer's who was staying there happened to mention to me later that he had seen the young apprentice to fiction driving, in a dogcart, a young lady with a very pink face. When I suggested that she was perhaps a woman of title with whom he was conscientiously flirting my informant replied: "She is indeed, but do you know what her title is?" He pronounced it—it was familiar and descriptive—but I won't reproduce it here. I don't know whether Leolin mentioned it to his mother: she would have needed all the purity of the artist to forgive him. I hated so to come across him that in the very last years I went rarely to see her, though I knew that she had come pretty well to the end of her rope. I didn't want her to tell me that she had fairly to give her books away—I didn't want to see her cry. She kept it up amazingly, and every few months, at my club, I saw three new volumes, in green, in crimson, in blue, on the book-table that groaned with light literature. Once I met her at the Academy soirée, where you meet people you thought were dead, and she vouchsafed the information, as if she owed it to me in candour, that Leolin had been obliged to recognise insuperable

difficulties in the question of *form*, he was so fastidious; so that she had now arrived at a definite understanding with him (it was such a comfort) that *she* would do the form if he would bring home the substance. That was now his position—he foraged for her in the great world at a salary. “He’s my ‘devil,’ don’t you see? as if I were a great lawyer: he gets up the case and I argue it.” She mentioned further that in addition to his salary he was paid by the piece: he got so much for a striking character, so much for a pretty name, so much for a plot, so much for an incident, and had so much promised him if he would invent a new crime.

“He *has* invented one,” I said, “and he’s paid every day of his life.”

“What is it?” she asked, looking hard at the picture of the year; “Baby’s Tub,” near which we happened to be standing.

I hesitated a moment. “I myself will write a little story about it, and then you’ll see.”

But she never saw; she had never seen anything, and she passed away with her fine blindness unimpaired. Her son published every scrap of scribbled paper that could be extracted from her table-drawers, and his sister quarrelled with him mortally about the proceeds, which showed that she only wanted a pretext, for they cannot have been great. I don’t know what Leolin lives upon, unless it be on a queer lady many years older than himself, whom he lately married. The last time I met him he said to me with his infuriating smile: “Don’t you think we can go a little further still—just a little?” *He* really goes too far.

Collaboration

I don't know how much people care for my work, but they like my studio (of which indeed I am exceedingly fond myself), as they show by their inclination to congregate there at dusky hours on winter afternoons, or on long dim evenings when the place looks well with its rich combinations and low-burning lamps and the bad pictures (my own) are not particularly visible. I won't go into the question of how many of these are purchased, but I rejoice in the distinction that my invitations are never declined. Some of my visitors have been good enough to say that on Sunday evenings in particular there is no pleasanter place in Paris—where so many places are pleasant—none friendlier to easy talk and repeated cigarettes, to the exchange of points of view and the comparison of accents. The air is as international as only Parisian air can be; women, I surmise, think they look well in it; they come also because they fancy they are doing something Bohemian, just as many of the men come because they suppose they are doing something correct. The old heraldic cushions on the divans, embossed with rusty gold, are favourable both to expansion and to contraction—that of course of contracting parties—and the Italian brocade on the walls appeals to one's highest feelings. Music makes its home there—though I confess I am not quite the master of *that* house, and when it is going on in a truly receptive hush I enjoy the way my company leans back and gazes through the thin smoke of cigarettes up at the distant Tiepolo in the almost palatial ceiling. I make sure the piano, the tobacco and the tea are all of the best.

For the conversation, I leave that mostly to take care of itself. There are discussions of course and differences—sometimes even a violent circulation of sense and sound; but I have a consciousness that beauty flourishes and that harmonies prevail in the end. I have occasionally known a visitor to be rude to me because he disliked another visitor's opinions—I had seen an old habitu  slip away without bidding me good night on the arrival of some confident specimen of *les jeunes*; but as a general thing we have it out together on the spot—the place is really a chamber of justice, a temple of reconciliation: we understand each other if we only sit up late enough. Art protects her children in the long run—she only asks them to trust her. She is like the Catholic Church—she guarantees paradise to the faithful. Music moreover is a universal solvent; though I've not an infallible ear I've a sufficient sense of the matter for that. Ah, the wounds I've known it to heal—the bridges I've known it to build—the ghosts I've known it to lay! Though I've seen people stalk out I've never observed them not to steal back. My studio in short is the theatre of a cosmopolite drama, a comedy essentially “of character.”

One of the liveliest scenes of the performance was the evening, last winter, on which I became aware that one of my compatriots—an American, my good friend Alfred Bonus—was engaged in a controversy somewhat acrimonious, on a literary subject, with Herman Heidenmauer, the young composer who had been playing to us divinely a short time before and whom I thought of neither as a disputant nor as an Englishman. I perceived in a moment that something had happened to present him in this combined character to poor Bonus, who was so ardent a patriot that he lived in Paris rather than in London, who had met his interlocutor for the first time on this occasion, and who apparently had been misled by the perfection with which Heidenmauer spoke English—he spoke it really better than Alfred Bonus. The young musician, a born Bavarian, had spent a few years in England, where he had a commercial step-brother planted and more or less prosperous—a helpful man who had watched over his difficult first steps, given him a temporary home, found him publishers and pupils, smoothed the way to a stupefied hearing for his first productions. He knew his

London and might at a first glance have been taken for one of its products; but he had, in addition to a genius of the sort that London fosters but doesn't beget, a very German soul. He brought me a note from an old friend on the other side of the Channel, and I liked him as soon as I looked at him; so much indeed that I could forgive him for making me feel thin and empirical, conscious that *he* was one of the higher kind whom the future has looked in the face. He had met through his gold spectacles her deep eyes, and some mutual communication had occurred. This had given him a confidence which passed for conceit only with those who didn't know the reason.

I guessed the reason early, and, as may be imagined, he didn't grudge me the knowledge. He was happy and various—as little as possible the mere long-haired musicmonger. His hair was short—it was only his legs and his laughter that were long. He was fair and rosy, and his gold spectacles glittered as if in response to the example set them by his beautiful young golden beard. You would have been sure he was an artist without going so far as to decide upon his particular passion; for you would have been conscious that whatever this passion might be it was acquainted with many of the others and mixed with them to its profit. Yet these discoveries had not been fully made by Alfred Bonus, whose occupation was to write letters to the American journals about the way the "boys" were coming on in Paris; for in such a case he probably would not have expected such nebulous greatness to condense at a moment's notice. Bonus is clever and critical, and a sort of self-appointed emissary or agent of the great republic. He has it at heart to prove that the Americans in Europe *do* get on—taking for granted on the part of the Americans at home an interest in this subject greater, as I often assure him, than any really felt. "Come, now, do *I* get on?" I often ask him; and I sometimes push the inquiry so far as to stammer: "And you, my dear Bonus, do *you* get on?" He is apt to look a little injured on such occasions, as if he would like to say in reply: "Don't you call it success to have Sunday evenings at which I'm a regular attendant? And can you question for a moment the figure I make at them?" It has even occurred to me that he suspects me of painting badly on purpose to spite him—that is to interfere with his favourite dogma. Therefore to spite me in return he's in the heroic predicament of refusing to admit that I'm a failure. He takes a great interest in the plastic arts, but his intensest sympathy is for literature. This sentiment is somewhat starved, as in that school the boys languish as yet on a back seat. To show what they are doing Bonus has to retreat upon the studios, but there is nothing he enjoys so much as having, when the rare chance offers, a good literary talk. He follows the French movement closely and explains it profusely to our compatriots, whom he mystifies, but who guess he's rather loose.

I forget how his conversation with Heidenmauer began—it was, I think, some difference of opinion about one of the English poets that set them afloat. Heidenmauer knows the English poets, and the French, and the Italian, and the Spanish, and the Russian—he is a wonderful representative of that Germanism which consists in the negation of intellectual frontiers. It is the English poets that, if I'm not mistaken, he loves best, and probably the harm was done by his having happened to say so. At any rate Alfred Bonus let him have it, without due notice perhaps, which is rather Alfred's way, on the question (a favourite one with my compatriot) of the backward state of literature in England, for which after all Heidenmauer was not responsible. Bonus believes in responsibility—the responsibility of others, an attitude which tends to make some of his friends extremely secretive, though perhaps it would have been justified—as to this I'm not sure—had Heidenmauer been, under the circumstances, technically British. Before he had had time to explain that he was not, the other persons present had become aware that a kind of challenge had passed—that nation, in a sudden startled flurry, somehow found itself pitted against nation. There was much vagueness at first as to which of the nations were engaged and as to what their quarrel was about, the question

coming presently to appear less simple than the spectacle (so easily conceivable) of a German's finding it hot for him in a French house, a house French enough at any rate to give countenance to the idea of his quick defeat.

How could the right cause fail of protection in any house of which Madame de Brindes and her charming daughter were so good as to be assiduous frequenters? I recollect perfectly the pale gleam of joy in the mother's handsome face when she gathered that what had happened was that a detested German was on his defence. She wears her eternal mourning (I admit it's immensely becoming) for a triple woe, for multiplied griefs and wrongs, all springing from the crash of the Empire, from the battlefields of 1870. Her husband fell at Sedan, her father and her brother on still darker days; both her own family and that of M. de Brindes, their general situation in life, were, as may be said, creations of the Empire, so that from one hour to the other she found herself sinking with the wreck. You won't recognise her under the name I give her, but you may none the less have admired, between their pretty lemon-coloured covers, the touching tales of Claude Lorrain. She plies an ingenious, pathetic pen and has reconciled herself to effort and privation for the sake of her daughter. I say privation, because these distinguished women are poor, receive with great modesty and have broken with a hundred of those social sanctities than are dearer to French souls than to any others. They have gone down into the market-place, and Paule de Brindes, who is three-and-twenty to-day and has a happy turn for keeping a water-colour liquid, earns a hundred francs here and there. She is not so handsome as her mother, but she has magnificent hair and what the French call a look of race, and is, or at least was till the other day, a frank and charming young woman. There is something exquisite in the way these ladies are earnestly, conscientiously modern. From the moment they accept necessities they accept them all, and poor Madame de Brindes flatters herself that she has made her dowerless daughter one of us others. The girl goes out alone, talks with young men and, although she only paints landscape, takes a free view of the *convenances*. Nothing can please either of them more than to tell them they have thrown over their superstitions. They haven't, thank heaven; and when I want to be reminded of some of the prettiest in the world—of a thousand fine scruples and pleasant forms, and of what grace can do for the sake of grace—I know where to go for it.

It was a part of this pious heresy—much more august in the way they presented it than some of the aspects of the old faith—that Paule should have become “engaged,” quite like a *jeune mees*, to my brilliant friend Félix Vendemer. He is such a votary of the modern that he was inevitably interested in the girl of the future and had matched one reform with another, being ready to marry without a penny, as the clearest way of expressing his appreciation, this favourable specimen of the type. He simply fell in love with Mademoiselle de Brindes and behaved, on his side, equally like one of us others, except that he begged me to ask her mother for her hand. I was inspired to do so with eloquence, and my friends were not insensible of such an opportunity to show that they now lived in the world of realities. Vendemer's sole fortune is his genius, and he and Paule, who confessed to an answering flame, plighted their troth like a pair of young rustics or (what comes for French people to the same thing) young Anglo-Saxons. Madame de Brindes thinks such doings at bottom very vulgar; but vulgar is what she tries hard to be, she is so convinced it is the only way to make a living. Vendemer had had at that time only the first of his successes, which was not, as you will remember—and unfortunately for Madame de Brindes—of this remunerative kind. Only a few people recognised the perfection of his little volume of verse: my acquaintance with him originated in my having been one of the few. A volume of verse was a scanty provision to marry on, so that, still like a pair of us others, the luckless lovers had to bide their time. Presently however came the success (again a success only with those who care for quality, not with the rough and ready public) of his comedy in verse at the Français. This charming

work had just been taken off (it had been found not to make money), when the various parties to my little drama met Heidenmauer at my studio.

Vendemer, who has, as indeed the others have, a passion for music, was tremendously affected by hearing him play two or three of his compositions, and I immediately saw that the immitigable German quality was a morsel much less bitter for him than for the two uncompromising ladies. He went so far as to speak to Heidenmauer frankly, to thank him with effusion, an effort of which neither of the quivering women would have been capable. Vendemer was in the room the night Alfred Bonus raised his little breeze; I saw him lean on the piano and listen with a queer face looking however rather wonderingly at Heidenmauer. Before this I had noticed the instant paleness (her face was admirably expressive) with which Madame de Brindes saw her prospective son-in-law make up, as it were, to the original Teuton, whose national character was intensified to her aching mind, as it would have been to that of most Frenchwomen in her place, by his wash of English colour. A German was bad enough—but a German with English aggravations! Her senses were too fine to give her the excuse of not feeling that his compositions were interesting, and she was capable, magnanimously, of listening to them with dropped eyes; but (much as it ever cost her not to be perfectly courteous), she couldn't have made even the most superficial speech to him about them. Marie de Brindes could never have spoken to Herman Heidenmauer. It was a narrowness if you will, but a narrowness that to my vision was enveloped in a dense atmosphere—a kind of sunset bloom—of enriching and fortifying things. Herman Heidenmauer himself, like the man of imagination and the lover of life that he was, would have entered into it delightedly, been charmed with it as a fine case of bigotry. This was conspicuous in Marie de Brindes: her loyalty to the national idea was that of a *dévôte* to a form of worship. She never spoke of France, but she always made me think of it, and with an authority which the women of her race seem to me to have in the question much more than the men. I dare say I'm rather in love with her, though, being considerably younger, I've never told her so—as if she would in the least mind that! I have indeed been a little checked by a spirit of allegiance to Vendemer; suspecting always (excuse my sophistication) that in the last analysis it is the mother's charm that he feels—or originally felt—in the daughter's. He spoke of the elder lady to me in those days with the insistence with which only a Frenchman can speak of the objects of his affection. At any rate there was always something symbolic and slightly ceremonial to me in her delicate cameo-face and her general black-robed presence: she made me think of a priestess or a mourner, of revolutions and sieges, detested treaties and ugly public things. I pitied her, too, for the strife of the elements in her—for the way she must have felt a noble enjoyment mutilated. She was too good for that, and yet she was too rigid for anything else; and the sight of such dismal perversions made me hate more than ever the stupid terms on which nations have organised their intercourse.

When she gathered that one of my guests was simply cramming it down the throat of another that the English literary mind was not even literary, she turned away with a vague shrug and a pitiful look at her daughter for the taste of people who took their pleasure so poorly: the truth in question would be so obvious that it was not worth making a scene about. Madame de Brindes evidently looked at any scene between the English and the Americans as a quarrel proceeding vaguely from below stairs—a squabble sordidly domestic. Her almost immediate departure with her daughter operated as a lucky interruption, and I caught for the first time in the straight, spare girl, as she followed her mother, a little of the air that Vendemer had told me he found in her, the still exaltation, the brown uplifted head that we attribute, or that at any rate he made it visible to me that he attributed, to the dedicated Maid. He considered that his intended bore a striking resemblance to Jeanne d'Arc, and he marched after her on this occasion like a square-shouldered armour-bearer. He reappeared, however, after he had put

the ladies into a cab, and half an hour later the rest of my friends, with the sole exception of Bonus, having dispersed, he was sitting up with me in the empty studio for another *bout de causerie*. At first perhaps I was too occupied with reprimanding my compatriot to give much attention to what Vendemer might have to say; I remember at any rate that I had asked Bonus what had induced him to make so grave a blunder. He was not even yet, it appeared, aware of his blunder, so that I had to inquire by what odd chance he had taken Heidenmauer for a bigoted Briton.

“If I spoke to him as one he answered as one; that’s bigoted enough,” said Alfred Bonus.

“He was confused and amused at your onslaught: he wondered what fly had stung you.”

“The fly of patriotism,” Vendemer suggested.

“Do *you* like him—a beast of a German?” Bonus demanded.

“If he’s an Englishman he isn’t a German—*il faut opter*. We can hang him for the one or for the other, we can’t hang him for both. I was immensely struck with those things he played.”

“They had no charm for me, or doubtless I too should have been demoralised,” Alfred said.

“He seemed to know nothing about Miss Brownrigg. Now Miss Brownrigg’s great.”

“I like the things and even the people you quarrel about, you big babies of the same breast. *C’est à se tordre!*” Vendemer declared.

“I may be very abject, but I *do* take an interest in the American novel,” Alfred rejoined.

“I hate such expressions: there’s no such thing as the American novel.”

“Is there by chance any such thing as the French?”

“*Pas davantage*—for the artist himself: how can you ask? I don’t know what is meant by French art and English art and American art: those seem to me mere cataloguers’ and reviewers’ and tradesmen’s names, representing preoccupations utterly foreign to the artist. Art is art in every country, and the novel (since Bonus mentions that) is the novel in every tongue, and hard enough work they have to live up to that privilege, without our adding another muddle to the problem. The reader, the consumer may call things as he likes, but we leave him to his little amusements.” I suggested that we were all readers and consumers; which only made Vendemer continue: “Yes, and only a small handful of us have the ghost of a palate. But you and I and Bonus are of the handful.”

“What do you mean by the handful?” Bonus inquired.

Vendemer hesitated a moment. “I mean the few intelligent people, and even the few people who are not——” He paused again an instant, long enough for me to request him not to say what they were “not,” and then went on: “People in a word who have the honour to live in the only country worth living in.”

“And pray what country is that?”

“The land of dreams—the country of art.”

“Oh, the land of dreams! I live in the land of realities!” Bonus exclaimed. “What do you all mean then by chattering so about *le roman russe?*”

“It’s a convenience—to identify the work of three or four, *là-bas*, because we’re so far from it. But do you see them *writing* ’le roman russe?’”

“I happen to know that that’s exactly what they want to do, some of them,” said Bonus.

“Some of the idiots, then! There are plenty of those everywhere. Anything born under that silly star is sure not to count.”

“Thank God I’m not an artist!” said Bonus.

“Dear Alfred’s a critic,” I explained.

“And I’m not ashamed of my country,” he subjoined.

“Even a critic perhaps may be an artist,” Vendemer mused.

“Then as the great American critic Bonus may be the great American artist,” I went on.

“Is that what you’re supposed to give us—‘American’ criticism?” Vendemer asked, with dismay in his expressive, ironic face. “Take care, take care, or it will be more American than critical, and then where will *you* be? However,” he continued, laughing and with a change of tone, “I may see the matter in too lurid a light, for I’ve just been favoured with a judgment conceived in the purest spirit of our own national genius.” He looked at me a moment and then he remarked: “That dear Madame de Brindes doesn’t approve of my attitude.”

“Your attitude?”

“Toward your German friend. She let me know it when I went down stairs with her—told me I was much too cordial, that I must observe myself.”

“And what did you reply to that?”

“I answered that the things he had played were extraordinarily beautiful.”

“And how did she meet that?”

“By saying that he’s an enemy of our country.”

“She had you there,” I rejoined.

“Yes, I could only reply ‘*Chère madame, voyons!*’”

“That was meagre.”

“Evidently, for it did no more for me than to give her a chance to declare that he can’t possibly be here for any good and that he belongs to a race it’s my sacred duty to loathe.”

“I see what she means.”

“I don’t then—where artists are concerned. I said to her: ‘*Ah, madame, vous savez que pour moi il n’y a que l’art!*’”

“It’s very exciting!” I laughed. “How could she parry that?”

“I know it, my dear child—but for *him*?” That’s the way she parried it. ‘Very well, for him?’ I asked. ‘For him there’s the insolence of the victor and a secret scorn for our incurable illusions!’”

“Heidenmauer has no insolence and no secret scorn.”

Vendemer was silent a moment. “Are you very sure of that?”

“Oh, I like him! He’s out of all that, and far above it. But what did Mademoiselle Paule say?” I inquired.

“She said nothing—she only looked at me.”

“Happy man!”

“Not a bit. She looked at me with strange eyes, in which I could read ‘Go straight, my friend—go straight!’ *Oh, les femmes, les femmes!*”

“What’s the matter with them now?”

“They’ve a mortal hatred of art!”

“It’s a true, deep instinct,” said Alfred Bonus.

“But what passed further with Madame de Brindes?” I went on.

“She only got into her cab, pushing her daughter first; on which I slammed the door rather hard and came up here. *Cela m’a porté sur les nerfs.*”

“I’m afraid I haven’t soothed them,” Bonus said, looking for his hat. When he had found it he added: “When the English have beaten us and pocketed our *milliards* I’ll forgive them; but not till then!” And with this he went off, made a little uncomfortable, I think, by Vendemer’s sharper alternatives, while the young Frenchman called after him: “My dear fellow, at night all cats are grey!”

Vendemer, when we were left alone together, mooned about the empty studio awhile and asked me three or four questions about Heidenmauer. I satisfied his curiosity as well as I could, but I demanded the reason of it. The reason he gave was that one of the young German’s compositions had already begun to haunt his memory; but that was a reason which, to my sense, still left something unexplained. I didn’t however challenge him, before he quitted me, further than to warn him against being deliberately perverse.

“What do you mean by being deliberately perverse?” He fixed me so with his intensely living French eye that I became almost blushingly conscious of a certain insincerity and, instead of telling him what I meant, tried to get off with the deplorable remark that the prejudices of Mesdames de Brindes were after all respectable. “That’s exactly what makes them so odious!” cried Vendemer.

A few days after this, late in the afternoon, Herman Heidenmauer came in to see me and found the young Frenchman seated at my piano—trying to win back from the keys some echo of a passage in the *Abendlied* we had listened to on the Sunday evening. They met, naturally, as good friends, and Heidenmauer sat down with instant readiness and gave him again the page he was trying to recover. He asked him for his address, that he might send him the composition, and at Vendemer’s request, as we sat in the firelight, played half-a-dozen other things. Vendemer listened in silence but to my surprise took leave of me before the lamp was brought in. I asked him to stay to dinner (I had already appealed to Heidenmauer to stay), but he explained that he was engaged to dine with Madame de Brindes—*à la maison* as he always called it. When he had gone Heidenmauer, with whom on departing he had shaken hands without a word, put to me the same questions about him that Vendemer had asked on the Sunday evening about the young German, and I replied that my visitor would find in a small volume of remarkable verse published by Lemerre, which I placed in his hands, much of the information he desired. This volume, which had just appeared, contained, beside a reprint of Vendemer’s earlier productions, many of them admirable lyrics, the drama that had lately been played at the Français, and Heidenmauer took it with him when he left me. But he left me late, and before this occurred, all the evening, we had much talk about the French nation. In the foreign colony of Paris the exchange of opinions on this subject is one of the most inevitable and by no means the least interesting of distractions; it furnishes occupation to people rather conscious of the burden of leisure. Heidenmauer had been little in Paris, but he was all the more open to impressions; they evidently poured in upon him and he gave them a generous hospitality. In the diffused white light of his fine German intelligence old

colours took on new tints to me, and while we spun fancies about the wonderful race around us I added to my little stock of notions about his own. I saw that his admiration for our neighbours was a very high tide, and I was struck with something bland and unconscious (noble and serene in its absence of precautions) in the way he let his doors stand open to it. It would have been exasperating to many Frenchmen; he looked at them through his clear spectacles with such an absence of suspicion that they might have anything to forgive him, such a thin metaphysical view of instincts and passions. He had the air of not allowing for recollections and nerves, and would doubtless give them occasion to make afresh some of their reflections on the tact of *ces gens-là*.

A couple of days after I had given him Vendemer's book he came back to tell me that he found great beauty in it. "It speaks to me—it speaks to me," he said with his air of happy proof. "I liked the songs—I liked the songs. Besides," he added, "I like the little romantic play—it has given me wonderful ideas; more ideas than anything has done for a long time. Yes—yes."

"What kind of ideas?"

"Well, this kind." And he sat down to the piano and struck the keys. I listened without more questions, and after a while I began to understand. Suddenly he said: "Do you know the words of *that*?" and before I could answer he was rolling out one of the lyrics of the little volume. The poem was strange and obscure, yet irresistibly beautiful, and he had translated it into music still more tantalizing than itself. He sounded the words with his German accent, barely perceptible in English but strongly marked in French. He dropped them and took them up again; he was playing with them, feeling his way. "*This* is my idea!" he broke out; he had caught it, in one of its mystic mazes, and he rendered it with a kind of solemn freshness. There was a phrase he repeated, trying it again and again, and while he did so he chanted the words of the song as if they were an illuminating flame, an inspiration. I was rather glad on the whole that Vendemer didn't hear what his pronunciation made of them, but as I was in the very act of rejoicing I became aware that the author of the verses had opened the door. He had pushed it gently, hearing the music; then hearing also his own poetry he had paused and stood looking at Heidenmauer. The young German nodded and laughed and, irreflectively, spontaneously, greeted him with a friendly "*Was sagen Sie dazu?*" I saw Vendemer change colour; he blushed red and, for an instant, as he stood wavering, I thought he was going to retreat. But I beckoned him in and, on the divan beside me, patted a place for him to sit.

He came in but didn't take this place; he went and stood before the fire to warm his feet, turning his back to us. Heidenmauer played and played, and after a little Vendemer turned round; he looked about him for a seat, dropped into it and sat with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands. Presently Heidenmauer called out, in French, above the music: "I like your songs—I like them immensely!" but the young Frenchman neither spoke nor moved. When however five minutes later Heidenmauer stopped he sprang up with an entreaty to him to go on, to go on for the love of God. "*Foilà—foilà!*" cried the musician, and with hands for an instant suspended he wandered off into mysterious worlds. He played Wagner and then Wagner again—a great deal of Wagner; in the midst of which, abruptly, he addressed himself again to Vendemer, who had gone still further from the piano, launching to me, however from his corner a "*Dieu, que c'est beau!*" which I saw that Heidenmauer caught. "I've a conception for an opera, you know—I'd give anything if you'd do the libretto!" Our German friend laughed out, after this, with clear good nature, and the rich appeal brought Vendemer slowly to his feet again, staring at the musician across the room and turning this time perceptibly pale.

I felt there was a drama in the air, and it made me a little nervous; to conceal which I said to Heidenmauer: “What’s your conception? What’s your subject?”

“My conception would be realized in the subject of M. Vendemer’s play—if he’ll do that for me in a great lyric manner!” And with this the young German, who had stopped playing to answer me, quitted the piano and Vendemer got up to meet him. “The subject is splendid—it has taken possession of me. Will you do it with me? Will you work with me? We shall make something great!”

“Ah, you don’t know what you ask!” Vendemer answered, with his pale smile.

“I do—I do: I’ve thought of it. It will be bad for me in my country; I shall suffer for it. They won’t like it—they’ll abuse me for it—they’ll say of me *pis que pendre*.” Heidenmauer pronounced it *bis que bendre*.

“They’ll hate my libretto so?” Vendemer asked.

“Yes, your libretto—they’ll say it’s immoral and horrible. And they’ll say *I’m* immoral and horrible for having worked with you,” the young composer went on, with his pleasant healthy lucidity. “You’ll injure my career. Oh yes, I shall suffer!” he joyously, exultingly cried.

“*Et moi donc!*” Vendemer exclaimed.

“Public opinion, yes. I shall also make you suffer—I shall nip your prosperity in the bud. All that’s *des bêtises—tes pétisses*,” said poor Heidenmauer. “In art there are no countries.”

“Yes, art is terrible, art is monstrous,” Vendemer replied, looking at the fire.

“I love your songs—they have extraordinary beauty.”

“And Vendemer has an equal taste for your compositions,” I said to Heidenmauer.

“Tempter!” Vendemer murmured to me, with a strange look.

“*C’est juste!* I mustn’t meddle—which will be all the easier as I’m dining out and must go and dress. You two make yourselves at home and fight it out here.”

“Do you *leave* me?” asked Vendemer, still with his strange look.

“My dear fellow, I’ve only just time.”

“We will dine together—he and I—at one of those characteristic places, and we will look at the matter in its different relations,” said Heidenmauer. “Then we will come back here to finish—your studio is so good for music.”

“There are some things it *isn’t* good for,” Vendemer remarked, looking at our companion.

“It’s good for poetry—it’s good for truth,” smiled the composer.

“You’ll stay *here* and dine together,” I said; “my servant can manage that.”

“No, no—we’ll go out and we’ll walk together. We’ll talk a great deal,” Heidenmauer went on. “The subject is so comprehensive,” he said to Vendemer, as he lighted another cigar.

“The subject?”

“Of your drama. It’s so universal.”

“Ah, the universe—*il n’y a que ça!*” I laughed, to Vendemer, partly with a really amused sense of the exaggerated woe that looked out of his poetic eyes and that seemed an appeal to me not to forsake him, to throw myself into the scale of the associations he would have to stifle, and partly to encourage him, to express my conviction that two such fine minds

couldn't in the long run be the worse for coming to an agreement. I might have been a more mocking Mephistopheles handing over his pure spirit to my literally German Faust.

When I came home at eleven o'clock I found him alone in my studio, where, evidently, for some time, he had been moving up and down in agitated thought. The air was thick with Bavarian fumes, with the reverberation of mighty music and great ideas, with the echoes of that "universe" to which I had so mercilessly consigned him. But I judged in a moment that Vendemer was in a very different phase of his evolution from the one in which I had left him. I had never seen his handsome, sensitive face so intensely illumined.

"*Ça y est—ça y est!*" he exclaimed, standing there with his hands in his pockets and looking at me.

"You've really agreed to do something together?"

"We've sworn a tremendous oath—we've taken a sacred engagement."

"My dear fellow, you're a hero."

"Wait and see! *C'est un très-grand esprit.*"

"So much the better!"

"*C'est un bien beau génie.* Ah, we've risen—we soar; *nous sommes dans les grandes espaces!*" my friend continued with his dilated eyes.

"It's very interesting—because it will cost you something."

"It will cost me everything!" said Félix Vendemer in a tone I seem to hear at this hour.

"That's just the beauty of it. It's the chance of chances to testify for art—to affirm an indispensable truth."

"An indispensable truth?" I repeated, feeling myself soar too, but into the splendid vague.

"Do you know the greatest crime that can be perpetrated against it?"

"Against it?" I asked, still soaring.

"Against the religion of art—against the love for beauty—against the search for the Holy Grail?" The transfigured look with which he named these things, the way his warm voice filled the rich room, was a revelation of the wonderful talk that had taken place.

"Do you know—for one of *us*—the really damnable, the only unpardonable, sin?"

"Tell me, so that I may keep clear of it!"

"To profane *our* golden air with the hideous invention of patriotism."

"It was a clever invention in its time!" I laughed.

"I'm not talking about its time—I'm talking about, its place. It was never anything but a fifth-rate impertinence here. In art there are no countries—no idiotic nationalities, no frontiers, nor *douanes*, nor still more idiotic fortresses and bayonets. It has the unspeakable beauty of being the region in which those abominations cease, the medium in which such vulgarities simply can't live. What therefore are we to say of the brutes who wish to drag them all in—to crush to death with them all the flowers of such a garden, to shut out all the light of such a sky?" I was far from desiring to defend the "brutes" in question, though there rose before me even at that moment a sufficiently vivid picture of the way, later on, poor Vendemer would have to face them. I quickly perceived indeed that the picture was, to his own eyes, a still more crowded canvas. Félix Vendemer, in the centre of it, was an admirable, a really sublime figure. If there had been wonderful talk after I quitted the two poets the wonder was not over

yet—it went on far into the night for my benefit. We looked at the prospect in many lights, turned the subject about almost every way it would go; but I am bound to say there was one relation in which we tacitly agreed to forbear to consider it. We neither of us uttered the name of Paule de Brindes—the outlook in that direction would too serious. And yet if Félix Vendemer, exquisite and incorruptible artist that he was, had fallen in love with the idea of “testifying,” it was from that direction that the finest part of his opportunity to do so would proceed.

I was only too conscious of this when, within the week, I received a hurried note from Madame de Brindes, begging me as a particular favour to come and see her without delay. I had not seen Vendemer again, but I had had a characteristic call from Heidenmauer, who, though I could imagine him perfectly in a Prussian helmet, with a needle-gun, perfectly, on definite occasion, a sturdy, formidable soldier, gave me a renewed impression of inhabiting, in the expansion of his genius and the exercise of his intelligence, no land of red tape, no province smaller nor more pedantically administered than the totality of things. I was reminded afresh too that *he* foresaw no striking salon-picture, no *chic* of execution nor romance of martyrdom, or at any rate devoted very little time to the consideration of such objects. He doubtless did scant justice to poor Vendemer’s attitude, though he said to me of him by the way, with his rosy deliberation: “He has good ideas—he has good ideas. The French mind has—for me—the taste of a very delightful *bonbon!*” He only measured the angle of convergence, as he called it, of their two projections. He was in short not preoccupied with the personal gallantry of their experiment; he was preoccupied with its “aesthetic and harmonic basis.”

It was without her daughter that Madame de Brindes received me, when I obeyed her summons, in her scrap of a *quatrième* in the Rue de Miromesnil.

“Ah, *cher monsieur*, how could you have permitted such a horror—how could you have given it the countenance of your roof, of your influence?” There were tears in her eyes, and I don’t think that for the moment I have ever been more touched by a reproach. But I pulled myself together sufficiently to affirm my faith as well as to disengage my responsibility. I explained that there was no horror to me in the matter, that if I was not a German neither was I a Frenchman, and that all I had before me was two young men inflamed by a great idea and nobly determined to work together to give it a great form.

“A great idea—to go over to *ces gens-là?*”

“To go over to them?”

“To put yourself on their side—to throw yourself into the arms of those who hate us—to fall into their abominable trap!”

“What do you call their abominable trap?”

“Their false *bonhomie*, the very impudence of their intrigues, their profound, scientific deceit and their determination to get the advantage of us by exploiting our generosity.”

“You attribute to such a man as Heidenmauer too many motives and too many calculations. He’s quite ideally superior!”

“Oh, German idealism—we know what that means! We’ve no use for their superiority; let them carry it elsewhere—let them leave us alone. Why do they thrust themselves in upon us and set old wounds throbbing by their detested presence? We don’t go near *them*, or ever wish to hear their ugly names or behold their *visages de bois*; therefore the most rudimentary good taste, the tact one would expect even from naked savages, might suggest to them to seek their amusements elsewhere. But *their* taste, *their* tact—I can scarcely trust myself to speak!”

Madame de Brindes did speak however at considerable further length and with a sincerity of passion which left one quite without arguments. There was no argument to meet the fact that Vendemer's attitude wounded her, wounded her daughter, *jusqu'au fond de l'âme*, that it represented for them abysses of shame and suffering and that for himself it meant a whole future compromised, a whole public alienated. It was vain doubtless to talk of such things; if people didn't *feel* them, if they hadn't the fibre of loyalty, the high imagination of honour, all explanations, all supplications were but a waste of noble emotion. M. Vendemer's perversity was monstrous—she had had a sickening discussion with him. What she desired of me was to make one last appeal to him, to put the solemn truth before him, to try to bring him back to sanity. It was as if he had temporarily lost his reason. It was to be made clear to him, *par exemple*, that unless he should recover it Mademoiselle de Brindes would unhesitatingly withdraw from her engagement.

“Does she *really* feel as you do?” I asked.

“Do you think I put words into her mouth? She feels as a *fille de France* is obliged to feel!”

“Doesn't she love him then?”

“She adores him. But she won't take him without his honour.”

“I don't understand such refinements!” I said.

“Oh, *vous autres!*” cried Madame de Brindes. Then with eyes glowing through her tears she demanded: “Don't you know she knows how her father died?” I was on the point of saying “What has that to do with it?” but I withheld the question, for after all I could conceive that it might have something. There was no disputing about tastes, and I could only express my sincere conviction that Vendemer was profoundly attached to Mademoiselle Paule. “Then let him prove it by making her a sacrifice!” my strenuous hostess replied; to which I rejoined that I would repeat our conversation to him and put the matter before him as strongly as I could. I delayed a little to take leave, wondering if the girl would not come in—I should have been so much more content to receive her strange recantation from her own lips. I couldn't say this to Madame de Brindes; but she guessed I meant it, and before we separated we exchanged a look in which our mutual mistrust was written—the suspicion on her side that I should not be a very passionate intercessor and the conjecture on mine that she might be misrepresenting her daughter. This slight tension, I must add, was only momentary, for I have had a chance of observing Paule de Brindes since then, and the two ladies were soon satisfied that I pitied them enough to have been eloquent.

My eloquence has been of no avail, and I have learned (it has been one of the most interesting lessons of my life) of what transcendent stuff the artist may sometimes be made. Herman Heidenmauer and Félix Vendemer are, at the hour I write, immersed in their monstrous collaboration. There were postponements and difficulties at first, and there will be more serious ones in the future, when it is a question of giving the finished work to the world. The world of Paris will stop its ears in horror, the German Empire will turn its mighty back, and the authors of what I foresee (oh, I've been treated to specimens!) as a perhaps really epoch-making musical revelation (is Heidenmauer's style rubbing off on me?) will perhaps have to beg for a hearing in communities fatally unintelligent. It may very well be that they will not obtain any hearing at all for years. I like at any rate to think that time works for them. At present they work for themselves and for each other, amid drawbacks of several kinds. Separating after the episode in Paris, they have met again on alien soil, at a little place on the Genoese Riviera where sunshine is cheap and tobacco bad, and they live (the two together) for five francs a day, which is all they can muster between them. It appears that when Heidenmauer's London step-brother was informed of the young composer's unnatural

alliance he instantly withdrew his subsidy. The return of it is contingent on the rupture of the unholy union and the destruction by flame of all the manuscript. The pair are very poor and the whole thing depends on their staying power. They are so preoccupied with their opera that they have no time for pot-boilers. Vendemer is in a feverish hurry, lest perhaps he should find himself chilled. There are still other details which contribute to the interest of the episode and which, for me, help to render it a most refreshing, a really great little case. It rests me, it delights me, there is something in it that makes for civilization. In their way they are working for human happiness. The strange course taken by Vendemer (I mean his renunciation of his engagement) must moreover be judged in the light of the fact that he was really in love. Something had to be sacrificed, and what he clung to most (he's extraordinary, I admit) was the truth he had the opportunity of proclaiming. Men give up their love for advantages every day, but they rarely give it up for such discomforts.

Paule de Brindes was the less in love of the two; I see her often enough to have made up my mind about that. But she's mysterious, she's odd; there was at any rate a sufficient wrench in her life to make her often absent-minded. Does her imagination hover about Félix Vendemer? A month ago, going into their rooms one day when her mother was not at home (the *bonne* had admitted me under a wrong impression) I found her at the piano, playing one of Heidenmauer's compositions—playing it without notes and with infinite expression. How had she got hold of it? How had she learned it? This was her secret—she blushed so that I didn't pry into it. But what is she doing, under the singular circumstances, with a composition of Herman Heidenmauer's? She never met him, she never heard him play but that once. It will be a pretty complication if it shall appear that the young German genius made on that occasion more than one intense impression. This needn't appear, however, inasmuch as, being naturally in terror of the discovery by her mother of such an anomaly, she may count on me absolutely not to betray her. I hadn't fully perceived how deeply susceptible she is to music. She must have a strange confusion of feelings—a dim, haunting trouble, with a kind of ache of impatience for the wonderful opera somewhere in the depths of it. Don't we live fast after all, and doesn't the old order change? Don't say art isn't mighty! I shall give you some more illustrations of it yet.

Owen Wingrave

I

“Upon my honour you must be off your head!” cried Spencer Coyle, as the young man, with a white face, stood there panting a little and repeating “Really, I’ve quite decided,” and “I assure you I’ve thought it all out.” They were both pale, but Owen Wingrave smiled in a manner exasperating to his interlocutor, who however still discriminated sufficiently to see that his grimace (it was like an irrelevant leer) was the result of extreme and conceivable nervousness.

“It was certainly a mistake to have gone so far; but that is exactly why I feel I mustn’t go further,” poor Owen said, waiting mechanically, almost humbly (he wished not to swagger, and indeed he had nothing to swagger about) and carrying through the window to the stupid opposite houses the dry glitter of his eyes.

“I’m unspeakably disgusted. You’ve made me dreadfully ill,” Mr. Coyle went on, looking thoroughly upset.

“I’m very sorry. It was the fear of the effect on you that kept me from speaking sooner.”

“You should have spoken three months ago. Don’t you know your mind from one day to the other?”

The young man for a moment said nothing. Then he replied with a little tremor: “You’re very angry with me, and I expected it. I’m awfully obliged to you for all you’ve done for me. I’ll do anything else for you in return, but I can’t do that. Everyone else will let me have it, of course. I’m prepared for it—I’m prepared for everything. That’s what has taken the time: to be sure I was prepared. I think it’s your displeasure I feel most and regret most. But little by little you’ll get over it.”

“*You’ll* get over it rather faster, I suppose!” Spencer Coyle satirically exclaimed. He was quite as agitated as his young friend, and they were evidently in no condition to prolong an encounter in which they each drew blood. Mr. Coyle was a professional “coach”; he prepared young men for the army, taking only three or four at a time, to whom he applied the irresistible stimulus of which the possession was both his secret and his fortune. He had not a great establishment; he would have said himself that it was not a wholesale business. Neither his system, his health nor his temper could have accommodated itself to numbers; so he weighed and measured his pupils and turned away more applicants than he passed. He was an artist in his line, caring only for picked subjects and capable of sacrifices almost passionate for the individual. He liked ardent young men (there were kinds of capacity to which he was indifferent) and he had taken a particular fancy to Owen Wingrave. This young man’s facility really fascinated him. His candidates usually did wonders, and he might have sent up a multitude. He was a person of exactly the stature of the great Napoleon, with a certain flicker of genius in his light blue eye: it had been said of him that he looked like a pianist. The tone of his favourite pupil now expressed, without intention indeed, a superior wisdom which irritated him. He had not especially suffered before from Wingrave’s high opinion of himself, which had seemed justified by remarkable parts; but to-day it struck him as intolerable. He cut short the discussion, declining absolutely to regard their relations as terminated, and remarked to his pupil that he had better go off somewhere (down to Eastbourne, say; the sea would bring him round) and take a few days to find his feet and come to his senses. He could afford the time, he was so well up: when Spencer Coyle remembered how well up he was he

could have boxed his ears. The tall, athletic young man was not physically a subject for simplified reasoning; but there was a troubled gentleness in his handsome face, the index of compunction mixed with pertinacity, which signified that if it could have done any good he would have turned both cheeks. He evidently didn't pretend that his wisdom was superior; he only presented it as his own. It was his own career after all that was in question. He couldn't refuse to go through the form of trying Eastbourne or at least of holding his tongue, though there was that in his manner which implied that if he should do so it would be really to give Mr. Coyle a chance to recuperate. He didn't feel a bit overworked, but there was nothing more natural than that with their tremendous pressure Mr. Coyle should be. Mr. Coyle's own intellect would derive an advantage from his pupil's holiday. Mr. Coyle saw what he meant, but he controlled himself; he only demanded, as his right, a truce of three days. Owen Wingrave granted it, though as fostering sad illusions this went visibly against his conscience; but before they separated the famous crammer remarked:

"All the same I feel as if I ought to see someone. I think you mentioned to me that your aunt had come to town?"

"Oh yes; she's in Baker Street. Do go and see her," the boy said comfortingly.

Mr. Coyle looked at him an instant. "Have you broached this folly to her?"

"Not yet—to no one. I thought it right to speak to you first."

"Oh, what you 'think right'!" cried Spencer Coyle, outraged by his young friend's standards. He added that he would probably call on Miss Wingrave; after which the recreant youth got out of the house.

Owen Wingrave didn't however start punctually for Eastbourne; he only directed his steps to Kensington Gardens, from which Mr. Coyle's desirable residence (he was terribly expensive and had a big house) was not far removed. The famous coach "put up" his pupils, and Owen had mentioned to the butler that he would be back to dinner. The spring day was warm to his young blood, and he had a book in his pocket which, when he had passed into the gardens and, after a short stroll, dropped into a chair, he took out with the slow, soft sigh that finally ushers in a pleasure postponed. He stretched his long legs and began to read it; it was a volume of Goethe's poems. He had been for days in a state of the highest tension, and now that the cord had snapped the relief was proportionate; only it was characteristic of him that this deliverance should take the form of an intellectual pleasure. If he had thrown up the probability of a magnificent career it was not to dawdle along Bond Street nor parade his indifference in the window of a club. At any rate he had in a few moments forgotten everything—the tremendous pressure, Mr. Coyle's disappointment, and even his formidable aunt in Baker Street. If these watchers had overtaken him there would surely have been some excuse for their exasperation. There was no doubt he was perverse, for his very choice of a pastime only showed how he had got up his German.

"What the devil's the matter with him, do *you* know?" Spencer Coyle asked that afternoon of young Lechmere, who had never before observed the head of the establishment to set a fellow such an example of bad language. Young Lechmere was not only Wingrave's fellow-pupil, he was supposed to be his intimate, indeed quite his best friend, and had unconsciously performed for Mr. Coyle the office of making the promise of his great gifts more vivid by contrast. He was short and sturdy and as a general thing uninspired, and Mr. Coyle, who found no amusement in believing in him, had never thought him less exciting than as he stared now out of a face from which you could never guess whether he had caught an idea. Young Lechmere concealed such achievements as if they had been youthful indiscretions. At

any rate he could evidently conceive no reason why it should be thought there was anything more than usual the matter with the companion of his studies; so Mr. Coyle had to continue:

“He declines to go up. He chucks the whole thing!”

The first thing that struck young Lechmere in the case was the freshness it had imparted to the governor’s vocabulary.

“He doesn’t want to go to Sandhurst?”

“He doesn’t want to go anywhere. He gives up the army altogether. He objects,” said Mr. Coyle, in a tone that made young Lechmere almost hold his breath, “to the military profession.”

“Why, it has been the profession of all his family!”

“Their profession? It has been their religion! Do you know Miss Wingrave?”

“Oh, yes. Isn’t she awful?” young Lechmere candidly ejaculated.

His instructor demurred.

“She’s formidable, if you mean that, and it’s right she should be; because somehow in her very person, good maiden lady as she is, she represents the might, she represents the traditions and the exploits of the British army. She represents the expansive property of the English name. I think his family can be trusted to come down on him, but every influence should be set in motion. I want to know what yours is. Can *you* do anything in the matter?”

“I can try a couple of rounds with him,” said young Lechmere reflectively. “But he knows a fearful lot. He has the most extraordinary ideas.”

“Then he has told you some of them—he has taken you into his confidence?”

“I’ve heard him jaw by the yard,” smiled the honest youth. “He has told me he despises it.”

“What *is* it he despises? I can’t make out.”

The most consecutive of Mr. Coyle’s nurslings considered a moment, as if he were conscious of a responsibility.

“Why, I think, military glory. He says we take the wrong view of it.”

“He oughtn’t to talk to *you* that way. It’s corrupting the youth of Athens. It’s sowing sedition.”

“Oh, I’m all right!” said young Lechmere. “And he never told me he meant to chuck it. I always thought he meant to see it through, simply because he had to. He’ll argue on any side you like. It’s a tremendous pity—I’m sure he’d have a big career.”

“Tell him so, then; plead with him; struggle with him—for God’s sake.”

“I’ll do what I can—I’ll tell him it’s a regular shame.”

“Yes, strike *that* note—insist on the disgrace of it.”

The young man gave Mr. Coyle a more perceptive glance. “I’m sure he wouldn’t do anything dishonourable.”

“Well—it won’t look right. He must be made to feel *that*—work it up. Give him a comrade’s point of view—that of a brother-in-arms.”

“That’s what I thought we were going to be!” young Lechmere mused romantically, much uplifted by the nature of the mission imposed on him. “He’s an awfully good sort.”

“No one will think so if he backs out!” said Spencer Coyle.

“They mustn’t say it to *me!*” his pupil rejoined with a flush.

Mr. Coyle hesitated a moment, noting his tone and aware that in the perversity of things, though this young man was a born soldier, no excitement would ever attach to *his* alternatives save perhaps on the part of the nice girl to whom at an early day he was sure to be placidly united. “Do you like him very much—do you believe in him?”

Young Lechmere’s life in these days was spent in answering terrible questions; but he had never been subjected to so queer an interrogation as this. “Believe in him? Rather!”

“Then *save* him!”

The poor boy was puzzled, as if it were forced upon him by this intensity that there was more in such an appeal than could appear on the surface; and he doubtless felt that he was only entering into a complex situation when after another moment, with his hands in his pockets, he replied hopefully but not pompously: “I daresay I can bring him round!”

II

Before seeing young Lechmere Mr. Coyle had determined to telegraph an inquiry to Miss Wingrave. He had prepaid the answer, which, being promptly put into his hand, brought the interview we have just related to a close. He immediately drove off to Baker Street, where the lady had said she awaited him, and five minutes after he got there, as he sat with Owen Wingrave’s remarkable aunt, he repeated over several times, in his angry sadness and with the infallibility of his experience: “He’s so intelligent—he’s so intelligent!” He had declared it had been a luxury to put such a fellow through.

“Of course he’s intelligent, what else could he be? We’ve never, that I know of, had but *one* idiot in the family!” said Jane Wingrave. This was an allusion that Mr. Coyle could understand, and it brought home to him another of the reasons for the disappointment, the humiliation as it were, of the good people at Paramore, at the same that it gave an example of the conscientious coarseness he had on former occasions observed in his interlocutress. Poor Philip Wingrave, her late brother’s eldest son, was literally imbecile and banished from view; deformed, unsocial, irretrievable, he had been relegated to a private asylum and had become among the friends of the family only a little hushed lugubrious legend. All the hopes of the house, picturesque Paramore, now unintermittently old Sir Philip’s rather melancholy home (his infirmities would keep him there to the last) were therefore collected on the second boy’s head, which nature, as if in compunction for her previous botch, had, in addition to making it strikingly handsome, filled with marked originalities and talents. These two had been the only children of the old man’s only son, who, like so many of his ancestors, had given up a gallant young life to the service of his country. Owen Wingrave the elder had received his death-cut, in close-quarters, from an Afghan sabre; the blow had come crashing across his skull. His wife, at that time in India, was about to give birth to her third child; and when the event took place, in darkness and anguish, the baby came lifeless into the world and the mother sank under the multiplication of her woes. The second of the little boys in England, who was at Paramore with his grandfather, became the peculiar charge of his aunt, the only unmarried one, and during the interesting Sunday that, by urgent invitation, Spencer Coyle, busy as he was, had, after consenting to put Owen through, spent under that roof, the celebrated crammer received a vivid impression of the influence exerted at least in intention by Miss Wingrave. Indeed the picture of this short visit remained with the observant little man a curious one—the vision of an impoverished Jacobean house, shabby and remarkably “creepy,” but full of character still and full of felicity as a setting for the distinguished figure of the peaceful old soldier. Sir Philip Wingrave, a relic rather than a celebrity, was a small

brown, erect octogenarian, with smouldering eyes and a studied courtesy. He liked to do the diminished honours of his house, but even when with a shaky hand he lighted a bedroom candle for a deprecating guest it was impossible not to feel that beneath the surface he was a merciless old warrior. The eye of the imagination could glance back into his crowded Eastern past—back at episodes in which his scrupulous forms would only have made him more terrible.

Mr. Coyle remembered also two other figures—a faded inoffensive Mrs. Julian, domesticated there by a system of frequent visits as the widow of an officer and a particular friend of Miss Wingrave, and a remarkably clever little girl of eighteen, who was this lady's daughter and who struck the speculative visitor as already formed for other relations. She was very impertinent to Owen, and in the course of a long walk that he had taken with the young man and the effect of which, in much talk, had been to clinch his high opinion of him, he had learned (for Owen chattered confidentially) that Mrs. Julian was the sister of a very gallant gentleman, Captain Hume-Walker, of the Artillery, who had fallen in the Indian Mutiny and between whom and Miss Wingrave (it had been that lady's one known concession) a passage of some delicacy, taking a tragic turn, was believed to have been enacted. They had been engaged to be married, but she had given way to the jealousy of her nature—had broken with him and sent him off to his fate, which had been horrible. A passionate sense of having wronged him, a hard eternal remorse had thereupon taken possession of her, and when his poor sister, linked also to a soldier, had by a still heavier blow been left almost without resources, she had devoted herself charitably to a long expiation. She had sought comfort in taking Mrs. Julian to live much of the time at Paramore, where she became an unremunerated though not uncriticised housekeeper, and Spencer Coyle suspected that it was a part of this comfort that she could at her leisure trample on her. The impression of Jane Wingrave was not the faintest he had gathered on that intensifying Sunday—an occasion singularly tinged for him with the sense of bereavement and mourning and memory, of names never mentioned, of the far-away plaint of widows and the echoes of battles and bad news. It was all military indeed, and Mr. Coyle was made to shudder a little at the profession of which he helped to open the door to harmless young men. Miss Wingrave moreover might have made such a bad conscience worse—so cold and clear a good one looked at him out of her hard, fine eyes and trumpeted in her sonorous voice.

She was a high, distinguished person; angular but not awkward, with a large forehead and abundant black hair, arranged like that of a woman conceiving perhaps excusably of her head as "noble," and irregularly streaked to-day with white. If however she represented for Spencer Coyle the genius of a military race it was not that she had the step of a grenadier or the vocabulary of a camp-follower; it was only that such sympathies were vividly implied in the general fact to which her very presence and each of her actions and glances and tones were a constant and direct allusion—the paramount valour of her family. If she was military it was because she sprang from a military house and because she wouldn't for the world have been anything but what the Wingraves had been. She was almost vulgar about her ancestors, and if one had been tempted to quarrel with her one would have found a fair pretext in her defective sense of proportion. This temptation however said nothing to Spencer Coyle, for whom as a strong character revealing itself in colour and sound she was a spectacle and who was glad to regard her as a force exerted on his own side. He wished her nephew had more of her narrowness instead of being almost cursed with the tendency to look at things in their relations. He wondered why when she came up to town she always resorted to Baker Street for lodgings. He had never known nor heard of Baker Street as a residence—he associated it only with bazaars and photographers. He divined in her a rigid indifference to everything that was not the passion of her life. Nothing really mattered to her but that, and she would have

occupied apartments in Whitechapel if they had been a feature in her tactics. She had received her visitor in a large cold, faded room, furnished with slippery seats and decorated with alabaster vases and wax-flowers. The only little personal comfort for which she appeared to have looked out was a fat catalogue of the Army and Navy Stores, which reposed on a vast, desolate table-cover of false blue. Her clear forehead—it was like a porcelain slate, a receptacle for addresses and sums—had flushed when her nephew’s crammer told her the extraordinary news; but he saw she was fortunately more angry than frightened. She had essentially, she would always have, too little imagination for fear, and the healthy habit moreover of facing everything had taught her that the occasion usually found her a quantity to reckon with. Mr. Coyle saw that her only fear at present could have been that of not being able to prevent her nephew from being absurd and that to such an apprehension as this she was in fact inaccessible. Practically too she was not troubled by surprise; she recognised none of the futile, none of the subtle sentiments. If Philip had for an hour made a fool of himself she was angry; disconcerted as she would have been on learning that he had confessed to debts or fallen in love with a low girl. But there remained in any annoyance the saving fact that no one could make a fool of *her*.

“I don’t know when I’ve taken such an interest in a young man—I think I never have, since I began to handle them,” Mr. Coyle said. “I like him, I believe in him—it’s been a delight to see how he was going.”

“Oh, I know how they go!” Miss Wingrave threw back her head with a familiar briskness, as if a rapid procession of the generations had flashed before her, rattling their scabbards and spurs. Spencer Coyle recognised the intimation that she had nothing to learn from anybody about the natural carriage of a Wingrave, and he even felt convicted by her next words of being, in her eyes, with the troubled story of his check, his weak complaint of his pupil, rather a poor creature. “If you like him,” she exclaimed, “for mercy’s sake keep him quiet!”

Mr. Coyle began to explain to her that this was less easy than she appeared to imagine; but he perceived that she understood very little of what he said. The more he insisted that the boy had a kind of intellectual independence, the more this struck her as a conclusive proof that her nephew was a Wingrave and a soldier. It was not till he mentioned to her that Owen had spoken of the profession of arms as of something that would be “beneath” him, it was not till her attention was arrested by this intenser light on the complexity of the problem that Miss Wingrave broke out after a moment’s stupefied reflection: “Send him to see me immediately!”

“That’s exactly what I wanted to ask your leave to do. But I’ve wanted also to prepare you for the worst, to make you understand that he strikes me as really obstinate and to suggest to you that the most powerful arguments at your command—especially if you should be able to put your hand on some intensely practical one—will be none too effective.”

“I think I’ve got a powerful argument.” Miss Wingrave looked very hard at her visitor. He didn’t know in the least what it was, but he begged her to put it forward without delay. He promised that their young man should come to Baker Street that evening, mentioning however that he had already urged him to spend without delay a couple of days at Eastbourne. This led Jane Wingrave to inquire with surprise what virtue there might be in *that* expensive remedy, and to reply with decision when Mr. Coyle had said “The virtue of a little rest, a little change, a little relief to overwrought nerves,” “Ah, don’t coddle him—he’s costing us a great deal of money! I’ll talk to him and I’ll take him down to Paramore; then I’ll send him back to you straightened out.”

Spencer Coyle hailed this pledge superficially with satisfaction, but before he quitted Miss Wingrave he became conscious that he had really taken on a new anxiety—a restlessness that made him say to himself, groaning inwardly: “Oh, she is a grenadier at bottom, and she’ll have no tact. I don’t know what her powerful argument is; I’m only afraid she’ll be stupid and make him worse. The old man’s better—*he’s* capable of tact, though he’s not quite an extinct volcano. Owen will probably put him in a rage. In short the difficulty is that the boy’s the best of them.”

Spencer Coyle felt afresh that evening at dinner that the boy was the best of them. Young Wingrave (who, he was pleased to observe, had not yet proceeded to the seaside) appeared at the repast as usual, looking inevitably a little self-conscious, but not too original for Bayswater. He talked very naturally to Mrs. Coyle, who had thought him from the first the most beautiful young man they had ever received; so that the person most ill at ease was poor Lechmere, who took great trouble, as if from the deepest delicacy, not to meet the eye of his misguided mate. Spencer Coyle however paid the penalty of his own profundity in feeling more and more worried; he could so easily see that there were all sorts of things in his young friend that the people of Paramore wouldn’t understand. He began even already to react against the notion of his being harassed—to reflect that after all he had a right to his ideas—to remember that he was of a substance too fine to be in fairness roughly used. It was in this way that the ardent little crammer, with his whimsical perceptions and complicated sympathies, was generally condemned not to settle down comfortably either into his displeasures or into his enthusiasms. His love of the real truth never gave him a chance to enjoy them. He mentioned to Wingrave after dinner the propriety of an immediate visit to Baker Street, and the young man, looking “queer,” as he thought—that is smiling again with the exaggerated glory he had shown in their recent interview—went off to face the ordeal. Spencer Coyle noted that he was scared—he was afraid of his aunt; but somehow this didn’t strike him as a sign of pusillanimity. *He* should have been scared, he was well aware, in the poor boy’s place, and the sight of his pupil marching up to the battery in spite of his terrors was a positive suggestion of the temperament of the soldier. Many a plucky youth would have shirked this particular peril.

“He *has* got ideas!” young Lechmere broke out to his instructor after his comrade had quitted the house. He was evidently bewildered and agitated—he had an emotion to work off. He had before dinner gone straight at his friend, as Mr. Coyle had requested, and had elicited from him that his scruples were founded on an overwhelming conviction of the stupidity—the “crass barbarism” he called it—of war. His great complaint was that people hadn’t invented anything cleverer, and he was determined to show, the only way he could, that *he* wasn’t such an ass.

“And he thinks all the great generals ought to have been shot, and that Napoleon Bonaparte in particular, the greatest, was a criminal, a monster for whom language has no adequate name!” Mr. Coyle rejoined, completing young Lechmere’s picture. “He favoured you, I see, with exactly the same pearls of wisdom that he produced for me. But I want to know what *you* said.”

“I said they were awful rot!” Young Lechmere spoke with emphasis, and he was slightly surprised to hear Mr. Coyle laugh incongruously at this just declaration and then after a moment continue:

“It’s all very curious—I daresay there’s something in it. But it’s a pity!”

“He told me when it was that the question began to strike him in that light. Four or five years ago, when he did a lot of reading about all the great swells and their campaigns—Hannibal

and Julius Cæsar, Marlborough and Frederick and Bonaparte. He *has* done a lot of reading, and he says it opened his eyes. He says that a wave of disgust rolled over him. He talked about the ‘immeasurable misery’ of wars, and asked me why nations don’t tear to pieces the governments, the rulers that go in for them. He hates poor old Bonaparte worst of all.”

“Well, poor old Bonaparte was a brute. He was a frightful ruffian,” Mr. Coyle unexpectedly declared. “But I suppose you didn’t admit that.”

“Oh, I daresay he was objectionable, and I’m very glad we laid him on his back. But the point I made to Wingrave was that his own behaviour would excite no end of remark.” Young Lechmere hesitated an instant, then he added: “I told him he must be prepared for the worst.”

“Of course he asked you what you meant by the ‘worst,’” said Spencer Coyle.

“Yes, he asked me that, and do you know what I said? I said people would say that his conscientious scruples and his wave of disgust are only a pretext. Then he asked ‘A pretext for what?’”

“Ah, he rather had you there!” Mr. Coyle exclaimed with a little laugh that was mystifying to his pupil.

“Not a bit—for I told him.”

“What did you tell him?”

Once more, for a few seconds, with his conscious eyes in his instructor’s, the young man hung fire.

“Why, what we spoke of a few hours ago. The appearance he’d present of not having——” The honest youth faltered a moment, then brought it out: “The military temperament, don’t you know? But do you know what he said to that?” young Lechmere went on.

“Damn the military temperament!” the crammer promptly replied.

Young Lechmere stared. Mr. Coyle’s tone left him uncertain if he were attributing the phrase to Wingrave or uttering his own opinion, but he exclaimed:

“Those were exactly his words!”

“He doesn’t care,” said Mr. Coyle.

“Perhaps not. But it isn’t fair for him to abuse us fellows. I told him it’s the finest temperament in the world, and that there’s nothing so splendid as pluck and heroism.”

“Ah! there you had *him*.”

“I told him it was unworthy of him to abuse a gallant, a magnificent profession. I told him there’s no type so fine as that of the soldier doing his duty.”

“That’s essentially *your* type, my dear boy.” Young Lechmere blushed; he couldn’t make out (and the danger was naturally unexpected to him) whether at that moment he didn’t exist mainly for the recreation of his friend. But he was partly reassured by the genial way this friend continued, laying a hand on his shoulder: “Keep *at* him that way! we may do something. I’m extremely obliged to you.” Another doubt however remained unassuaged—a doubt which led him to exclaim to Mr. Coyle before they dropped the painful subject:

“He *doesn’t* care! But it’s awfully odd he shouldn’t!”

“So it is, but remember what you said this afternoon—I mean about your not advising people to make insinuations to *you*.”

“I believe I should knock a fellow down!” said young Lechmere. Mr. Coyle had got up; the conversation had taken place while they sat together after Mrs. Coyle’s withdrawal from the dinner-table and the head of the establishment administered to his disciple, on principles that were a part of his thoroughness, a glass of excellent claret. The disciple, also on his feet, lingered an instant, not for another “go,” as he would have called it, at the decanter, but to wipe his microscopic moustache with prolonged and unusual care. His companion saw he had something to bring out which required a final effort, and waited for him an instant with a hand on the knob of the door. Then as young Lechmere approached him Spencer Coyle grew conscious of an unwonted intensity in the round and ingenuous face. The boy was nervous, but he tried to behave like a man of the world. “Of course, it’s between ourselves,” he stammered, “and I wouldn’t breathe such a word to any one who wasn’t interested in poor Wingrave as you are. But do you think he funks it?”

Mr. Coyle looked at him so hard for an instant that he was visibly frightened at what he had said.

“Funks it! Funks what?”

“Why, what we’re talking about—the service.” Young Lechmere gave a little gulp and added with a *naïveté* almost pathetic to Spencer Coyle: “The dangers, you know!”

“Do you mean he’s thinking of his skin?”

Young Lechmere’s eyes expanded appealingly, and what his instructor saw in his pink face—he even thought he saw a tear—was the dread of a disappointment shocking in the degree in which the loyalty of admiration had been great.

“Is he—is he *afraid*?” repeated the honest lad, with a quaver of suspense.

“Dear no!” said Spencer Coyle, turning his back.

Young Lechmere felt a little snubbed and even a little ashamed; but he felt still more relieved.

III

Less than a week after this Spencer Coyle received a note from Miss Wingrave, who had immediately quitted London with her nephew. She proposed that he should come down to Paramore for the following Sunday—Owen was really so tiresome. On the spot, in that house of examples and memories and in combination with her poor dear father, who was “dreadfully annoyed,” it might be worth their while to make a last stand. Mr. Coyle read between the lines of this letter that the party at Paramore had got over a good deal of ground since Miss Wingrave, in Baker Street, had treated his despair as superficial. She was not an insinuating woman, but she went so far as to put the question on the ground of his conferring a particular favour on an afflicted family; and she expressed the pleasure it would give them if he should be accompanied by Mrs. Coyle, for whom she inclosed a separate invitation. She mentioned that she was also writing, subject to Mr. Coyle’s approval, to young Lechmere. She thought such a nice manly boy might do her wretched nephew some good. The celebrated crammer determined to embrace this opportunity; and now it was the case not so much that he was angry as that he was anxious. As he directed his answer to Miss Wingrave’s letter he caught himself smiling at the thought that at bottom he was going to defend his young friend rather than to attack him. He said to his wife, who was a fair, fresh, slow woman—a person of much more presence than himself—that she had better take Miss Wingrave at her word: it was such an extraordinary, such a fascinating specimen of an old English home. This last allusion was amicably sarcastic—he had already accused the good lady more than once of being in love with Owen Wingrave. She admitted that she was, she

even gloried in her passion; which shows that the subject, between them, was treated in a liberal spirit. She carried out the joke by accepting the invitation with eagerness. Young Lechmere was delighted to do the same; his instructor had good-naturedly taken the view that the little break would freshen him up for his last spurt.

It was the fact that the occupants of Paramore did indeed take their trouble hard that struck Spencer Coyle after he had been an hour or two in that fine old house. This very short second visit, beginning on the Saturday evening, was to constitute the strangest episode of his life. As soon as he found himself in private with his wife—they had retired to dress for dinner—they called each other's attention with effusion and almost with alarm to the sinister gloom that was stamped on the place. The house was admirable with its old grey front which came forward in wings so as to form three sides of a square, but Mrs. Coyle made no scruple to declare that if she had known in advance the sort of impression she was going to receive she would never have put her foot in it. She characterized it as "uncanny," she accused her husband of not having warned her properly. He had mentioned to her in advance certain facts, but while she almost feverishly dressed she had innumerable questions to ask. He hadn't told her about the girl, the extraordinary girl, Miss Julian—that is, he hadn't told her that this young lady, who in plain terms was a mere dependent, would be in effect, and as a consequence of the way she carried herself, the most important person in the house. Mrs. Coyle was already prepared to announce that she hated Miss Julian's affectations. Her husband above all hadn't told her that they should find their young charge looking five years older.

"I couldn't imagine that," said Mr. Coyle, "nor that the character of the crisis here would be quite so perceptible. But I suggested to Miss Wingrave the other day that they should press her nephew in real earnest, and she has taken me at my word. They've cut off his supplies—they're trying to starve him out. That's not what I meant—but indeed I don't quite *know* today what I meant. Owen feels the pressure, but he won't yield." The strange thing was that, now that he was there, the versatile little coach felt still more that his own spirit had been caught up by a wave of reaction. If he was there it was because he was on poor Owen's side. His whole impression, his whole apprehension, had on the spot become much deeper. There was something in the dear boy's very resistance that began to charm him. When his wife, in the intimacy of the conference I have mentioned, threw off the mask and commended even with extravagance the stand his pupil had taken (he was too good to be a horrid soldier and it was noble of him to suffer for his convictions—wasn't he as upright as a young hero, even though as pale as a Christian martyr?) the good lady only expressed the sympathy which, under cover of regarding his young friend as a rare exception, he had already recognised in his own soul.

For, half an hour ago, after they had had superficial tea in the brown old hall of the house, his young friend had proposed to him, before going to dress, to take a turn outside, and had even, on the terrace, as they walked together to one of the far ends of it, passed his hand entreatingly into his companion's arm, permitting himself thus a familiarity unusual between pupil and master and calculated to show that he had guessed whom he could most depend on to be kind to him. Spencer Coyle on his own side had guessed something, so that he was not surprised at the boy's having a particular confidence to make. He had felt on arriving that each member of the party had wished to get hold of him first, and he knew that at that moment Jane Wingrave was peering through the ancient blur of one of the windows (the house had been modernised so little that the thick dim panes were three centuries old) to see if her nephew looked as if he were poisoning the visitor's mind. Mr. Coyle lost no time therefore in reminding the youth (and he took care to laugh as he did so) that he had not come down to Paramore to be corrupted. He had come down to make, face to face, a last appeal to

him—he hoped it wouldn't be utterly vain. Owen smiled sadly as they went, asking him if he thought he had the general air of a fellow who was going to knock under.

"I think you look strange—I think you look ill," Spencer Coyle said very honestly. They had paused at the end of the terrace.

"I've had to exercise a great power of resistance, and it rather takes it out of one."

"Ah, my dear boy, I wish your great power—for you evidently possess it—were exerted in a better cause!"

Owen Wingrave smiled down at his small instructor. "I don't believe that!" Then he added, to explain why: "Isn't what you want, if you're so good as to think well of my character, to see me exert *most* power, in whatever direction? Well, *this* is the way I exert most." Owen Wingrave went on to relate that he had had some terrible hours with his grandfather, who had denounced him in a way to make one's hair stand up on one's head. He had expected them not to like it, not a bit, but he had had no idea they would make such a row. His aunt was different, but she was equally insulting. Oh, they had made him feel they were ashamed of him; they accused him of putting a public dishonour on their name. He was the only one who had ever backed out—he was the first for three hundred years. Every one had known he was to go up, and now every one would know he was a young hypocrite who suddenly pretended to have scruples. They talked of his scruples as you wouldn't talk of a cannibal's god. His grandfather had called him outrageous names. "He called me—he called me——" Here the young man faltered, his voice failed him. He looked as haggard as was possible to a young man in such magnificent health.

"I probably know!" said Spencer Coyle, with a nervous laugh.

Owen Wingrave's clouded eyes, as if they were following the far-off consequences of things, rested for an instant on a distant object. Then they met his companion's and for another moment sounded them deeply. "It isn't true. No, it isn't. It's not *that!*"

"I don't suppose it is! But what *do* you propose instead of it?"

"Instead of what?"

"Instead of the stupid solution of war. If you take that away you should suggest at least a substitute."

"That's for the people in charge, for governments and cabinets," said Owen Wingrave.

"*They*'ll arrive soon enough at a substitute, in the particular case, if they're made to understand that they'll be hung if they don't find one. Make it a capital crime—that'll quicken the wits of ministers!" His eyes brightened as he spoke, and he looked assured and exalted. Mr. Coyle gave a sigh of perplexed resignation—it was a monomania. He fancied after this for a moment that Owen was going to ask him if he too thought he was a coward; but he was relieved to observe that he either didn't suspect him of it or shrank uncomfortably from putting the question to the test. Spencer Coyle wished to show confidence, but somehow a direct assurance that he didn't doubt of his courage appeared too gross a compliment—it would be like saying he didn't doubt of his honesty. The difficulty was presently averted by Owen's continuing: "My grandfather can't break the entail, but I shall have nothing but this place, which, as you know, is small and, with the way rents are going, has quite ceased to yield an income. He has some money—not much, but such as it is he cuts me off. My aunt does the same—she has let me know her intentions. She was to have left me her six hundred a year. It was all settled; but now what's settled is that I don't get a penny of it if I give up the army. I must add in fairness that I have from my mother three hundred a year of my own. And I tell you the simple truth when I say that I don't care a rap for the loss of the money."

The young man drew a long, slow breath, like a creature in pain; then he subjoined:
 “*That’s* not what worries me!”

“What are you going to do?” asked Spencer Coyle.

“I don’t know; perhaps nothing. Nothing great, at all events. Only something peaceful!”

Owen gave a weary smile, as if, worried as he was, he could yet appreciate the humorous effect of such a declaration from a Wingrave; but what it suggested to his companion, who looked up at him with a sense that he was after all not a Wingrave for nothing and had a military steadiness under fire, was the exasperation that such a programme, uttered in such a way and striking them as the last word of the inglorious, might well have engendered on the part of his grandfather and his aunt. “Perhaps nothing”—when he might carry on the great tradition! Yes, he wasn’t weak, and he was interesting; but there *was* a point of view from which he was provoking. “What *is* it then that worries you?” Mr. Coyle demanded.

“Oh, the house—the very air and feeling of it. There are strange voices in it that seem to mutter at me—to say dreadful things as I pass. I mean the general consciousness and responsibility of what I’m doing. Of course it hasn’t been easy for me—not a bit. I assure you I don’t enjoy it.” With a light in them that was like a longing for justice Owen again bent his eyes on those of the little coach; then he pursued: “I’ve started up all the old ghosts. The very portraits glower at me on the walls. There’s one of my great-great-grandfather (the one the extraordinary story you know is about—the old fellow who hangs on the second landing of the big staircase) that fairly stirs on the canvas—just heaves a little—when I come near it. I have to go up and down stairs—it’s rather awkward! It’s what my aunt calls the family circle. It’s all constituted here, it’s a kind of indestructible presence, it stretches away into the past, and when I came back with her the other day Miss Wingrave told me I wouldn’t have the impudence to stand in the midst of it and say such things. I had to say them to my grandfather; but now that I’ve said them it seems to me that the question’s ended. I want to go away—I don’t care if I never come back again.”

“Oh, you *are* a soldier; you must fight it out!” Mr. Coyle laughed.

The young man seemed discouraged at his levity, but as they turned round, strolling back in the direction from which they had come, he himself smiled faintly after an instant and replied:

“Ah, we’re tainted—all!”

They walked in silence part of the way to the old portico; then Spencer Coyle, stopping short after having assured himself that he was at a sufficient distance from the house not to be heard, suddenly put the question: “What does Miss Julian say?”

“Miss Julian?” Owen had perceptibly coloured.

“I’m sure *she* hasn’t concealed her opinion.”

“Oh, it’s the opinion of the family circle, for she’s a member of it of course. And then she has her own as well.”

“Her own opinion?”

“Her own family circle.”

“Do you mean her mother—that patient lady?”

“I mean more particularly her father, who fell in battle. And her grandfather, and *his* father, and her uncles and great-uncles—they all fell in battle.”

“Hasn’t the sacrifice of so many lives been sufficient? Why should she sacrifice you?”

“Oh, she *hates* me!” Owen declared, as they resumed their walk.

“Ah, the hatred of pretty girls for fine young men!” exclaimed Spencer Coyle.

He didn’t believe in it, but his wife did, it appeared perfectly, when he mentioned this conversation while, in the fashion that has been described, the visitors dressed for dinner. Mrs. Coyle had already discovered that nothing could have been nastier than Miss Julian’s manner to the disgraced youth during the half-hour the party had spent in the hall; and it was this lady’s judgment that one must have had no eyes in one’s head not to see that she was already trying outrageously to flirt with young Lechmere. It was a pity they had brought that silly boy: he was down in the hall with her at that moment. Spencer Coyle’s version was different; he thought there were finer elements involved. The girl’s footing in the house was inexplicable on any ground save that of her being predestined to Miss Wingrave’s nephew. As the niece of Miss Wingrave’s own unhappy intended she had been dedicated early by this lady to the office of healing by a union with Owen the tragic breach that had separated their elders; and if in reply to this it was to be said that a girl of spirit couldn’t enjoy in such a matter having her duty cut out for her, Owen’s enlightened friend was ready with the argument that a young person in Miss Julian’s position would never be such a fool as really to quarrel with a capital chance. She was familiar at Paramore and she felt safe; therefore she might trust herself to the amusement of pretending that she had her option. But it was all innocent coquetry. She had a curious charm, and it was vain to pretend that the heir of that house wouldn’t seem good enough to a girl, clever as she might be, of eighteen. Mrs. Coyle reminded her husband that the poor young man was precisely now *not* of that house: this problem was among the questions that exercised their wits after the two men had taken the turn on the terrace. Spencer Coyle told his wife that Owen was afraid of the portrait of his great-great-grandfather. He would show it to her, since she hadn’t noticed it, on their way down stairs.

“Why of his great-great-grandfather more than of any of the others?”

“Oh, because he’s the most formidable. He’s the one who’s sometimes seen.”

“Seen where?” Mrs. Coyle had turned round with a jerk.

“In the room he was found dead in—the White Room they’ve always called it.”

“Do you mean to say the house has a *ghost*?” Mrs. Coyle almost shrieked. “You brought me here without telling me?”

“Didn’t I mention it after my other visit?”

“Not a word. You only talked about Miss Wingrave.”

“Oh, I was full of the story—you have simply forgotten.”

“Then you should have reminded me!”

“If I had thought of it I would have held my peace, for you wouldn’t have come.”

“I wish, indeed, I hadn’t!” cried Mrs. Coyle. “What *is* the story?”

“Oh, a deed of violence that took place here ages ago. I think it was in George the First’s time. Colonel Wingrave, one of their ancestors, struck in a fit of passion one of his children, a lad just growing up, a blow on the head of which the unhappy child died. The matter was hushed up for the hour—some other explanation was put about. The poor boy was laid out in one of those rooms on the other side of the house, and amid strange smothered rumours the funeral was hurried on. The next morning, when the household assembled, Colonel Wingrave

was missing; he was looked for vainly, and at last it occurred to some one that he might perhaps be in the room from which his child had been carried to burial. The seeker knocked without an answer—then opened the door. Colonel Wingrave lay dead on the floor, in his clothes, as if he had reeled and fallen back, without a wound, without a mark, without anything in his appearance to indicate that he had either struggled or suffered. He was a strong, sound man—there was nothing to account for such a catastrophe. He is supposed to have gone to the room during the night, just before going to bed, in some fit of compunction or some fascination of dread. It was only after this that the truth about the boy came out. But no one ever sleeps in the room.”

Mrs. Coyle had fairly turned pale. “I hope not! Thank heaven they haven’t put *us* there!”

“We’re at a comfortable distance; but I’ve seen the gruesome chamber.”

“Do you mean you’ve been *in* it?”

“For a few moments. They’re rather proud of it and my young friend showed it to me when I was here before.”

Mrs. Coyle stared. “And what is it like?”

“Simply like an empty, dull, old-fashioned bedroom, rather big, with the things of the ‘period’ in it. It’s panelled from floor to ceiling, and the panels evidently, years and years ago, were painted white. But the paint has darkened with time and there are three or four quaint little ancient ‘samplers,’ framed and glazed, hung on the walls.”

Mrs. Coyle looked round with a shudder. “I’m glad there are no samplers here! I never heard anything so jumpy! Come down to dinner.”

On the staircase as they went down her husband showed her the portrait of Colonel Wingrave—rather a vigorous representation, for the place and period, of a gentleman with a hard, handsome face, in a red coat and a peruke. Mrs. Coyle declared that his descendant Sir Philip was wonderfully like him; and her husband could fancy, though he kept it to himself, that if one should have the courage to walk about the old corridors of Paramore at night one might meet a figure that resembled him roaming, with the restlessness of a ghost, hand in hand with the figure of a tall boy. As he proceeded to the drawing-room with his wife he found himself suddenly wishing that he had made more of a point of his pupil’s going to Eastbourne. The evening however seemed to have taken upon itself to dissipate any such whimsical forebodings, for the grimness of the family circle, as Spencer Coyle had preconceived its composition, was mitigated by an infusion of the “neighbourhood.” The company at dinner was recruited by two cheerful couples—one of them the vicar and his wife, and by a silent young man who had come down to fish. This was a relief to Mr. Coyle, who had begun to wonder what was after all expected of him and why he had been such a fool as to come, and who now felt that for the first hours at least the situation would not have directly to be dealt with. Indeed he found, as he had found before, sufficient occupation for his ingenuity in reading the various symptoms of which the picture before him was an expression. He should probably have an irritating day on the morrow: he foresaw the difficulty of the long decorous Sunday and how dry Jane Wingrave’s ideas, elicited in a strenuous conference, would taste. She and her father would make him feel that they depended upon him for the impossible, and if they should try to associate him with a merely stupid policy he might end by telling them what he thought of it—an accident not required to make his visit a sensible mistake. The old man’s actual design was evidently to let their friends see in it a positive mark of their being all right. The presence of the great London coach was tantamount to a profession of faith in the results of the impending examination. It had clearly been obtained from Owen, rather to Spencer Coyle’s surprise, that he would do

nothing to interfere with the apparent harmony. He let the allusions to his hard work pass and, holding his tongue about his affairs, talked to the ladies as amicably as if he had not been “cut off.” When Spencer Coyle looked at him once or twice across the table, catching his eye, which showed an indefinable passion, he saw a puzzling pathos in his laughing face: one couldn’t resist a pang for a young lamb so visibly marked for sacrifice. “Hang him—what a pity he’s such a fighter!” he privately sighed, with a want of logic that was only superficial.

This idea however would have absorbed him more if so much of his attention had not been given to Kate Julian, who now that he had her well before him struck him as a remarkable and even as a possibly fascinating young woman. The fascination resided not in any extraordinary prettiness, for if she was handsome, with her long Eastern eyes, her magnificent hair and her general unabashed originality, he had seen complexions rosier and features that pleased him more: it resided in a strange impression that she gave of being exactly the sort of person whom, in her position, common considerations, those of prudence and perhaps even a little those of decorum, would have enjoined on her not to be. She was what was vulgarly termed a dependant—penniless, patronized, tolerated; but something in her aspect and manner signified that if her situation was inferior, her spirit, to make up for it, was above precautions or submissions. It was not in the least that she was aggressive, she was too indifferent for that; it was only as if, having nothing either to gain or to lose, she could afford to do as she liked. It occurred to Spencer Coyle that she might really have had more at stake than her imagination appeared to take account of; whatever it was at any rate he had never seen a young woman at less pains to be on the safe side. He wondered inevitably how the peace was kept between Jane Wingrave and such an inmate as this; but those questions of course were unfathomable deeps. Perhaps Kate Julian lorded it even over her protectress. The other time he was at Paramore he had received an impression that, with Sir Philip beside her, the girl could fight with her back to the wall. She amused Sir Philip, she charmed him, and he liked people who weren’t afraid; between him and his daughter moreover there was no doubt which was the higher in command. Miss Wingrave took many things for granted, and most of all the rigour of discipline and the fate of the vanquished and the captive.

But between their clever boy and so original a companion of his childhood what odd relation would have grown up? It couldn’t be indifference, and yet on the part of happy, handsome, youthful creatures it was still less likely to be aversion. They weren’t Paul and Virginia, but they must have had their common summer and their idyll: no nice girl could have disliked such a nice fellow for anything but not liking *her*, and no nice fellow could have resisted such propinquity. Mr. Coyle remembered indeed that Mrs. Julian had spoken to him as if the propinquity had been by no means constant, owing to her daughter’s absences at school, to say nothing of Owen’s; her visits to a few friends who were so kind as to “take her” from time to time; her sojourns in London—so difficult to manage, but still managed by God’s help—for “advantages,” for drawing and singing, especially drawing or rather painting, in oils, in which she had had immense success. But the good lady had also mentioned that the young people were quite brother and sister, which *was* a little, after all, like Paul and Virginia. Mrs. Coyle had been right, and it was apparent that Virginia was doing her best to make the time pass agreeably for young Lechmere. There was no such whirl of conversation as to render it an effort for Mr. Coyle to reflect on these things, for the tone of the occasion, thanks principally to the other guests, was not disposed to stray—it tended to the repetition of anecdote and the discussion of rents, topics that huddled together like uneasy animals. He could judge how intensely his hosts wished the evening to pass off as if nothing had happened; and this gave him the measure of their private resentment. Before dinner was over he found himself fidgetty about his second pupil. Young Lechmere, since he began to cram, had done all that might have been expected of him; but this couldn’t blind his instructor to a

present perception of his being in moments of relaxation as innocent as a babe. Mr. Coyle had considered that the amusements of Paramore would probably give him a fillip, and the poor fellow's manner testified to the soundness of the forecast. The fillip had been unmistakably administered; it had come in the form of a revelation. The light on young Lechmere's brow announced with a candour that was almost an appeal for compassion, or at least a deprecation of ridicule, that he had never seen anything like Miss Julian.

IV

In the drawing-room after dinner the girl found an occasion to approach Spencer Coyle. She stood before him a moment, smiling while she opened and shut her fan, and then she said abruptly, raising her strange eyes: "I know what you've come for, but it isn't any use."

"I've come to look after *you* a little. Isn't *that* any use?"

"It's very kind. But I'm not the question of the hour. You won't do anything with Owen."

Spencer Coyle hesitated a moment. "What will *you* do with his young friend?"

She stared, looked round her.

"Mr. Lechmere? Oh, poor little lad! We've been talking about Owen. He admires him so."

"So do I. I should tell you that."

"So do we all. That's why we're in such despair."

"Personally then you'd *like* him to be a soldier?" Spencer Coyle inquired.

"I've quite set my heart on it. I adore the army and I'm awfully fond of my old playmate," said Miss Julian.

Her interlocutor remembered the young man's own different version of her attitude; but he judged it loyal not to challenge the girl.

"It's not conceivable that your old playmate shouldn't be fond of you. He must therefore wish to please you; and I don't see why—between you—you don't set the matter right."

"Wish to please me!" Miss Julian exclaimed. "I'm sorry to say he shows no such desire. He thinks me an impudent wretch. I've told him what I think of *him*, and he simply hates me."

"But you think so highly! You just told me you admire him."

"His talents, his possibilities, yes; even his appearance, if I may allude to such a matter. But I don't admire his present behaviour."

"Have you had the question out with him?" Spencer Coyle asked.

"Oh, yes, I've ventured to be frank—the occasion seemed to excuse it. He couldn't like what I said."

"What did you say?"

Miss Julian, thinking a moment, opened and shut her fan again.

"Why, that such conduct isn't that of a gentleman!"

After she had spoken her eyes met Spencer Coyle's, who looked into their charming depths.

"Do you want then so much to send him off to be killed?"

"How odd for *you* to ask that—in such a way!" she replied with a laugh. "I don't understand your position: I thought your line was to *make* soldiers!"

“You should take my little joke. But, as regards Owen Wingrave, there’s no ‘making’ needed,” Mr. Coyle added. “To my sense”—the little crammer paused a moment, as if with a consciousness of responsibility for his paradox—”to my sense he *is*, in a high sense of the term, a fighting man.”

“Ah, let him prove it!” the girl exclaimed, turning away.

Spencer Coyle let her go; there was something in her tone that annoyed and even a little shocked him. There had evidently been a violent passage between these young people, and the reflection that such a matter was after all none of his business only made him more sore. It was indeed a military house, and she was at any rate a person who placed her ideal of manhood (young persons doubtless always had their ideals of manhood) in the type of the belted warrior. It was a taste like another; but, even a quarter of an hour later, finding himself near young Lechmere, in whom this type was embodied, Spencer Coyle was still so ruffled that he addressed the innocent lad with a certain magisterial dryness. “You’re not to sit up late, you know. That’s not what I brought you down for.” The dinner-guests were taking leave and the bedroom candles twinkled in a monitory row. Young Lechmere however was too agreeably agitated to be accessible to a snub: he had a happy preoccupation which almost engendered a grin.

“I’m only too eager for bedtime. Do you know there’s an awfully jolly room?”

“Surely they haven’t put you there?”

“No indeed: no one has passed a night in it for ages. But that’s exactly what I want to do—it would be tremendous fun.”

“And have you been trying to get Miss Julian’s permission?”

“Oh, *she* can’t give leave, she says. But she believes in it, and she maintains that no man dare.”

“No man *shall*! A man in your critical position in particular must have a quiet night,” said Spencer Coyle.

Young Lechmere gave a disappointed but reasonable sigh.

“Oh, all right. But mayn’t I sit up for a little go at Wingrave? I haven’t had any yet.”

Mr. Coyle looked at his watch.

“You may smoke *one* cigarette.”

He felt a hand on his shoulder, and he turned round to see his wife tilting candle-grease upon his coat. The ladies were going to bed and it was Sir Philip’s inveterate hour; but Mrs. Coyle confided to her husband that after the dreadful things he had told her she positively declined to be left alone, for no matter how short an interval, in any part of the house. He promised to follow her within three minutes, and after the orthodox handshakes the ladies rustled away. The forms were kept up at Paramore as bravely as if the old house had no present heartache. The only one of which Spencer Coyle noticed the omission was some salutation to himself from Kate Julian. She gave him neither a word nor a glance, but he saw her look hard at Owen Wingrave. Her mother, timid and pitying, was apparently the only person from whom this young man caught an inclination of the head. Miss Wingrave marshalled the three ladies—her little procession of twinkling tapers—up the wide oaken stairs and past the watching portrait of her ill-fated ancestor. Sir Philip’s servant appeared and offered his arm to the old man, who turned a perpendicular back on poor Owen when the boy made a vague movement to anticipate this office. Spencer Coyle learned afterwards that before Owen had

forfeited favour it had always, when he was at home, been his privilege at bedtime to conduct his grandfather ceremoniously to rest. Sir Philip's habits were contemptuously different now. His apartments were on the lower floor and he shuffled stiffly off to them with his valet's help, after fixing for a moment significantly on the most responsible of his visitors the thick red ray, like the glow of stirred embers, that always made his eyes conflict oddly with his mild manners. They seemed to say to Spencer Coyle "We'll let the young scoundrel have it to-morrow!" One might have gathered from them that the young scoundrel, who had now strolled to the other end of the hall, had at least forged a cheque. Mr. Coyle watched him an instant, saw him drop nervously into a chair and then with a restless movement get up. The same movement brought him back to where his late instructor stood addressing a last injunction to young Lechmere.

"I'm going to bed and I should like you particularly to conform to what I said to you a short time ago. Smoke a single cigarette with your friend here and then go to your room. You'll have me down on you if I hear of your having, during the night, tried any preposterous games." Young Lechmere, looking down with his hands in his pockets, said nothing—he only poked at the corner of a rug with his toe; so that Spencer Coyle, dissatisfied with so tacit a pledge, presently went on, to Owen: "I must request you, Wingrave, not to keep this sensitive subject sitting up—and indeed to put him to bed and turn his key in the door." As Owen stared an instant, apparently not understanding the motive of so much solicitude, he added: "Lechmere has a morbid curiosity about one of your legends—of your historic rooms. Nip it in the bud."

"Oh, the legend's rather good, but I'm afraid the room's an awful sell!" Owen laughed.

"You know you don't *believe* that, my boy!" young Lechmere exclaimed.

"I don't think he does," said Mr. Coyle, noticing Owen's mottled flush.

"He wouldn't try a night there himself!" young Lechmere pursued.

"I know who told you that," rejoined Owen, lighting a cigarette in an embarrassed way at the candle, without offering one to either of his companions.

"Well, what if she did?" asked the younger of these gentleman, rather red. "Do you want them *all* yourself?" he continued facetiously, fumbling in the cigarette-box.

Owen Wingrave only smoked quietly; then he exclaimed:

"Yes—what if she did? But she doesn't know," he added.

"She doesn't know what?"

"She doesn't know anything!—I'll tuck him in!" Owen went on gaily to Mr. Coyle, who saw that his presence, now that a certain note had been struck, made the young men uncomfortable. He was curious, but there was a kind of discretion, with his pupils, that he had always pretended to practise; a discretion that however didn't prevent him as he took his way upstairs from recommending them not to be donkeys.

At the top of the staircase, to his surprise, he met Miss Julian, who was apparently going down again. She had not begun to undress, nor was she perceptibly disconcerted at seeing him. She nevertheless, in a manner slightly at variance with the rigour with which she had overlooked him ten minutes before, dropped the words: "I'm going down to look for something. I've lost a jewel."

"A jewel?"

“A rather good turquoise, out of my locket. As it’s the only ornament I have the honour to possess——!” And she passed down.

“Shall I go with you and help you?” asked Spencer Coyle.

The girl paused a few steps below him, looking back with her Oriental eyes.

“Don’t I hear voices in the hall?”

“Those remarkable young men are there.”

“*They’ll* help me.” And Kate Julian descended.

Spencer Coyle was tempted to follow her, but remembering his standard of tact he rejoined his wife in their apartment. He delayed however to go to bed, and though he went into his dressing-room he couldn’t bring himself even to take off his coat. He pretended for half an hour to read a novel; after which, quietly, or perhaps I should say agitatedly, he passed from the dressing-room into the corridor. He followed this passage to the door of the room which he knew to have been assigned to young Lechmere and was comforted to see that it was closed. Half an hour earlier he had seen it standing open; therefore he could take for granted that the bewildered boy had come to bed. It was of this he had wished to assure himself, and having done so he was on the point of retreating. But at the same instant he heard a sound in the room—the occupant was doing, at the window, something which showed him that he might knock without the reproach of waking his pupil up. Young Lechmere came in fact to the door in his shirt and trousers. He admitted his visitor in some surprise, and when the door was closed again Spencer Coyle said:

“I don’t want to make your life a burden to you, but I had it on my conscience to see for myself that you’re not exposed to undue excitement.”

“Oh, there’s plenty of that!” said the ingenuous youth. “Miss Julian came down again.”

“To look for a turquoise?”

“So she said.”

“Did she find it?”

“I don’t know. I came up. I left her with poor Wingrave.”

“Quite the right thing,” said Spencer Coyle.

“I don’t know,” young Lechmere repeated uneasily. “I left them quarrelling.”

“What about?”

“I don’t understand. They’re a quaint pair!”

Spencer Coyle hesitated. He had, fundamentally, principles and scruples, but what he had in particular just now was a curiosity, or rather, to recognise it for what it was, a sympathy, which brushed them away.

“Does it strike you that *she*’s down on him?” he permitted himself to inquire.

“Rather!—when she tells him he lies!”

“What do you mean?”

“Why, before *me*. It made me leave them; it was getting too hot. I stupidly brought up the question of the haunted room again, and said how sorry I was that I had had to promise you not to try my luck with it.”

“You can’t pry about in that gross way in other people’s houses—you can’t take such liberties, you know!” Mr. Coyle interjected.

“I’m all right—see how good I am. I don’t want to go *near* the place!” said young Lechmere, confidently. “Miss Julian said to me ‘Oh, I daresay *you’d* risk it, but’—and she turned and laughed at poor Owen—that’s more than we can expect of a gentleman who has taken *his* extraordinary line.’ I could see that something had already passed between them on the subject—some teasing or challenging of hers. It may have been only chaff, but his chucking the profession had evidently brought up the question of his pluck.”

“And what did Owen say?”

“Nothing at first; but presently he brought out very quietly: ‘I spent all last night in the confounded place.’ We both stared and cried out at this and I asked him what he had seen there. He said he had seen nothing, and Miss Julian replied that he ought to tell his story better than that—he ought to make something good of it. ‘It’s not a story—it’s a simple fact,’ said he; on which she jeered at him and wanted to know why, if he had done it, he hadn’t told her in the morning, since he knew what she thought of him. ‘I know, but I don’t care,’ said Wingrave. This made her angry, and she asked him quite seriously whether he would care if he should know she believed him to be trying to deceive us.”

“Ah, what a brute!” cried Spencer Coyle.

“She’s a most extraordinary girl—I don’t know what she’s up to.”

“Extraordinary indeed—to be romping and bandying words at that hour of the night with fast young men!”

Young Lechmere reflected a moment. “I mean because I think she likes him.”

Spencer Coyle was so struck with this unwonted symptom of subtlety that he flashed out:

“And do you think he likes *her*?”

But his interlocutor only replied with a puzzled sigh and a plaintive “I don’t know—I give it up!—I’m sure he *did* see something or hear something,” young Lechmere added.

“In that ridiculous place? What makes you sure?”

“I don’t know—he looks as if he had. He behaves as if he had.”

“Why then shouldn’t he mention it?”

Young Lechmere thought a moment. “Perhaps it’s too gruesome!”

Spencer Coyle gave a laugh. “Aren’t you glad then *you’re* not in it?”

“Uncommonly!”

“Go to bed, you goose,” said Spencer Coyle, with another laugh. “But before you go tell me what he said when she told him he was trying to deceive you.”

“Take me there yourself, then, and lock me in!”

“And *did* she take him?”

“I don’t know—I came up.”

Spencer Coyle exchanged a long look with his pupil.

“I don’t think they’re in the hall now. Where’s Owen’s own room?”

“I haven’t the least idea.”

Mr. Coyle was perplexed; he was in equal ignorance, and he couldn't go about trying doors. He bade young Lechmere sink to slumber, and came out into the passage. He asked himself if he should be able to find his way to the room Owen had formerly shown him, remembering that in common with many of the others it had its ancient name painted upon it. But the corridors of Paramore were intricate; moreover some of the servants would still be up, and he didn't wish to have the appearance of roaming over the house. He went back to his own quarters, where Mrs. Coyle soon perceived that his inability to rest had not subsided. As she confessed for her own part, in the dreadful place, to an increased sense of "creepiness," they spent the early part of the night in conversation, so that a portion of their vigil was inevitably beguiled by her husband's account of his colloquy with little Lechmere and by their exchange of opinions upon it. Toward two o'clock Mrs. Coyle became so nervous about their persecuted young friend, and so possessed by the fear that that wicked girl had availed herself of his invitation to put him to an abominable test, that she begged her husband to go and look into the matter at whatever cost to his own equilibrium. But Spencer Coyle, perversely, had ended, as the perfect stillness of the night settled upon them, by charming himself into a tremulous acquiescence in Owen's readiness to face a formidable ordeal—an ordeal the more formidable to an excited imagination as the poor boy now knew from the experience of the previous night how resolute an effort he should have to make. "I hope he *is* there," he said to his wife: "it puts them all so in the wrong!" At any rate he couldn't take upon himself to explore a house he knew so little. He was inconsequent—he didn't prepare for bed. He sat in the dressing-room with his light and his novel, waiting to find himself nodding. At last however Mrs. Coyle turned over and ceased to talk, and at last too he fell asleep in his chair. How long he slept he only knew afterwards by computation; what he knew to begin with was that he had started up, in confusion, with the sense of a sudden appalling sound. His sense cleared itself quickly, helped doubtless by a confirmatory cry of horror from his wife's room. But he gave no heed to his wife; he had already bounded into the passage. There the sound was repeated—it was the "Help! help!" of a woman in agonised terror. It came from a distant quarter of the house, but the quarter was sufficiently indicated. Spencer Coyle rushed straight before him, with the sound of opening doors and alarmed voices in his ears and the faintness of the early dawn in his eyes. At a turn of one of the passages he came upon the white figure of a girl in a swoon on a bench, and in the vividness of the revelation he read as he went that Kate Julian, stricken in her pride too late with a chill of compunction for what she had mockingly done, had, after coming to release the victim of her derision, reeled away, overwhelmed, from the catastrophe that was her work—the catastrophe that the next moment he found himself aghast at on the threshold of an open door. Owen Wingrave, dressed as he had last seen him, lay dead on the spot on which his ancestor had been found. He looked like a young soldier on a battle-field.

The Wheel Of Time

I

“And your daughter?” said Lady Greyswood; “tell me about her. She must be nice.”

“Oh, yes, she’s nice enough. She’s a great comfort.”

Mrs. Knocker hesitated a moment, then she went on: “Unfortunately she’s not good-looking—not a bit.”

“That doesn’t matter, when they’re not ill-natured,” rejoined, insincerely, Lady Greyswood, who had the remains of great beauty.

“Oh, but poor Fanny is quite extraordinarily plain. I assure you it does matter. She knows it herself; she suffers from it. It’s the sort of thing that makes a great difference in a girl’s life.”

“But if she’s charming, if she’s clever!” said Lady Greyswood, with more benevolence than logic. “I’ve known plain women who were liked.”

“Do you mean *me*, my dear?” her old friend straightforwardly inquired. “But I’m not so awfully liked!”

“You?” Lady Greyswood exclaimed. “Why, you’re grand!”

“I’m not so repulsive as I was when I was young perhaps, but that’s not saying much.”

“As when you were young!” laughed Lady Greyswood. “You sweet thing, you *are* young. I thought India dried people up.”

“Oh, when you’re a mummy to begin with!” Mrs. Knocker returned, with her trick of self-abasement. “Of course I’ve not been such a fool as to keep my children there. My girl *is* clever,” she continued, “but she’s afraid to show it. Therefore you may judge whether, with her unfortunate appearance, she’s charming.”

“She shall show it to *me*! You must let me do everything for her.”

“Does that include finding her a husband? I should like her to show it to someone who’ll marry her.”

“I’ll marry her!” said Lady Greyswood, who was handsomer than ever when she laughed and looked capable.

“What a blessing to meet you this way on the threshold of home! I give you notice that I shall cling to you. But that’s what I meant; that’s the thing the want of beauty makes so difficult—as if it were not difficult enough at the best.”

“My dear child, one meets plenty of ugly women with husbands,” Lady Greyswood argued, “and often with very nice ones.”

“Yes, mine is very nice. There are men who don’t mind one’s face, for whom beauty isn’t indispensable, but they are rare. I don’t understand them. If I’d been a man about to marry I should have gone in for looks. However, the poor child will *have* something,” Mrs. Knocker continued.

Lady Greyswood rested thoughtful eyes on her. “Do you mean she’ll be well off?”

“We shall do everything we can for her. We’re not in such misery as we used to be. We’ve managed to save in India, strange to say, and six months ago my husband came into money

(more than we had ever dreamed of), by the death of his poor brother. We feel quite opulent (it's rather nice!) and we should expect to do something decent for our daughter. I don't mind it's being known."

"It *shall* be known!" said Lady Greyswood, getting up. "Leave the dear child to me!" The old friends embraced, for the porter of the hotel had come in to say that the carriage ordered for her ladyship was at the door. They had met in Paris by the merest chance, in the court of an inn, after a separation of years, just as Lady Greyswood was going home. She had been to Aix-les-Bains early in the season and was resting on her way back to England. Mrs. Knocker and the General, bringing their eastern exile to a close, had arrived only the night before from Marseilles and were to wait in Paris for their children, a tall girl and two younger boys, who, inevitably dissociated from their parents, had been for the past two years with a devoted aunt, their father's maiden sister, at Heidelberg. The reunion of the family was to take place with jollity in Paris, whither this good lady was now hurrying with her drilled and demoralized charges. Mrs. Knocker had come to England to see them two years before, and the period at Heidelberg had been planned during this visit. With the termination of her husband's service a new life opened before them all, and they had plans of comprehensive rejoicing for the summer—plans involving however a continuance, for a few months, of useful foreign opportunities, during which various questions connected with the organization of a final home in England were practically to be dealt with. There was to be a salubrious house on the continent, taken in some neighbourhood that would both yield a stimulus to plain Fanny's French (her German was much commended), and permit of frequent "running over" for the General. With these preoccupations Mrs. Knocker, after her delightful encounter with Lady Greyswood, was less keenly conscious of the variations of destiny than she had been when, at the age of twenty, that intimate friend of her youth, beautiful, loveable and about to be united to a nobleman of ancient name, was brightly, almost insolently alienated. The less attractive of the two girls had married only several years later, and her marriage had perhaps emphasised the divergence of their ways. To-day however the inequality, as Mrs. Knocker would have phrased it, rather dropped out of the impression produced by the somewhat wasted and faded dowager, exquisite still, but unexpectedly appealing, who made no secret (an attempt that in an age of such publicity would have been useless), of what she had had, in vulgar parlance, to put up with, or of her having been left badly off. She had spoken of her children—she had had no less than six—but she had evidently thought it better not to speak of her husband. That somehow made up, on Mrs. Knocker's part, for some ancient aches.

It was not till a year after this incident that, one day in London, in her little house in Queen Street, Lady Greyswood said to her third son, Maurice—the one she was fondest of, the one who on his own side had given her most signs of affection:

"I don't see what there is for you but to marry a girl of a certain fortune."

"Oh, that's not my line! I may be an idiot, but I'm not mercenary," the young man declared. He was not an idiot, but there was an examination, rather stiff indeed, to which, without success, he had gone up twice. The diplomatic service was closed to him by this catastrophe; nothing else appeared particularly open; he was terribly at leisure. There had been a theory none the less that he was the ablest of the family. Two of his brothers had been squeezed into the army and had declared rather crudely that they would do their best to keep Maurice out. They were not put to any trouble in this respect however, as he professed a complete indifference to the trade of arms. His mother, who was vague about everything except the idea that people ought to like him, if only for his extraordinary good looks, thought it strange there shouldn't be some opening for him in political life, or something to be picked up even in the City. But no bustling borough solicited the advantage of his protection, no eminent

statesman in want of a secretary took him by the hand, no great commercial house had been keeping a stool for him. Maurice, in a word, was not “approached” from any quarter, and meanwhile he was as irritating as the intending traveller who allows you the pleasure of looking out his railway-connections. Poor Lady Greyswood fumbled the social Bradshaw in vain. The young man had only one marked taste, with which his mother saw no way to deal—an invincible passion for photography. He was perpetually taking shots at his friends, but she couldn’t open premises for him in Baker Street. He smoked endless cigarettes—she was sure they made him languid. She would have been more displeased with him if she had not felt so vividly that someone ought to do something for him; nevertheless she almost lost patience at his remark about not being mercenary. She was on the point of asking him what he called it to live on his relations, but she checked the words as she remembered that she herself was the only one who did much for him. Nevertheless, as she hated open professions of disinterestedness, she replied that that was a nonsensical tone. Whatever one should get in such a way one would give quite as much, even if it didn’t happen to be money; and when he inquired in return what it was (beyond the disgrace of his failures) that she judged a fellow like him would bring to his bride, she replied that he would bring himself, his personal qualities (she didn’t like to be more definite about his appearance), his name, his descent, his connections—good honest commodities all, for which any girl of proper feeling would be glad to pay. Such a name as that of the Glanvils was surely worth something, and she appealed to him to try what he could do with it.

“Surely I can do something better with it than sell it,” said Maurice.

“I should like then very much to hear what,” she replied very calmly, waiting reasonably for his answer. She waited to no purpose; the question baffled him, like those of his examinations. She explained that she meant of course that he should care for the girl, who might easily have a worse fault than the command of bread and butter. To humour her, for he was always good-natured, he said after a moment, smiling:

“Dear mother, is she pretty?”

“Is who pretty?”

“The young lady you have in your eye. Of course I see you’ve picked her out.”

She coloured slightly at this—she had planned a more gradual revelation. For an instant she thought of saying that she had only had a general idea, for the form of his question embarrassed her; but on reflection she determined to be frank and practical. “Well, I confess I *am* thinking of a girl—a very nice one. But she hasn’t great beauty.”

“Oh, then it’s of no use.”

“But she’s delightful, and she’ll have thirty thousand pounds down, to say nothing of expectations.”

Maurice Glanvil looked at his mother. “She must be hideous—for you to admit it. Therefore if she’s rich she becomes quite impossible; for how can a fellow have the air of having been bribed with gold to marry a monster?”

“Fanny Knocker isn’t the least a monster, and I can see that she’ll improve. She’s tall, and she’s quite strong, and there’s nothing at all disagreeable about her. Remember that you can’t have everything.”

“I thought you contended that I could!” said Maurice, amused at his mother’s description of her young friend’s charms. He had never heard anyone damned, as regards that sort of thing, with fainter praise. He declared that he would be perfectly capable of marrying a poor girl,

but that the prime necessity in any young person he should think of would be the possession of a face—to put it at the least—that it would give him positive pleasure to look at. “I don’t ask for much, but I do ask for beauty,” he went on. “My eye must be gratified—I must have a wife I can photograph.”

Lady Greyswood was tempted to answer that he himself had good looks enough to make a handsome couple, but she withheld the remark as injudicious, though effective, for it was a part of her son’s amiability that he appeared to have no conception of his plastic side. He would have been disgusted if she had put it forward; if he had the ideal he had just described it was not because his own profile was his standard. What she herself saw in it was a force for coercing heiresses. She had however to be patient, and she promised herself to be adroit; which was all the easier as she really liked Fanny Knocker.

The girl’s parents had at last taken a house in Ennismore Gardens, and the friend of her mother’s youth had been confronted with the question of redeeming the pledges uttered in Paris. This unsophisticated and united family, with relations to visit and schoolboys’ holidays to outlive, had spent the winter in the country and had but lately begun to talk of itself, extravagantly of course, through Mrs. Knocker’s droll lips, as open to social attentions. Lady Greyswood had not been false to her vows; she had on the contrary recognised from the first that, if he could only be made to see it, Fanny Knocker would be just the person to fill out poor Maurice’s blanks. She had kept this confidence to herself, but it had made her very kind to the young lady. One of the forms of this kindness had been an ingenuity in keeping her from coming to Queen Street until Maurice should have been prepared. Was he to be regarded as prepared now that he asserted he would have nothing to do with Miss Knocker? This was a question that worried Lady Greyswood, who at any rate said to herself that she had told him the worst. Her idea had been to sound her old friend only after the young people should have met and Fanny should have fallen in love. Such a catastrophe for Fanny belonged for Lady Greyswood to that order of convenience that she could always take for granted.

She had found the girl, as she expected, ugly and awkward, but had also discovered a charm of character in her intelligent timidity. No one knew better than this observant woman how thankless a task in general it was in London to “take out” a plain girl; she had seen the nicest creatures, in the brutality of balls, participate only through wistful, almost tearful eyes; her little drawing-room, at intimate hours, had been shaken by the confidences of desperate mothers. None the less she felt sure that Fanny’s path would not be rugged; thirty thousand pounds were a fine set of features, and her anxiety was rather on the score of the expectations of the young lady’s parents. Mrs. Knocker had dropped remarks suggestive of a high imagination, of the conviction that there might be a real efficacy in what they were doing for their daughter. The danger, in other words, might well be that no younger son need apply—a possibility that made Lady Greyswood take all her precautions. The acceptability of her favourite child was consistent with the rejection of those of other people—on which indeed it even directly depended. She remembered on the other hand the proverb about taking your horse to the water; the crystalline spring of her young friend’s homage might overflow, but she couldn’t compel her boy to drink. The clever way was to break down his prejudice—to get him to consent to give poor Fanny a chance. Therefore if she was careful not to worry him she let him see her project as something patient and deeply wise; she had the air of waiting resignedly for the day on which, in the absence of other solutions, he would say to her: “Well, let me have a look at my fate!” Meanwhile moreover she was nothing if not conscientious, and as she had made up her mind about the girl’s susceptibility she had a scruple against exposing her. This exposure would not be justified so long as Maurice’s theoretic rigour should remain unabated.

She felt virtuous in carrying her scruple to the point of rudeness; she knew that Jane Knocker wondered why, though so attentive in a hundred ways, she had never definitely included the poor child in any invitation to Queen Street. There came a moment when it gave her pleasure to suspect that her old friend had begun to explain this omission by the idea of a positive exaggeration of good faith—an honest recognition of the detrimental character of the young man in ambush there. As Maurice, though much addicted to kissing his mother at home, never dangled about her in public, he had remained a mythical figure to Mrs. Knocker: he had been absent (culpably—there was a touch of the inevitable incivility in it), on each of the occasions on which, after their arrival in London, she and her husband dined with Lady Greyswood. This astute woman knew that her delightful Jane was whimsical enough to be excited good-humouredly by a mystery: she might very well want to make Maurice's acquaintance in just the degree in which she guessed that his mother's high sense of honour kept him out of the way. Moreover she desired intensely that her daughter should have the sort of experience that would help her to take confidence. Lady Greyswood knew that no one had as yet asked the girl to dinner and that this particular attention was the one for which her mother would be most grateful. No sooner had she arrived at these illuminations than, with deep diplomacy, she requested the pleasure of the company of her dear Jane and the General. Mrs. Knocker accepted with delight—she always accepted with delight—so that nothing remained for Lady Greyswood but to make sure of Maurice in advance. After this was done she had only to wait. When the dinner, on a day very near at hand, took place (she had jumped at the first evening on which the Knockers were free), she had the gratification of seeing her prevision exactly fulfilled. Her whimsical Jane had thrown the game into her hands, had been taken at the very last moment with one of her Indian headaches and, infinitely apologetic and explanatory, had hustled poor Fanny off with the General. The girl, flurried and frightened by her responsibility, sat at dinner next to Maurice, who behaved beautifully—not in the least as the victim of a trick; and when a fortnight later Lady Greyswood was able to divine that her mind from that evening had been filled with a virginal ecstasy, she was also fortunately able to feel serenely, delightfully guiltless.

II

She knew this fact about Fanny's mind, she believed, some time before Jane Knocker knew it; but she also had reason to think that Jane Knocker had known it for some time before she spoke of it. It was not till the middle of June, after a succession of encounters between the young people, that her old friend came one morning to discuss the circumstance. Mrs. Knocker asked her if she suspected it, and she promptly replied that it had never occurred to her. She added that she was extremely sorry and that it had probably in the first instance been the fault of that injudicious dinner.

“Ah, the day of my headache—my miserable headache?” said her visitor. “Yes, very likely that did it. He's so dreadfully good-looking.”

“Poor child, he can't help that. Neither can I!” Lady Greyswood ventured to add.

“He comes by it honestly. He seems very nice.”

“He's nice enough, but he hasn't a farthing, you know, and his expectations are *nil*.” They considered, they turned the matter about, they wondered what they had better do. In the first place there was no room for doubt; of course Mrs. Knocker hadn't sounded the girl, but a mother, a true mother was never reduced to that. If Fanny was in every relation of life so painfully, so constitutionally awkward, the still depths of her shyness, of her dissimulation even, in such a predicament as this, might easily be imagined. She would give no sign that she could possibly smother, she would say nothing and do nothing, watching herself, poor

child, with trepidation; but she would suffer, and some day when the question of her future should really come up—it might after all in the form of some good proposal—they would find themselves beating against a closed door. That was what they had to think of; that was why Mrs. Knocker had come over. Her old friend cross-examined her with a troubled face, but she was very impressive with her reasons, her intuitions.

“I’ll send him away in a moment, if you’d like that,” Lady Greyswood said at last. “I’ll try and get him to go abroad.”

Her visitor made no direct reply to this, and no reply at all for some moments. “What does he expect to do—what does he want to do?” she asked.

“Oh, poor boy, he’s looking—he’s trying to decide. He asks nothing of anyone. If he would only knock at a few doors! But he’s too proud.”

“Do you call him *very* clever?” Fanny’s mother demanded.

“Yes, decidedly—and good and kind and true. But he has been unlucky.”

“Of course he can’t bear her!” said Mrs. Knocker with a little dry laugh.

Lady Greyswood stared; then she broke out: “Do you mean you’d be willing?—”

“He’s very charming.”

“Ah, but you must have great ideas.”

“He’s very well connected,” said Mrs. Knocker, snapping the tight elastic on her umbrella.

“Oh, my dear Jane—’connected’!” Lady Greyswood gave a sigh of the sweetest irony.

“He’s connected with you, to begin with.”

Lady Greyswood put out her hand and held her visitor’s for a moment. “Of course it isn’t as if he were a different sort of person. Of course I should like it!” she added.

“Does he dislike her *very* much?”

Lady Greyswood looked at her friend with a smile. “He resembles Fanny—he doesn’t tell. But what would her father say?” she went on.

“He doesn’t know it.”

“You’ve not talked with him?”

Mrs. Knocker hesitated a moment. “He thinks she’s all right.” Both the ladies laughed a little at the density of men; then the visitor said: “I wanted to see you first.”

This circumstance gave Lady Greyswood food for thought; it suggested comprehensively that in spite of a probable deficiency of zeal on the General’s part the worthy man would not be the great obstacle. She had begun so quickly to turn over in her mind the various ways in which this new phase of the business might make it possible the real obstacle should be surmounted that she scarcely heard her companion say next: “The General will only want his daughter to be happy. He has no definite ambitions for her. I dare say Maurice could make him like him.” It was something more said by her companion about Maurice that sounded sharply through her reverie. “But unless the idea appeals to *him* a bit there’s no use talking about it.”

At this Lady Greyswood spoke with decision. “It *shall* appeal to him. Leave it to me! Kiss your dear child for me,” she added as the ladies embraced and separated.

In the course of the day she made up her mind, and when she again broached the question to her son (it befell that very evening) she felt that she stood on firmer ground. She began by mentioning to him that her dear old friend had the same charming dream—for the girl—that *she* had; she sketched with a light hand a picture of their preconcerted happiness in the union of their children. When he replied that he couldn't for the life of him imagine what the Knockers could see in a poor beggar of a younger son who had publicly come a cropper, she took pains to prove that he was as good as anyone else and much better than many of the young men to whom persons of sense were often willing to confide their daughters. She had been in much tribulation over the circumstance announced to her in the morning, not knowing whether, in her present enterprise, to keep it back or put it forward. If Maurice should happen not to take it in the right way it was the sort of thing that might dish the whole experiment. He might be bored, he might be annoyed, he might be horrified—there was no limit, in such cases, to the perversity, to the possible brutality of even the most amiable man. On the other hand he might be pleased, touched, flattered—if he didn't dislike the girl too much. Lady Greyswood could indeed imagine that it might be unpleasant to know that a person who was disagreeable to you was in love with you; so that there was just that risk to run. She determined to run it only if there should be absolutely no other card to play. Meanwhile she said: “Don't you see, now, how intelligent she is, in her quiet way, and how perfect she is at home—without any nonsense or affectation or ill-nature? She's not a bit stupid, she's remarkably clever. She can do a lot of things; she has no end of talents. Many girls with a quarter of her abilities would make five times the show.”

“My dear mother, she's a great swell, I freely admit it. She's far too good for me. What in the world puts it into your two heads that she would look at me?”

At this Lady Greyswood was tempted to speak; but after an instant she said instead: “She *has* looked at you, and you've seen how. You've seen her several times now, and she has been remarkably nice to you.”

“Nice? Ah, poor girl, she's frightened to death!”

“Believe me—I read her,” Lady Greyswood replied.

“She knows she has money and she thinks I'm after it. She thinks I'm a ravaging wolf and she's scared.”

“I happen to know as a fact that she's in love with you!” Before she could check herself Lady Greyswood had played her card, and though she held her breath a little after doing so she felt that it had been a good moment. “If I hadn't known it,” she hastened further to declare, “I should never have said another word.” Maurice burst out laughing—how in the world *did* she know it? When she put the evidence before him she had the pleasure of seeing that he listened without irritation; and this emboldened her to say: “Don't you think you could *try* to like her?”

Maurice was lounging on a sofa opposite to her; jocose but embarrassed, he had thrown back his head, and while he stretched himself his eyes wandered over the upper expanse of the room. “It's very kind of her and of her mother, and I'm much obliged and all that, though a fellow feels rather an ass in talking about such a thing. Of course also I don't pretend—before such a proof of wisdom—that I think her in the least a fool. But, oh, dear——!” And the young man broke off with laughing impatience, as if he had too much to say. His mother waited an instant, then she uttered a persuasive, interrogative sound, and he went on: “It's only a pity she's so awful!”

“So awful?” murmured Lady Greyswood.

“Dear mother, she’s about as ugly a woman as ever turned round on you. If there were only just a touch or two less of it!”

Lady Greyswood got up: she stood looking in silence at the tinted shade of the lamp. She remained in this position so long that he glanced at her—he was struck with the sadness in her face. He would have been in error however if he had suspected that this sadness was assumed for the purpose of showing him that she was wounded by his resistance, for the reflection that his last words caused her to make was as disinterested as it was melancholy. Here was an excellent, a charming girl—a girl, she was sure, with a rare capacity for devotion—whose future was reduced to nothing by the mere accident, in her face, of a certain want of drawing. A man could settle her fate with a laugh, could give her away with a snap of his fingers. She seemed to see Maurice administer to poor Fanny’s image the little displeased shove with which he would have disposed of an ill-seasoned dish. Moreover he greatly exaggerated. Her heart grew heavy with a sense of the hardness of the lot of women, and when she looked again at her son there were tears in her eyes that startled him. “Poor girl—poor girl!” she simply sighed, in a tone that was to reverberate in his mind and to constitute in doing so a real appeal to his imagination. After a moment she added: “We’ll talk no more about her—no, no!”

All the same she went three days later to see Mrs. Knocker and say to her: “My dear creature, I think it’s all right.”

“Do you mean he’ll take us up?”

“He’ll come and see you, and you must give him plenty of chances.” What Lady Greyswood would have liked to be able to say, crudely and comfortably, was: “He’ll try to manage it—he promises to do what he can.” What she did say, however, was: “He’s greatly prepossessed in the dear child’s favour.”

“Then I dare say he’ll be very nice.”

“If I didn’t think he’d behave like a gentleman I wouldn’t raise a finger. The more he sees of her the more he’ll be sure to like her.”

“Of course with poor Fanny that’s the only thing one can build on,” said Mrs. Knocker.

“There’s so much to get over.”

Lady Greyswood hesitated a moment. “Maurice *has* got over it. But I should tell you that at first he doesn’t want it known.”

“Doesn’t want what known?”

“Why, the footing on which he comes. You see it’s just the least bit experimental.”

“For what do you take me?” asked Mrs. Knocker. “The child shall never dream that anything has passed between us. No more of course shall her father.”

“It’s too delightful of you to leave it that way,” Lady Greyswood replied. “We must surround her happiness with every safeguard.”

Mrs. Knocker sat pensive for some moments. “So that if nothing comes of it there’s no harm done? That idea—that nothing may come of it—makes one a little nervous,” she added.

“Of course I can’t absolutely answer for my poor boy!” said Lady Greyswood, with just the faintest ring of impatience. “But he’s much affected by what he knows—I told him. That’s what moves him.”

“He must of course be perfectly free.”

“The great thing is for her not to know.”

Mrs. Knocker considered. “Are you very sure?” She had apparently had a profounder second thought.

“Why, my dear—with the risk!”

“Isn’t the risk, after all, greater the other way? Mayn’t it help the matter on, mayn’t it do the poor child a certain degree of good, the idea that, as you say, he’s prepossessed in her favour? It would perhaps cheer her up, as it were, and encourage her, so that by the very fact of being happier about herself she may make a better impression. That’s what she wants, poor thing—to be helped to hold up her head, to take herself more seriously, to believe that people can like her. And fancy, when it’s a case of such a beautiful young man who’s all ready to!”

“Yes, he’s all ready to,” Lady Greyswood conceded. “Of course it’s a question for your own discretion. I can’t advise you, for you know your child. But it seems to me a case for tremendous caution.”

“Oh, trust me for that!” said Mrs. Knocker. “We shall be very kind to him,” she smiled, as her visitor got up.

“He’ll appreciate that. But it’s too nice of you to leave it so.”

Mrs. Knocker gave a hopeful shrug. “He has only to be civil to Blake!”

“Ah, he isn’t a brute!” Lady Greyswood exclaimed, caressing her.

After this she passed a month of no little anxiety. She asked her son no question, and for two or three weeks he offered her no other information than to say two or three times that Miss Knocker really could ride; but she learned from her old friend everything she wanted to know. Immediately after the conference of the two ladies Maurice, in the Row, had taken an opportunity of making up to the girl. She rode every day with her father, and Maurice rode, though possessed of nothing in life to put a leg across; and he had been so well received that this proved the beginning of a custom. He had a canter with the young lady most days in the week, and when they parted it was usually to meet again in the evening. His relations with the household in Ennismore Gardens were indeed not left greatly to his initiative; he became on the spot the subject of perpetual invitations and arrangements, the centre of the friendliest manœuvres; so that Lady Greyswood was struck with Jane Knocker’s feverish energy in the good cause—the ingenuity, the bribery, the cunning that an exemplary mother might be inspired to practise. She herself did nothing, she left it all to poor Jane, and this perhaps gave her for the moment a sense of contemplative superiority. She wondered if *she* would in any circumstances have plotted so almost fiercely for one of her children. She was glad her old friend’s design had her full approbation; she held her breath a little when she said to herself: “Suppose I hadn’t liked it—suppose it had been for Chumleigh!” Chumleigh was the present Lord Greyswood, whom his mother still called by his earlier designation. Fanny Knocker’s thirty thousand would have been by no means enough for Chumleigh. Lady Greyswood, in spite of her suspense, was detached enough to be amused when her accomplice told her that “Blake” had said that Maurice really could ride. The two mothers thanked God for the riding—the riding would see them through. Lady Greyswood had watched Fanny narrowly in the Park, where, in the saddle, she looked no worse than lots of girls. She had no idea how Maurice got his mounts—she knew Chumleigh had none to give him; but there were directions in which she would have encouraged him to incur almost any liability. He was evidently amused and beguiled; he fell into comfortable attitudes on the soft cushions that were laid for him and partook with relish of the dainties that were served; he had his fill of the theatres, of the opera—entertainments of which he was fond. She could see he didn’t care

for the sort of people he met in Ennismore Gardens, but this didn't matter: so much as that she didn't ask of him. She knew that when he should have something to tell her he would speak; and meanwhile she pretended to be a thousand miles away. The only thing that worried her was that he had dropped photography. She said to Mrs. Knocker more than once: "Does he make love?—that's what I want to know!" to which this lady replied with her incongruous drollery: "My dear, how can I make out? He's so little like Blake!" But she added that she believed Fanny was intensely happy. Lady Greyswood had been struck with the girl's looking so, and she rejoiced to be able to declare in perfectly good faith that she thought her greatly improved. "Didn't I tell you?" returned Mrs. Knocker to this with a certain accent of triumph. It made Lady Greyswood nervous, for she took it to mean that Fanny had had a hint from her mother of Maurice's possible intentions. She was afraid to ask her old friend directly if this were definitely true: poor Fanny's improvement was after all not a gain sufficient to make up for the cruelty that would reside in the sense of being rejected.

One day, in Queen Street, Maurice said in an abrupt, conscientious way: "You were right about Fanny Knocker—she's a remarkably clever and a thoroughly nice girl; a fellow can really talk with her. But oh mother!"

"Well, my dear?"

The young man's face wore a strange smile. "Oh mother!" he expressively, quite tragically repeated. "But it's all right!" he presently added in a different tone, and Lady Greyswood was reassured. This confidence, however, received a shock a little later, on the evening of a day that had been intensely hot. A torrid wave had passed over London, and in the suffocating air the pleasures of the season had put on a purple face. Lady Greyswood, whose own fineness of tone no temperature could affect, knew, in her bedimmed drawing-room, exactly the detail of her son's engagements. She pitied him—*she* had managed to keep clear; she had in particular a vision of a distribution of prizes, by one of the princesses, at a big horticultural show; she saw the sweltering starers (and at what, after all?) under a huge glass roof, while there passed before her, in a blur of crimson, the glimpse of uncomfortable cheeks under an erratic white bonnet, together also with the sense that some of Jane Knocker's ideas of pleasure were of the oddest (she had such *lacunes*), and some of the ordeals to which she exposed poor Fanny singularly ill-chosen. Maurice came in, perspiring but pale (nothing could make *him* ugly!) to dress for dinner, and though he was in a great hurry he found time to pant: "Oh mother, what I'm going through for you!"

"Do you mean rushing about so—in this weather? We shall have a change to-night."

"I hope so! There are people for whom it doesn't do at all; ah, not a bit!" said Maurice with a laugh that she didn't fancy. But he went upstairs before she could think of anything to reply, and after he had dressed he passed out without speaking to her again. The next morning, on entering her room, her maid mentioned as a delicate duty that Mr. Glanvil, whose door stood wide open and whose bed was untouched, had apparently not yet come in. While, however, her ladyship was in the first freshness of meditation on this singular fact the morning's letters were brought up, and as it happened that the second envelope she glanced at was addressed in Maurice's hand she was quickly in possession of an explanation still more startling than his absence. He wrote from a club, at nine o'clock the previous evening, to announce that he was taking the night train for the continent. He hadn't dressed for dinner, he had dressed otherwise, and having stuffed a few things with surreptitious haste into a Gladstone bag, had slipped unperceived out of the house and into a hansom. He had sent to Ennismore Gardens, from his club, an apology—a request he should not be waited for; and now he should just have time to get to Charing Cross. He was off he didn't know where, but he was off he did know why. "You'll know why, dear mother too, I think," this wonderful communication

continued; “you’ll know why, because I haven’t deceived you. I’ve done what I could, but I’ve broken down. I felt to-day that it was no use; there was a moment, at that beastly exhibition, when I saw it, when the question was settled. The truth rolled over me in a stifling wave. After that I made up my mind there was nothing to do but to bolt. I meant to put it off till to-morrow, and to tell you first, but while I was dressing to-day it struck me irresistibly that my true course is to break now—never to enter the house or go near her again. I was afraid of a scene with you about this. I haven’t uttered a word of ‘love’ to her (heaven save us!) but my position this afternoon became definitely false, and that fact prescribes the course I am taking. You shall hear from me again in a day or two. I have the greatest regard for her, but I can’t bear to look at her. I don’t care a bit for money, but, hang it, I *must* have beauty! Please send me twenty pounds, *poste restante*, Boulogne.”

“What I want, Jane, is to get at this,” Lady Greyswood said, later in the day, with an austerity that was sensible even through her tears. “Does the child know, or doesn’t she, what was at stake?”

“She hasn’t an inkling of it—how should she? I recognised that it was best not to tell her—and I didn’t.”

On this, as Mrs. Knocker’s tears had also flowed, Lady Greyswood kissed her. But she didn’t believe her. Fanny herself, however, for the rest of the season, proved inscrutable. “She’s a character!” Lady Greyswood reflected with admiration. In September, in Yorkshire, the girl was taken seriously ill.

III

After luncheon at the Crisfords’—the big Sunday banquets of twenty people and a dozen courses—the men, lingering a little in the dining-room, dawdling among displaced chairs and dropped napkins while the ladies rustled away, ended by shuffling in casual pairs up to the studio, where coffee was served and where, presently, before the cigarettes were smoked out, Mrs. Crisford always reappeared to usher in her contingent. The studio was high and handsome, and luncheon at the Crisfords’ was, in the common esteem, more amusing than almost anything else in London except dinner. It was Bohemia with excellent service—Bohemia not debtor but creditor. Upstairs the pictures, finished or nearly finished, and arranged in a shining row, gave an obviousness of topic, so that conversation could easily touch bottom. Maurice Glanvil, who had never been in the house before, looked about and wondered; he was struck with the march of civilization—the rise of the social tide. There were new notes in English life, which he caught quickly with his fresh sense; during his long absence—twenty years of France and Italy—all sorts of things had happened. In his youth, in England, artists and authors and actors—people of that general kind—were not nearly so “smart.” Maurice Glanvil was forty-nine to-day, and he thought a great deal of his youth. He regretted it, he missed it, he tried to beckon it back; but the differences in London made him feel that it had gone forever. There might perhaps be some sudden compensation in being fifty, some turn of the dim telescope, some view from the brow of the hill; it was a round, gross, stupid number, which probably would make one pompous, make one think one’s self venerable. Meanwhile at any rate it was odious to be forty-nine. Maurice observed the young now more than he had ever done; observed them, that is, as the young. He wished he could have had a son, to be twenty with again; his daughter was only eighteen, but fond as he was of her he couldn’t live instinctively into her girlishness. It was not that there was not plenty of it, for she was simple, sweet, indefinite, without the gifts that the boy would have had, the gifts—what had become of them now?—that he himself used to have.

The youngest person present, before the ladies came in, was the young man who had sat next to Vera and whom, being on the same side of the long table, he had not had under his eye. Maurice noticed him now, noticed that he was very good-looking, fair and fresh and clean, impeccable in his straight smoothness; also that apparently knowing none of the other guests and moving by himself about the studio with visible interest in the charming things, he had the modesty of his age and of his position. He had however something more besides, which had begun to prompt this observer to speak to him in order to hear the sound of his voice—a strange, elusive resemblance, lost in the profile but flickering straight out of the full face, to someone Maurice had known. For a minute Glanvil was worried by it—he had a sense that a name would suddenly come to him if he should see the lips in motion; but as he was on the point of laying the ghost by an experiment Mrs. Crisford led in her companions. His daughter was among them, and in company, as he was constantly anxious about her appearance and her attitude, she had at moments the faculty of drawing his attention from everything else. The poor child, the only fruit of his odd, romantic union, the *coup de foudre* of his youth, with her strangely beautiful mother, whose own mother had been a Russian and who had died in giving birth to her—his short, colourless, insignificant Vera was excessively, incorrigibly plain. She had been the disappointment of his life, but he greatly pitied her. Her want of beauty, with her antecedents, had been one of the strangest tricks of fate; she was acutely conscious of it and, being good and docile, would have liked to please. She did sometimes, to her father's delight, in spite of everything; she had been educated abroad, on foreign lines, near her mother's people. He had brought her to England to take her out, to do what he could for her; but he was not unaware that in England her manners, which had been thought very pretty on the continent, would strike some persons as artificial. They were exactly what her mother's had been; they made up to a certain extent for the want of other resemblance. An extreme solicitude at any rate as to the impression they might make was the source of his habit, in London, of watching her covertly. He tried to see at a given moment how she looked, if she were happy; it was always with an intention of encouragement, and there was a frequent exchange between them of little invisible affectionate signs. She wore charming clothes, but she was terribly short; in England the girls were gigantic and it was only the tallest who were noticed. Their manners, alas, had nothing to do with it—many of them indeed hadn't any manners. As soon as he had got near Vera he said to her, scanning her through his single glass from head to foot:

“Who is the young man who sat next you? the one at the other end of the room.”

“I don't know his name, papa—I didn't catch it.”

“Was he civil—did he talk to you?”

“Oh, a great deal, papa—about all sorts of things.”

Something in the tone of her voice made him look with greater intensity and even with greater tenderness than usual into her little dim green eyes. “Then you're all right—you're getting on?”

She gave her effusive smile—the one that perhaps wouldn't do in England. “Oh beautifully, papa—everyone's so kind.”

She never complained, was a brave little optimist, full of sweet resources; but he had detected to-day as soon as he looked at her the particular shade of her content. It made him continue, after an hesitation: “He didn't say anything about his relations—anything that could give you a clue?”

Vera thought a moment. “Not that I can remember—unless that Mr. Crisford is painting the portrait of his mother. Ah, there it is!” the girl exclaimed, looking across the room at a large

picture on an easel, which the young man had just approached and from which their host had removed the drapery that covered it. Maurice Glanvil had observed this drapery, and as the artist unveiled the canvas with a flourish he saw that he had been waiting for the ladies to show it, to produce a surprise, a grand effect. Everyone moved toward it, and Maurice, with his daughter beside him, recognised that the production, a portrait, was striking, a great success for Crisford—the figure, down to the knees, with an extraordinary look of life, of a tall, handsome woman of middle age, in full dress, in black. Yet he saw it for the moment vaguely, through a preoccupation, that of a discovery which he had just made and which had recalled to him an incident of his youth—his juxtaposition, in London, at a dinner, to a girl, insurmountably charmless to him, who had fallen in love with him (so that she was nearly to die of it), within the first five minutes, before he had even spoken; as he had subsequently learned from a communication made him by his poor mother—a reminder uttered with a pointless bitterness that he had failed to understand and accompanied with unsuspected details, much later—too late, long after his marriage and shortly before her death. He said to himself that he must look out, and he wondered if poor Vera would also be insurmountably charmless to the good-looking young man. “But what a likeness, papa—what a likeness!” he heard her murmur at his elbow with suppressed excitement.

“How can you tell, my dear, if you haven’t seen her?”

“I mean to the gentleman—the son.”

Everyone was exclaiming “How wonderfully clever—how beautiful!” and under cover of the agitation and applause Maurice Glanvil had drawn nearer the picture. The movement had brought him close to the young man of whom he had been talking with Vera and who, with his happy eyes on the painted figure, seemed to smile in acknowledgment of the artist’s talent and of the sitter’s charm.

“Do you know who the lady is?” Maurice said to him.

He turned his bright face to his interlocutor. “She’s my mother—Mrs. Tregent. Isn’t it wonderful?”

His eyes, his lips, his voice flashed a light into Glanvil’s uncertainty—the tormenting resemblance was simply a prolonged echo of Fanny Knocker, in whose later name, precisely, he recognised the name pronounced by the young man. Maurice Glanvil stared in some bewilderment; this stately, splendid lady, with a face so vivid that it was handsome, was what that unfortunate girl had become? The eyes, as if they picked him out, looked at him strangely from the canvas; the face, with all its difference, asserted itself, and he felt himself turning as red as if he had been in the presence of the original. Young Tregent, pleased and proud, had given way to the pressing spectators, placing himself at Vera’s other side; and Maurice heard the girl exclaim to him in one of her pretty effusions: “How beautiful she must be, and how amiable!”

“She is indeed—it’s not a bit flattered.” And while Maurice still stared, more and more mystified—for “flattered, flattered!” was the unspoken solution in which he had instantly taken refuge—his neighbour continued: “I wish you could know her—you must; she’s delightful. She couldn’t come here to-day—they asked her: she has people lunching at home.”

“I should be so glad; perhaps we may meet her somewhere,” said Vera.

“If I ask her and if you’ll let her I’m sure she’ll come to see you,” the young man responded. Maurice had glanced at him while the face of the portrait watched them with the oddest, the grimmest effect. He was filled with a confusion of feelings, asking himself half-a-dozen

questions at once. Was young Tregent, with his attentive manner, “making up” to Vera? was he going out of his way in answering for his mother’s civility? Little did he know what he was taking on himself! Above all was Fanny Knocker to-day this extraordinary figure—extraordinary in the light of the early plainness that had made him bolt? He became conscious of an extreme curiosity, an irresistible desire to see her.

“Oh, papa,” said Vera, “Mr. Tregent’s so kind; he’s so good as to promise us a visit from his mother.”

The young man’s friendly eyes were still on the child’s face. “I’ll tell her all about you. Oh, if I ask her she’ll come!” he repeated.

“Does she do everything you ask her?” the girl inquired.

“She likes to know my friends!”

Maurice hesitated, wondering if he were in the presence of a smooth young humbug to whom compliments cost nothing, or in that of an impression really made—made by his little fluttered, unpopular Vera. He had a horror of exposing his child to risks, but his curiosity was greater than his caution. “Your mother mustn’t come to us—it’s our duty to go to her,” he said to Mr. Tregent; “I had the honour of knowing her—a long time ago. Her mother and mine were intimate friends. Be so good as to mention my name to her, that of Maurice Glanvil, and to tell her how glad I have been to make your acquaintance. And now, my dear child,” he added to Vera, “we must take leave.”

During the rest of that day it never occurred to him that there might be an awkwardness in his presenting himself, even after many years, before a person with whom he had broken as he had broken with Fanny Knocker. This was partly because he held, justly enough, that he had never committed himself, and partly because the intensity of his desire to measure with his own eyes the change represented—misrepresented perhaps—by the picture was a force greater than any embarrassment. His mother had told him that the poor girl had cruelly suffered, but there was no present intensity in that idea. With her expensive portrait, her grand air, her handsome son, she somehow embodied success, whereas he himself, standing for mere bereavement and disappointment, was a failure not to be surpassed. With Vera that evening he was very silent; she saw him smoke endless cigarettes and wondered what he was thinking of. She guessed indeed, but she was too subtle a little person to attempt to fall in with his thoughts or to be willing to betray her own by asking him random questions about Mrs. Tregent. She had expressed as they came away from their luncheon-party a natural surprise at the coincidence of his having known the mother of her amusing neighbour, but the only other words that dropped from her on the subject were contained in a question that, before she went to bed, she put to him with abrupt gaiety, while she carefully placed a marker in a book she had not been reading.

“When is it then that we’re to call upon this wonderful old friend?”

He looked at her through the smoke of his cigarette. “I don’t know. We must wait a little, to allow her time to give some sign.”

“Oh, I see!” And Vera took leave of him with one of her sincere little kisses.

IV

He had not long to wait for the sign from Mrs. Tregent; it arrived the very next morning in the shape of an invitation to dinner. This invitation was immediately accepted, but a fortnight was still to intervene—a trial to Maurice Glanvil’s patience. The promptitude of the demonstration gave him pleasure—it showed him no bitterness had survived. What place was

there indeed for resentment, since she had married and given birth to children and thought so well of the face God had conferred on her as to wish to hand it on to her posterity? Her husband was in Parliament, or had been—that came back to him from his mother's story. He caught himself reverting to her with a frequency that surprised him; he was haunted by the image of that bright, strong woman on Crisford's canvas, in whom there was just enough of Fanny Knocker to put a sort of defiance into the difference. He wanted to see it again, and his opportunity was at hand in the form of a visit to Mrs. Crisford. He called on this lady, without his daughter, four days after he had lunched with her, and, finding her at home, he presently led the conversation to the portrait and to his ardent desire for another glimpse of it. Mrs. Crisford gratified this eagerness—perhaps he struck her as a possible sitter; it was late in the afternoon and her husband was out: she led him into the studio. Mrs. Tregent, splendid and serene, stood there as if she had been watching for him. There was no doubt the picture was a masterpiece. Maurice had mentioned that he had known the original years before and then had lost sight of her. He questioned his hostess with artful detachment.

“What sort of a person has she become—agreeable, popular?”

“Everyone adores her—she's so clever.”

“Really—remarkably?”

“Extraordinarily—one of the cleverest women I've ever known, and quite one of the most charming.”

Maurice looked at the portrait—at the super-subtle smile which seemed to tell him Mrs. Tregent knew they were talking about her; a kind of smile he had never expected to live to see in Fanny Knocker's eyes. Then he asked: “Has she literally become as handsome as that?”

Mrs. Crisford hesitated. “She's beautiful.”

“Beautiful?” Maurice echoed.

“What shall I say? It's a peculiar charm! It's her spirit. One sees that her life has been beautiful in spite of her sorrows!” Mrs. Crisford added.

“What sorrows has she had?” Maurice coloured a little as soon as he had spoken.

“Oh, lots of deaths. She has lost her husband; she has lost several children.”

“Ah, that's new to me. Was her marriage happy?”

“It must have been for Mr. Tregent. If it wasn't for her, no one ever knew.”

“But she has a son,” said Maurice.

“Yes, the only one—such a dear. She thinks all the world of him.”

At this moment a message was brought to Mrs. Crisford, and she asked to be excused while she went to say a word to someone who was waiting. Maurice Glanvil in this way was left alone for five minutes with the intensity of the presence evoked by the artist. He found himself agitated, excited by it: the face of the portrait was so intelligent and conscious that as he stood there he felt as if some strange communication had taken place between his being and Mrs. Tregent's. The idea made him nervous: he moved about the room and ended by turning his back. Mrs. Crisford reappeared, but he soon took leave of her; and when he had got home (he had settled himself in South Kensington, in a little indiscriminated house which he had hated from the first), he learned from his daughter that she had had a visit from young Tregent. He had asked first for Mr. Glanvil and then, in the second instance, for herself, telling her when admitted, as if to attenuate his possible indiscretion, that his mother had

charged him to try to see her even if he should not find her father. Vera had never before received a gentleman alone, and the incident had left traces of emotion. "Poor little thing!" Maurice said to himself: he always took a melancholy view of any happiness of his daughter's, tending to believe, in his pessimism, that it could only lead to some refinement of humiliation. He encouraged her however to talk about young Tregent, who, according to her account, had been extravagantly amusing. He had said moreover that his mother was tremendously impatient to renew such an old acquaintance. "Why in the world doesn't she, then?" Maurice asked himself; "why doesn't she come and see Vera?" He reflected afterwards that such an expectation was unreasonable, but it represented at the moment a kind of rebellion of his conscience. Then, as he had begun to be a little ashamed of his curiosity, he liked to think that Mrs. Tregent would have quite as much. On the morrow he knocked at her door—she lived in a "commodious" house in Manchester Square—and had the satisfaction, as he had chosen his time carefully, of learning that she had just come in.

Upstairs, in a high, quiet, old-fashioned drawing-room, she was before him. What he saw was a tall woman in black, in her bonnet, with a white face, smiling intensely—smiling and smiling before she spoke. He quickly perceived that she was agitated and was making an heroic effort, which would presently be successful, not to show it. But it was above all clear to him that she wasn't Fanny Knocker—was simply another person altogether. She had nothing in common with Fanny Knocker—it was impossible to meet her on the ground of any former acquaintance. What acquaintance had he ever had with this graceful, harmonious, expressive English matron, whose smile had a singular radiance? That rascal of a Crisford had done her such perfect justice that he felt as if he had before him the portrait of which the image in the studio had been the original. There were nevertheless things to be said, and they said them on either side, sinking together, with friendly exclamations and exaggerated laughs, on the sofa, where her nearness seemed the span of all the distance that separated her from the past. The phrase that hummed through everything, to his sense, was his own inarticulate "How could I have known? how could I have known?" How could he have foreseen that time and life and happiness (it was probably more than anything happiness), would transpose her into such a different key? Her whole personality revealed itself from moment to moment as something so agreeable that even after all these years he felt himself blushing for the crass stupidity of his mistake. Yes, he was turning red, and she could see it and would know why: a perception that could only constitute for her a magnificent triumph, a revenge. All his natural and acquired coolness, his experience of life, his habit of society, everything that contributed to make him a man of the world, were of no avail to cover his confusion. He took refuge from it almost angrily in trying to prove to himself that she had on a second look a likeness to the ugly girl he had not thought good enough—in trying to trace Fanny Knocker in her fair, ripe bloom, the fine irregularity of her features. To put his finger on the identity would make him feel better. Some of the facts of the girl's crooked face were still there—conventional beauty was absent; but the proportions and relations had changed, and the expression and the spirit: she had accepted herself or ceased to care—had found oblivion and activity and appreciation. What Maurice mainly discovered however in this intenser observation was an attitude of hospitality toward himself which immediately effaced the presumption of "triumph." Vulgar vanity was far from her, and the grossness of watching her effect upon him: she was watching only the lost vision that had come back, the joy that, if for a single hour, she had found again. She herself had no measure of the alteration that struck him, and there was no substitution for her in the face that her deep eyes seemed to brush with their hovering. Presently they were talking like old friends, and before long each was in possession of the principal facts concerning the other. Many things had come and gone and the common fate had pressed them hard. Her parents were dead, and her husband and her first-born children. He, on his side, had lost his mother and his wife. They matched bereavements and compared bruises, and in the

way she expressed herself there was a charm which forced him, as he wondered, to remember that Fanny Knocker had at least been intelligent.

“I wish I could have seen your wife—you must tell me all about her,” she said. “Haven’t you some portraits?”

“Some poor little photographs. I’ll show them to you. She was very pretty and very gentle; she was also very un-English. But she only lived a year. She wasn’t clever and accomplished—like you.”

“Ah, me; you don’t know *me!*”

“No, but I want to—oh particularly. I’m prepared to give a good deal of time to the study.”

“We must be friends,” said Mrs. Tregent. “I shall take an extraordinary interest in your daughter.”

“She’ll be grateful for it. She’s a good little reasonable thing, without a scrap of beauty.”

“You care greatly for that,” said Mrs. Tregent.

He hesitated a moment. “Don’t you?”

She smiled at him with her basking candour. “I used to. That’s my husband,” she added, with an odd, though evidently accidental, inconsequence. She had reached out to a table for a photograph in a silver frame. “He was very good to me.”

Maurice saw that Mr. Tregent had been many years older than his wife—a prosperous, prosaic, parliamentary person whom she couldn’t impose on a man of the world. He sat an hour, and they talked of the mutilated season of their youth: he wondered at the things she remembered. In this little hour he felt his situation change—something strange and important take place: he seemed to see why he had come back to England. But there was an implication that worried him—it was in the very air, a reverberation of that old assurance of his mother’s. He wished to clear the question up—it would matter for the beginning of a new friendship. Had she had any sense of injury when he took to his heels, any glimpse of the understanding on which he had begun to come to Ennismore Gardens? He couldn’t find out to-day except by asking her, which, at their time of life, after so many years and consolations, would be legitimate and even amusing. When he took leave of her he held her hand a moment, hesitating; then he brought out:

“Did they ever tell you—a hundred years ago—that between your mother and mine there was a great question of our marrying?”

She stared—she broke into a laugh. “*Was* there?”

“Did you ever know it? Did you ever suspect it?”

She hesitated and, for the first time since he had been in the room, ceased for an instant to look straight at him. She only answered, still laughing however: “Poor dears—they were altogether too deep!”

She evidently wished to convey that she had never known. Maurice was a little disappointed: at present he would have preferred her knowledge. But as he walked home across the park, through Kensington Gardens, he felt it impossible to believe in her ignorance.

V

At the end of a month he broke out to her. “I can’t get over it, it’s so extraordinary—the difference between your youth and your maturity!”

“Did you expect me to be an eternal child?” Mrs. Tregent asked composedly.

“No, it isn’t that.” He stopped—it would be difficult to explain.

“What is it then?” she inquired, with her systematic refusal to acknowledge a complication. There was always, to Maurice Glanvil’s ear, in her impenetrability to allusion, the faintest, softest glee, and it gave her on this occasion the appearance of recognising his difficulty and being amused at it. She would be excusable to be a little cold-blooded. He really knew however that the penalty was all in his own reflections, for it had not taken him even a month to perceive that she was supremely, almost strangely indulgent. There was nothing he was ready to say that she might not hear, and her absence of coquetry was a remarkable rest to him.

“It isn’t what I expected—it’s what I didn’t expect. To say exactly what I mean, it’s the way you’ve improved.”

“I’ve improved? I’m so glad!”

“Surely you’ve been aware of it—you’ve been conscious of the transformation.”

“As an improvement? I don’t know. I’ve been conscious of changes enough—of all the stages and strains and lessons of life. I’ve been aware of growing old, and I hold, in dissent from the usual belief, that there’s no fool like a young fool. One is never, I suppose, such a fool as one *has* been, and that may count perhaps as amelioration. But I can’t flatter myself that I’ve had two different identities. I’ve had to make one, such as it is, do for everything. I think I’ve been happier than I originally supposed I should be—and yet I had my happiness too as a girl. At all events if you were to scratch me, as they say, you’d still find——” She paused a moment, and he really hung upon her lips: there was such a charm of tone in whatever she said. “You’d still find, underneath, the blowsy girl——” With this she again checked herself and, slightly to his surprise, gave a nervous laugh.

“The blowsy girl?” he repeated, with an artlessness of interrogation that made her laugh again.

“Whom you went with that hot day to see the princess give the prizes.”

“Oh yes—that dreadful day!” he answered gravely, musingly, with the whole scene pictured by her words and without contesting the manner in which she qualified herself. It was the nearest allusion that had passed between them to that crudest conception of his boyhood, his flight from Ennismore Gardens. Almost every day for a month he had come to see her, and they had talked of a thousand things; never yet however had they made any explicit mention of this remote instance of premature wisdom. Moreover if he now felt the need of going back it was not to be apologetic, to do penance; he had nothing to explain, for his behaviour, as he considered it, still struck him, given the circumstances, as natural. It was to himself indeed that explanations were owing, for he had been the one who had been most deceived. He liked Mrs. Tregent better than he had ever liked a woman—that is he liked her for more reasons. He had liked his poor little wife only for one, which was after all no reason at all: he had been in love with her. In spite of the charm that the renewal of acquaintance with his old friend had so unexpectedly added to his life there was a vague torment in his relation with her, the sense of a revenge (oh a very kind one!) to take, a haunting idea that he couldn’t pacify. He could still feel sore at the trick that had been played him. Even after a month the curiosity with which he had approached her was not assuaged; in a manner indeed it had only borrowed force from all she had insisted on doing for him. She was literally doing everything now; gently, gaily, with a touch so familiar that protestations on his part would have been pedantic, she had taken his life in hand. Rich as she was she had known how to give him lessons in

economy; she had taught him how to manage in London on his means. A month ago his servants had been horrid—to-day they were the best he had ever known. For Vera she was plainly a providence—her behaviour to Vera was transcendent.

He had privately made up his mind that Vera had in truth had her *coup de foudre*—that if she had had a chance she would have laid down her little life for Arthur Tregent; yet two circumstances, he could perceive, had helped to postpone, to attenuate even somewhat, her full consciousness of what had befallen her. One of these influences had been the prompt departure of the young man from London; the other was simply the diversion produced by Mrs. Tregent's encompassing art. It had had immediate consequences for the child: it was like a drama in perpetual climaxes. This surprising benefactress rejoiced in her society, took her "out," treated her as if there were mysterious injustices to repair. Vera was agitated not a little by such a change in her life; she had English kindred enough, uncles and aunts and cousins; but she had felt herself lost in her father's family and was principally aware, among them, of their strangeness and their indifference. They affected her mainly as mere number and stature. Mrs. Tregent's was a performance unpromised and uninterrupted, and the girl desired to know if all English people took so generous a view of friendship. Maurice laughed at this question and, without meeting his daughter's eyes, answered in the negative. Vera guessed so many things that he didn't know what she would be guessing next. He saw her caught up to the blue like Ganymede, and surrendered her contentedly. She had been the occupation of his life, yet to Mrs. Tregent he was willing to part with her; this lady was the only person of whom he would not have been jealous. Even in the young man's absence moreover Vera lived with the son of the house and breathed his air; Manchester Square was full of him, his photograph was on every table. How often she spoke of him to his mother Maurice had no means of knowing, nor whether Mrs. Tregent encouraged such a topic; he had reason to believe indeed that there were reserves on either side, and he felt that he could trust his old friend's prudence as much as her liberality. The attitude of forbearance from rash allusions, which was Maurice's own, could not at any rate keep Arthur from being a presence in the little drama which had begun for them all, as the older man was more and more to recognise with nervous prefigurements, on that occasion at the Crisfords'.

Arthur Tregent had gone to Ireland to spend a few weeks with an old university friend—the gentleman indeed, at Cambridge, had been his tutor—who had lately, in a district classified as "disturbed," come into a bewildering heritage. He had chosen in short for a study of the agrarian question on the spot the moment of the year when London was most absorbing. Maurice Glanvil made no remark to his mother on this anomaly, and she offered him no explanation of it; they talked in fact of almost everything except Arthur. Mrs. Tregent had to her constant visitor the air of feeling that she owed him in relation to her son an apology which she had not the materials for making. It was certainly a high standard of courtesy that would suggest to her that he ought to have put himself out for these social specimens; but it was obvious that her standard was high. Maurice Glanvil smiled when he thought to what bare civility the young man would have deemed himself held had he known of a certain passage of private history. But he knew nothing—Maurice was sure of that; his reason for going away had been quite another matter. That Vera's brooding parent should have had such an insight into the young man's motives is a proof of the amount of reflection that he devoted to him. He had not seen much of him and in truth he found him provoking, but he was haunted by the odd analogy of which he had had a glimpse on their first encounter. The late Mr. Tregent had had "interests in the north," and the care of them had naturally devolved upon his son, who by the mother's account had shown an admirable capacity for business. The late Mr. Tregent had also been actively political, and it was fondly hoped, in Manchester Square at least, that the day was not distant when his heir would, in turn and as a

representative of the same respectabilities, speak reported words in debate. Maurice himself, vague about the House of Commons, had nothing to say against his making a figure there. Accordingly if these natural gifts continued to remind him of his own fastidiously clever youth, it was with the difference that Arthur Tregent's cleverness struck him as much the greater of the two. If the changes in England were marked this indeed was in general one of them, that the sharp young men were still sharper than of yore. When they had ability at any rate they showed it all; Maurice would never have pretended that he had shown all his. He had not cared whether anyone knew it. It was not however this superior intensity which provoked him, and poor young Tregent could not be held responsible for his irritation. If the circumstance in which they most resembled each other was the disposition to escape from plain girls who aspired to them, such a characteristic, as embodied in the object of Vera's admiration, was purely interesting, was even amusing, to Vera's father; but it would have gratified him to be able to ascertain from Mrs. Tregent whether, to her knowledge, her son thought his child really repulsive, and what annoyed him was the fact that such an inquiry was practically impossible. Arthur was provoking in short because he had an advantage—an advantage residing in the fact that his mother's friend couldn't ask questions about him without appearing to indulge in hints and overtures. The idea of this officiousness was odious to Maurice Glanvil; so that he confined himself to meditating in silence on the happiness it would be for poor Vera to marry a beautiful young man with a fortune and a future.

Though the opportunity for this recreation—it engaged much of his time—should be counted as one of the pleasant results of his intimacy with Mrs. Tregent, yet the sense, perverse enough, that he had a ground of complaint against her subsisted even to the point of finally steadying him while he expressed his grievance. This happened in the course of one of those afternoon hours that had now become indispensable to him—hours of belated tea and egotistical talk in the long summer light and the chastened roar of London.

“No, it wasn't fair,” he said, “and I wasn't well used—a hundred years ago. I'm sore about it now; you ought to have notified me, to have instructed me. Why didn't you, in common honesty? Why didn't my poor mother, who was so eager and shrewd? Why didn't yours? She used to talk to me. Heaven forgive me for saying it, but our mothers weren't up to the mark! You may tell me they didn't know; to which I reply that mine was universally supposed, and by me in particular, to know everything that could be known. No, it wasn't well managed, and the consequence has been this odious discovery, an awful shock to a man of my time of life and under the effect of which I now speak to you, that for a quarter of a century I've been a fool.”

“What would you have wished us to do?” Mrs. Tregent asked as she gave him another cup of tea.

“Why, to have said ‘Wait, wait—at any price; have patience and hold on!’ They ought to have told me, *you* ought to have told me, that your conditions at that time were a temporary phase and that you would infallibly break your shell. You ought to have warned me, they ought to have warned me, that there would be wizardry in the case, that you were to be the subject, at a given moment, of a transformation absolutely miraculous. I couldn't know it by inspiration; I measured you by the common law—how could I do anything else? But it wasn't kind to leave me in error.”

Maurice Glanvil treated himself without scruple to this fine ironic flight, this sophistry which eased his nerves, because though it brought him nearer than he had yet come to putting his finger, visibly to Mrs. Tregent, on the fact that he had once tried to believe he could marry her and had found her too ugly, their present relation was so extraordinary and his present appreciation so liberal as to make almost any freedom excusable, especially as his companion

had the advantage of being to all intents and purposes a different person from the one he talked of, while he suffered the ignominy of being the same.

“There has been no miracle,” said Mrs. Tregent after a moment. “I’ve never known anything but the common, ah the very common, law, and anything that I may have become only the common things have made me.”

He shook his head. “You wore a disfiguring mask, a veil, a disguise. One fine day you dropped them all and showed the world the real creature.”

“It wasn’t one fine day—it was little by little.”

“Well, one fine day I saw the result; the process doesn’t matter. To arrive at a goal invisible from the starting-point is no doubt an incident in the life of a certain number of women. But what is absolutely unprecedented is to have traversed such a distance.”

“Hadn’t I a single redeeming point?” Mrs. Tregent demanded.

He hesitated a little, and while he hesitated she looked at him. Her look was but of an instant, but it told him everything, told him, in one misty moonbeam, all she had known of old. She had known perfectly—she had been as conscious of the conditions of his experiment as of the invincibility of his repugnance. Whether her mother had betrayed him didn’t matter; she had read everything clear and had had to accept the cruel truth. He was touched as he had never been by that moment’s communication; he was, unexpectedly, almost awestruck, for there was something still more in it than he had guessed. “I was letting my fancy play just now,” he answered, apologetically. “It was I who was wanting—it was I who was the idiot!”

“Don’t say that. You were so kind.” And hereupon Mrs. Tregent startled her visitor by bursting into tears.

She recovered herself indeed, and they forbore on that occasion, in the interest of the decorum expected of persons of their age and in their circumstances, to rake over these smouldering ashes; but such a conversation had made a difference, and from that day onward Maurice Glanvil was awake to the fact that he had been the passion of this extraordinary woman’s life. He felt humiliated for an hour, but after that his pleasure was almost as great as his wonder. For wonder there was plenty of room, but little by little he saw how things had come to pass. She was not subjected to the ordeal of telling him or to the abasement of any confession, but day by day he sounded, with a purity of gratitude that renewed, in his spirit, the sources of youth, the depths of everything that her behaviour implied. Of such a studied tenderness as she showed him the roots could only be in some unspeakably sacred past. She had not to explain, she had not to clear up inconsistencies, she had only to let him be with her. She had striven, she had accepted, she had conformed, but she had thought of him every day of her life. She had taken up duties and performed them, she had banished every weakness and practised every virtue, but the still, hidden flame had never been quenched. His image had interposed, his reality had remained, and she had never denied herself the sweetness of hoping that she should see him again and that she should know him. She had never raised a little finger for it, but fortune had answered her prayer. Women were capable of these mysteries of sentiment, these intensities of fidelity and there were moments in which Maurice Glanvil’s heart beat strangely before a vision really so sublime. He seemed to understand now by what miracle Fanny Knocker had been beautified—the miracle of heroic docilities and accepted pangs and vanquished egotisms. It had never come in a night, but it had come by living for others. She was living for others still; it was impossible for him to see anything else at last than that she was living for him. The time of passion was over, but the time of service was long. When all this became vivid to him he felt that he couldn’t recognise it enough and yet that recognition might only be tacit and, as it were, circuitous. He couldn’t

say to her even humorously “It’s very kind of you to be in love with such a donkey,” for these words would have implied somehow that he had rights—an attitude from which his renovated delicacy shrank. He bowed his head before such charity and seemed to see moreover that Mrs. Tregent’s desire to befriend him was a feeling independent of any prospect of gain and indifferent to any chance of reward. It would be described vulgarly, after so much had come and gone, as the state of being “in love”—the state of the instinctive and the simple, which they both had left far behind; so that there was a certain sort of reciprocity which would almost constitute an insult to it.

VI

He soared on these high thoughts till, toward the end of July (Mrs. Tregent stayed late in town—she was awaiting her son’s return) he made the discovery that to some persons, perhaps indeed to many, he had all the air of being in love. This image was flashed back to him from the irreverent lips of a lady who knew and admired Mrs. Tregent and who professed amusement at his surprise, at his artless declaration that he had no idea he had made himself conspicuous. She assured him that everyone was talking about him—though people after all had a tenderness for elderly romance; and she left him divided between the acute sense that he was comical (he had a horror of that) and the pale perception of something that he could “help” still less. At the end of a few hours of reflection he had sacrificed the penalty to the privilege; he was about to be fifty, and he knew Fanny Knocker’s age—no one better; but he cared no straw for vulgar judgments and moreover could think of plenty of examples of unions admired even after longer delays. For three days he enjoyed the luxury of admitting to himself without reserve how indispensable she had become to him; as the third drew to a close he was more nervous than really he had ever been in his life, for this was the evening on which, after many hindrances, Mrs. Tregent had agreed to dine with him. He had planned the occasion for a month—he wanted to show her how well he had learned from her how to live on his income. Her occupations had always interposed—she was teaching him new lessons; but at last she gave him the joy of sitting at his table. At the evening’s end he begged her to remain after the others, and he asked one of the ladies who had been present, and who was going to a pair of parties, to be so good as to take Vera away. This indeed had been arranged in advance, and when, in the discomposed drawing-room, of which the windows stood open to the summer night, he was alone with his old friend, he saw in her face that she knew it had been arranged. He saw more than this—that she knew what he was waiting to say and that if, after a visible reluctance, she had consented to come, it was in order to meet him, with whatever effort, on the ground he had chosen—meet him once and then leave it forever. This was why, without interrupting him, but before he had finished, putting out her hand to his own, with a strange clasp of refusal, she was ready to show him, in a woeful but beautiful headshake to which nothing could add, that it was impossible at this time of day for them to marry. She stayed only a moment, but in that moment he had to accept the knowledge that by as much as it might have been of old, by so much might it never be again. After she had gone he walked up and down the drawing-room half the night. He sent the servants to bed, he blew out the candles; the forsaken place was lighted only by the lamps in the street. He gave himself the motive of waiting for Vera to come back, but in reality he threshed about in the darkness because his cheeks had begun to burn. There was a sting for him in Mrs. Tregent’s refusal, and this sting was sharper even than the disappointment of his desire. It was a reproach to his delicacy; it made him feel as if he had been an ass for the second time. When she was young and free his faith had been too poor and his perceptions too dense; he had waited to show her that he only bargained for certainties and only recognised success. He dropped into a chair at last and sat there a long time, his elbows on his knees, his face in his hands, trying to cover up his humiliation,

waiting for it to ebb. As the sounds of the night died away it began to come back to him that she had given him a promise to which a rich meaning could be attached. What was it that before going away she had said about Vera, in words he had been at the moment too disconcerted to take in? Little by little he reconstructed these words with comfort; finally, when after hearing a carriage stop at the door he hastily pulled himself together and went down to admit his daughter, the sight of the child on his threshold, as the brougham that had restored her drove away, brought them all back in their generosity.

“Have you danced?” he asked.

She hesitated. “A little, papa.”

He knew what that meant—she had danced once. He followed her upstairs in silence; she had not wasted her time—she had had her humiliation. Ah, clearly she was too short! Yet on the landing above, where her bedroom candle stood, she tried to be gay with him, asking him about his own party and whether the people had stayed late.

“Mrs. Tregent stayed after the others. She spoke very kindly of you.”

The girl looked at her father with an anxiety that showed through her smile. “What did she say?”

He hesitated, as Vera had done a moment before. “That you must be our compensation.”

His daughter’s eyes, still wondering, turned away. “What did she mean?”

“That it’s all right, darling!” And he supplied the deficiencies of this explanation with a long kiss for good-night.

The next day he went to see Mrs. Tregent, who wore the air of being glad to have something at once positive and pleasant to say. She announced immediately that Arthur was coming back.

“I congratulate you.” Then, as they exchanged one of their looks of unreserved recognition, Maurice added: “Now it’s for Vera and me to go.”

“To go?”

“Without more delay. It’s high time we should take ourselves off.”

Mrs. Tregent was silent a moment. “Where shall you go?”

“To our old haunts, abroad. We must see some of our old friends. We shall spend six months away.”

“Then what becomes of *my* months?”

“Your months?”

“Those it’s all arranged she’s to spend at Blankley.” Blankley was Mrs. Tregent’s house in Derbyshire, and she laughed as she went on: “Those that I spoke of last evening. Don’t look as if we had never discussed it and settled it!”

“What shall I do without her?” Maurice Glanvil presently demanded.

“What will you do *with* her?” his hostess replied, with a world of triumphant meaning. He was not prepared to say, in the sense of her question, and he took refuge in remarking that he noted her avoidance of any suggestion that he too would be welcome in Derbyshire; which led her to continue, with unshrinking frankness: “Certainly, I don’t want you a bit. Leave us alone.”

“Is it safe?”

“Of course I can’t absolutely answer for anything, but at least it will be safer than with *you*,” said Mrs. Tregent.

Maurice Glanvil turned this over. “Does he dislike me?”

“What an idea!”

But the question had brought the colour to her face, and the sight of this, with her evasive answer, kindled in Maurice’s heart a sudden relief, a delight almost, that was strange enough. Arthur was in opposition, plainly, and that was why he had so promptly quitted London, that was why Mrs. Tregent had refused Mr. Glanvil. The idea was an instant balm. “He’d be quite right, poor fellow!” Maurice declared. “I’ll go abroad alone.”

“Let me keep her six months,” said Mrs. Tregent. “I’ll try it—I’ll try it!”

“I wouldn’t interfere for the world.”

“It’s an immense responsibility; but I should like so to succeed.”

“She’s an angel!” Maurice said.

“That’s what gives me courage.”

“But she mustn’t dream of any plot,” he added.

“For what do you take me?” Mrs. Tregent exclaimed with a smile which lightened up for him intensely that far-away troubled past as to which she had originally baffled his inquiry.

The joy of perceiving in an aversion to himself a possible motive for Arthur’s absence was so great in him that before he took leave of her he ventured to say to his old friend: “Does he like her at all?”

“He likes her very much.”

Maurice remembered how much he had liked Fanny Knocker and been willing to admit it to his mother; but he presently observed: “Of course he can’t think her in the least pretty.”

“As you say, she’s an angel,” Mrs. Tregent rejoined.

“She would pass for one better if she were a few inches taller.”

“It doesn’t matter,” said Mrs. Tregent.

“One must remember that in that respect, at her age, she won’t change,” Maurice pursued, wondering after he had spoken whether he had pressed upon the second pronoun.

“No, she won’t change. But she’s a darling!” Mrs. Tregent exclaimed; and it was in these meagre words, which were only half however of what passed between them, that an extraordinary offer was made and accepted. They were so ready to understand each other that no insistence and no professions now were necessary, and that Maurice Glanvil had not even broken into a murmur of gratitude at this quick revelation of his old friend’s beautiful conception of a nobler remedy—the endeavour to place their union outside themselves, to make their children know the happiness they had missed. They had not needed to teach each other what they saw, what they guessed, what moved them with pity and hope, and there were transitions enough safely skipped in the simple conversation I have preserved. But what Mrs. Tregent was ready to do for him filled Maurice Glanvil, for days after this, with an even greater wonder, and it seemed to him that not till then had she fully shown him that she had forgiven him.

Six months, however, proved much more than sufficient for her attempt to test the plasticity of her son. Maurice Glanvil went abroad, but was nervous and restless, wandering from place to place, revisiting old scenes and old friends, reverting, with a conscious, an even amused incongruity, and yet with an effect that was momentarily soothing, to places at which he had stayed with his wife, but feeling all the while that he was really staking his child's happiness. It only half reassured him to feel that Vera would never know what poor Fanny Knocker had been condemned to know, for the daily contact was cruel from the moment the issue was uncertain; and it only half helped him to reflect that she was not so plain as Fanny, for had not Arthur Tregent given him the impression that the young man of the present was intrinsically even more difficult to please than the young man of the past? The letters he received from Blankley conveyed no information about Arthur beyond the fact that he was at home; only once Vera mentioned that he was "remarkably good" to her. Toward the end of November he found himself in Paris, submitting reluctantly to social accidents which put off from day to day his return to London, when, one morning in the Rue de Rivoli, he had to stop short to permit the passage of a vehicle which had emerged from the court of an hotel. It was an open cab—the day was mild and bright—with a small quantity of neat, leathery luggage, which Maurice vaguely recognised as English, stowed in the place beside the driver—luggage from which his eyes shifted straight to the occupant of the carriage, a young man with his face turned to the allurements of travel and the urbanity of farewell to bowing waiters still visible in it. The young man was so bright and so on his way, as it were, that Maurice, standing there to make room for him, felt for the instant that he too had taken a tip. The feeling became acute as he recognised that this humiliating obligation was to no less a person than Arthur Tregent. It was Arthur who was so much on his way—it was Arthur who was catching a train. He noticed his mother's friend as the cab passed into the street, and, with a quick demonstration, caused the driver to pull up. He jumped out, and under the arcade the two men met with every appearance of cordiality, but with conscious confusion. Each of them coloured perceptibly, and Maurice was angry with himself for blushing before a boy. Long afterwards he remembered how cold, and even how hard, was the handsome clearness of the young eyes that met his own in an artificial smile.

"You here? I thought you were at Blankley."

"I left Blankley yesterday; I'm on my way to Spain."

"To Spain? How charming!"

"To join a friend there—just for a month or two."

"Interesting country—well worth seeing. Your mother's all right?"

"Oh, yes, all right. And Miss Glanvil——" Arthur Tregent went on, cheerfully.

"Vera's all right?" interrupted Maurice, with a still gayer tone.

"Everyone, everything's all right!" Arthur laughed.

"Well, I mustn't keep you. Bon voyage!"

Maurice Glanvil, after the young man had driven on, flattered himself that in this brief interview he had suppressed every indication of surprise; but that evening he crossed the Channel, and on the morrow he went down to Blankley. "To Spain—to Spain!" the words kept repeating themselves in his ears. He, when he had taken flight in a similar conjunction, had only got, for the time, as far as Boulogne; and he was reminded afresh of the progress of the species. When he was introduced into the drawing-room at Blankley—a chintzy, flowery, friendly expanse—Mrs. Tregent rose before him alone and offered him a face that she had

never shown before. She was white and she looked scared; she faltered in her movement to meet him.

“I met Arthur in Paris, so I thought I might come.”

Oh, yes; there was pain in her face, and a kind of fear of him that frightened her, but their hands found each other’s hands while she replied: “He went off—I didn’t know it.”

“But you had a letter the next morning,” Maurice said.

She stared. “How did you know that?”

“Who should know better than I? He wrote from London, explaining.”

“I did what I could—I believed in it!” said Mrs Tregent. “He was charming, for a while.”

“But he broke down. She’s too short, eh?” Maurice asked.

“Don’t laugh; she’s ill.”

“What’s the matter with her?”

Mrs. Tregent gave the visitor a look in which there was almost a reproach for the question. “She has had a chill; she’s in bed. You must see her.”

She took him upstairs and he saw his child. He remembered what his mother had told him of the grievous illness of Fanny Knocker. Poor little Vera lay there in the flush of a feverish cold which had come on the evening before. She grew worse from the effect of a complication, and for three days he was anxious about her; but even more than with his alarm he held his breath before the distress, the disappointment, the humility of his old friend. Up to this hour he had not fully measured the strength of her desire to do something for him, or the intensity of passion with which she had wished to do it in the particular way that had now broken down. She had counted on her influence with her son, on his affection and on the maternal art, and there was anguish in her compunction for her failure, for her false estimate of the possible. Maurice Glanvil reminded her in vain of the consoling fact that Vera had known nothing of any plan, and he guessed indeed the reason why this theory had no comfort. No one could be better aware than Fanny Tregent of how much girls knew who knew nothing. It was doubtless this same sad wisdom that kept her sombre when he expressed a confidence that his child would promptly recover. She herself had had a terrible fight—and yet with the physical victory, had she recovered? Her apprehension for Vera was justified, for the poor girl was destined finally to forfeit even the physical victory. She got better, she got up, she quitted Blankley, she quitted England with her father, but her health had failed and a year later it gave way. Overtaken in Rome by a second illness, she succumbed; unlike Fanny Knocker she was never to have her revenge.

The Death of the Lion

CHAPTER I.

I had simply, I suppose, a change of heart, and it must have begun when I received my manuscript back from Mr. Pinhorn. Mr. Pinhorn was my “chief,” as he was called in the office: he had the high mission of bringing the paper up. This was a weekly periodical, which had been supposed to be almost past redemption when he took hold of it. It was Mr. Deedy who had let the thing down so dreadfully: he was never mentioned in the office now save in connexion with that misdemeanour. Young as I was I had been in a manner taken over from Mr. Deedy, who had been owner as well as editor; forming part of a promiscuous lot, mainly plant and office-furniture, which poor Mrs. Deedy, in her bereavement and depression, parted with at a rough valuation. I could account for my continuity but on the supposition that I had been cheap. I rather resented the practice of fathering all flatness on my late protector, who was in his unhonoured grave; but as I had my way to make I found matter enough for complacency in being on a “staff.” At the same time I was aware of my exposure to suspicion as a product of the old lowering system. This made me feel I was doubly bound to have ideas, and had doubtless been at the bottom of my proposing to Mr. Pinhorn that I should lay my lean hands on Neil Paraday. I remember how he looked at me—quite, to begin with, as if he had never heard of this celebrity, who indeed at that moment was by no means in the centre of the heavens; and even when I had knowingly explained he expressed but little confidence in the demand for any such stuff. When I had reminded him that the great principle on which we were supposed to work was just to create the demand we required, he considered a moment and then returned: “I see—you want to write him up.”

“Call it that if you like.”

“And what’s your inducement?”

“Bless my soul—my admiration!”

Mr. Pinhorn pursed up his mouth. “Is there much to be done with him?”

“Whatever there is we should have it all to ourselves, for he hasn’t been touched.”

This argument was effective and Mr. Pinhorn responded. “Very well, touch him.” Then he added: “But where can you do it?”

“Under the fifth rib!”

Mr. Pinhorn stared. “Where’s that?”

“You want me to go down and see him?” I asked when I had enjoyed his visible search for the obscure suburb I seemed to have named.

“I don’t ‘want’ anything—the proposal’s your own. But you must remember that that’s the way we do things *now*,” said Mr. Pinhorn with another dig Mr. Deedy.

Unregenerate as I was I could read the queer implications of this speech. The present owner’s superior virtue as well as his deeper craft spoke in his reference to the late editor as one of that baser sort who deal in false representations. Mr. Deedy would as soon have sent me to call on Neil Paraday as he would have published a “holiday-number”; but such scruples presented themselves as mere ignoble thrift to his successor, whose own sincerity took the form of ringing door-bells and whose definition of genius was the art of finding people at home. It was as if Mr. Deedy had published reports without his young men’s having, as

Pinhorn would have said, really been there. I was unregenerate, as I have hinted, and couldn't be concerned to straighten out the journalistic morals of my chief, feeling them indeed to be an abyss over the edge of which it was better not to peer. Really to be there this time moreover was a vision that made the idea of writing something subtle about Neil Paraday only the more inspiring. I would be as considerate as even Mr. Deedy could have wished, and yet I should be as present as only Mr. Pinhorn could conceive. My allusion to the sequestered manner in which Mr. Paraday lived—it had formed part of my explanation, though I knew of it only by hearsay—was, I could divine, very much what had made Mr. Pinhorn nibble. It struck him as inconsistent with the success of his paper that any one should be so sequestered as that. And then wasn't an immediate exposure of everything just what the public wanted? Mr. Pinhorn effectually called me to order by reminding me of the promptness with which I had met Miss Braby at Liverpool on her return from her fiasco in the States. Hadn't we published, while its freshness and flavour were unimpaired, Miss Braby's own version of that great international episode? I felt somewhat uneasy at this lumping of the actress and the author, and I confess that after having enlisted Mr. Pinhorn's sympathies I procrastinated a little. I had succeeded better than I wished, and I had, as it happened, work nearer at hand. A few days later I called on Lord Crouchley and carried off in triumph the most unintelligible statement that had yet appeared of his lordship's reasons for his change of front. I thus set in motion in the daily papers columns of virtuous verbiage. The following week I ran down to Brighton for a chat, as Mr. Pinhorn called it, with Mrs. Bounder, who gave me, on the subject of her divorce, many curious particulars that had not been articulated in court. If ever an article flowed from the primal fount it was that article on Mrs. Bounder. By this time, however, I became aware that Neil Paraday's new book was on the point of appearing and that its approach had been the ground of my original appeal to Mr. Pinhorn, who was now annoyed with me for having lost so many days. He bundled me off—we would at least not lose another. I've always thought his sudden alertness a remarkable example of the journalistic instinct. Nothing had occurred, since I first spoke to him, to create a visible urgency, and no enlightenment could possibly have reached him. It was a pure case of profession flair—he had smelt the coming glory as an animal smells its distant prey.

CHAPTER II.

I may as well say at once that this little record pretends in no degree to be a picture either of my introduction to Mr. Paraday or of certain proximate steps and stages. The scheme of my narrative allows no space for these things, and in any case a prohibitory sentiment would hang about my recollection of so rare an hour. These meagre notes are essentially private, so that if they see the light the insidious forces that, as my story itself shows, make at present for publicity will simply have overmastered my precautions. The curtain fell lately enough on the lamentable drama. My memory of the day I alighted at Mr. Paraday's door is a fresh memory of kindness, hospitality, compassion, and of the wonderful illuminating talk in which the welcome was conveyed. Some voice of the air had taught me the right moment, the moment of his life at which an act of unexpected young allegiance might most come home to him. He had recently recovered from a long, grave illness. I had gone to the neighbouring inn for the night, but I spent the evening in his company, and he insisted the next day on my sleeping under his roof. I hadn't an indefinite leave: Mr. Pinhorn supposed us to put our victims through on the gallop. It was later, in the office, that the rude motions of the jig were set to music. I fortified myself, however, as my training had taught me to do, by the conviction that nothing could be more advantageous for my article than to be written in the very atmosphere. I said nothing to Mr. Paraday about it, but in the morning, after my remove from the inn, while he was occupied in his study, as he had notified me he should need to be,

I committed to paper the main heads of my impression. Then thinking to commend myself to Mr. Pinhorn by my celerity, I walked out and posted my little packet before luncheon. Once my paper was written I was free to stay on, and if it was calculated to divert attention from my levity in so doing I could reflect with satisfaction that I had never been so clever. I don't mean to deny of course that I was aware it was much too good for Mr. Pinhorn; but I was equally conscious that Mr. Pinhorn had the supreme shrewdness of recognising from time to time the cases in which an article was not too bad only because it was too good. There was nothing he loved so much as to print on the right occasion a thing he hated. I had begun my visit to the great man on a Monday, and on the Wednesday his book came out. A copy of it arrived by the first post, and he let me go out into the garden with it immediately after breakfast, I read it from beginning to end that day, and in the evening he asked me to remain with him the rest of the week and over the Sunday.

That night my manuscript came back from Mr. Pinhorn, accompanied with a letter the gist of which was the desire to know what I meant by trying to fob off on him such stuff. That was the meaning of the question, if not exactly its form, and it made my mistake immense to me. Such as this mistake was I could now only look it in the face and accept it. I knew where I had failed, but it was exactly where I couldn't have succeeded. I had been sent down to be personal and then in point of fact hadn't been personal at all: what I had dispatched to London was just a little finicking feverish study of my author's talent. Anything less relevant to Mr. Pinhorn's purpose couldn't well be imagined, and he was visibly angry at my having (at his expense, with a second-class ticket) approached the subject of our enterprise only to stand off so helplessly. For myself, I knew but too well what had happened, and how a miracle—as pretty as some old miracle of legend—had been wrought on the spot to save me. There had been a big brush of wings, the flash of an opaline robe, and then, with a great cool stir of the air, the sense of an angel's having swooped down and caught me to his bosom. He held me only till the danger was over, and it all took place in a minute. With my manuscript back on my hands I understood the phenomenon better, and the reflexions I made on it are what I meant, at the beginning of this anecdote, by my change of heart. Mr. Pinhorn's note was not only a rebuke decidedly stern, but an invitation immediately to send him—it was the case to say so—the genuine article, the revealing and reverberating sketch to the promise of which, and of which alone, I owed my squandered privilege. A week or two later I recast my peccant paper and, giving it a particular application to Mr. Paraday's new book, obtained for it the hospitality of another journal, where, I must admit, Mr. Pinhorn was so far vindicated as that it attracted not the least attention.

CHAPTER III.

I was frankly, at the end of three days, a very prejudiced critic, so that one morning when, in the garden, my great man had offered to read me something I quite held my breath as I listened. It was the written scheme of another book—something put aside long ago, before his illness, but that he had lately taken out again to reconsider. He had been turning it round when I came down on him, and it had grown magnificently under this second hand. Loose liberal confident, it might have passed for a great gossiping eloquent letter—the overflow into talk of an artist's amorous plan. The theme I thought singularly rich, quite the strongest he had yet treated; and this familiar statement of it, full too of fine maturities, was really, in summarised splendour, a mine of gold, a precious independent work. I remember rather profanely wondering whether the ultimate production could possibly keep at the pitch. His reading of the fond epistle, at any rate, made me feel as if I were, for the advantage of posterity, in close correspondence with him—were the distinguished person to whom it had been affectionately addressed. It was a high distinction simply to be told such things. The idea he now communicated had all the freshness, the flushed fairness, of the conception

untouched and untried: it was Venus rising from the sea and before the airs had blown upon her. I had never been so throbbingly present at such an unveiling. But when he had tossed the last bright word after the others, as I had seen cashiers in banks, weighing mounds of coin, drop a final sovereign into the tray, I knew a sudden prudent alarm.

“My dear master, how, after all, are you going to do it? It’s infinitely noble, but what time it will take, what patience and independence, what assured, what perfect conditions! Oh for a lone isle in a tepid sea!”

“Isn’t this practically a lone isle, and aren’t you, as an encircling medium, tepid enough?” he asked, alluding with a laugh to the wonder of my young admiration and the narrow limits of his little provincial home. “Time isn’t what I’ve lacked hitherto: the question hasn’t been to find it, but to use it. Of course my illness made, while it lasted, a great hole—but I dare say there would have been a hole at any rate. The earth we tread has more pockets than a billiard-table. The great thing is now to keep on my feet.”

“That’s exactly what I mean.”

Neil Paraday looked at me with eyes—such pleasant eyes as he had—in which, as I now recall their expression, I seem to have seen a dim imagination of his fate. He was fifty years old, and his illness had been cruel, his convalescence slow. “It isn’t as if I weren’t all right.”

“Oh if you weren’t all right I wouldn’t look at you!” I tenderly said.

We had both got up, quickened as by this clearer air, and he had lighted a cigarette. I had taken a fresh one, which with an intenser smile, by way of answer to my exclamation, he applied to the flame of his match. “If I weren’t better I shouldn’t have thought of *that!*” He flourished his script in his hand.

“I don’t want to be discouraging, but that’s not true,” I returned. “I’m sure that during the months you lay here in pain you had visitations sublime. You thought of a thousand things. You think of more and more all the while. That’s what makes you, if you’ll pardon my familiarity, so respectable. At a time when so many people are spent you come into your second wind. But, thank God, all the same, you’re better! Thank God, too, you’re not, as you were telling me yesterday, ‘successful.’ If *you* weren’t a failure what would be the use of trying? That’s my one reserve on the subject of your recovery—that it makes you ‘score,’ as the newspapers say. It looks well in the newspapers, and almost anything that does that’s horrible. ‘We are happy to announce that Mr. Paraday, the celebrated author, is again in the enjoyment of excellent health.’ Somehow I shouldn’t like to see it.”

“You won’t see it; I’m not in the least celebrated—my obscurity protects me. But couldn’t you bear even to see I was dying or dead?” my host enquired.

“Dead—*passé* encore; there’s nothing so safe. One never knows what a living artist may do—one has mourned so many. However, one must make the worst of it. You must be as dead as you can.”

“Don’t I meet that condition in having just published a book?”

“Adequately, let us hope; for the book’s verily a masterpiece.”

At this moment the parlour-maid appeared in the door that opened from the garden: Paraday lived at no great cost, and the frisk of petticoats, with a timorous “Sherry, sir?” was about his modest mahogany. He allowed half his income to his wife, from whom he had succeeded in separating without redundancy of legend. I had a general faith in his having behaved well, and I had once, in London, taken Mrs. Paraday down to dinner. He now turned to speak to the maid, who offered him, on a tray, some card or note, while, agitated, excited, I wandered

to the end of the precinct. The idea of his security became supremely dear to me, and I asked myself if I were the same young man who had come down a few days before to scatter him to the four winds. When I retraced my steps he had gone into the house, and the woman—the second London post had come in—had placed my letters and a newspaper on a bench. I sat down there to the letters, which were a brief business, and then, without heeding the address, took the paper from its envelope. It was the journal of highest renown, *The Empire* of that morning. It regularly came to Paraday, but I remembered that neither of us had yet looked at the copy already delivered. This one had a great mark on the “editorial” page, and, uncrumpling the wrapper, I saw it to be directed to my host and stamped with the name of his publishers. I instantly divined that *The Empire* had spoken of him, and I’ve not forgotten the odd little shock of the circumstance. It checked all eagerness and made me drop the paper a moment. As I sat there conscious of a palpitation I think I had a vision of what was to be. I had also a vision of the letter I would presently address to Mr. Pinhorn, breaking, as it were, with Mr. Pinhorn. Of course, however, the next minute the voice of *The Empire* was in my ears.

The article wasn’t, I thanked heaven, a review; it was a “leader,” the last of three, presenting Neil Paraday to the human race. His new book, the fifth from his hand, had been but a day or two out, and *The Empire*, already aware of it, fired, as if on the birth of a prince, a salute of a whole column. The guns had been booming these three hours in the house without our suspecting them. The big blundering newspaper had discovered him, and now he was proclaimed and anointed and crowned. His place was assigned him as publicly as if a fat usher with a wand had pointed to the topmost chair; he was to pass up and still up, higher and higher, between the watching faces and the envious sounds—away up to the dais and the throne. The article was “epoch-making,” a landmark in his life; he had taken rank at a bound, waked up a national glory. A national glory was needed, and it was an immense convenience he was there. What all this meant rolled over me, and I fear I grew a little faint—it meant so much more than I could say “yea” to on the spot. In a flash, somehow, all was different; the tremendous wave I speak of had swept something away. It had knocked down, I suppose, my little customary altar, my twinkling tapers and my flowers, and had reared itself into the likeness of a temple vast and bare. When Neil Paraday should come out of the house he would come out a contemporary. That was what had happened: the poor man was to be squeezed into his horrible age. I felt as if he had been overtaken on the crest of the hill and brought back to the city. A little more and he would have dipped down the short cut to posterity and escaped.

CHAPTER IV.

When he came out it was exactly as if he had been in custody, for beside him walked a stout man with a big black beard, who, save that he wore spectacles, might have been a policeman, and in whom at a second glance I recognised the highest contemporary enterprise.

“This is Mr. Morrow,” said Paraday, looking, I thought, rather white: “he wants to publish heaven knows what about me.”

I winced as I remembered that this was exactly what I myself had wanted. “Already?” I cried with a sort of sense that my friend had fled to me for protection.

Mr. Morrow glared, agreeably, through his glasses: they suggested the electric headlights of some monstrous modern ship, and I felt as if Paraday and I were tossing terrified under his bows. I saw his momentum was irresistible. “I was confident that I should be the first in the field. A great interest is naturally felt in Mr. Paraday’s surroundings,” he heavily observed.

“I hadn’t the least idea of it,” said Paraday, as if he had been told he had been snoring.

“I find he hasn’t read the article in *The Empire*,” Mr. Morrow remarked to me. “That’s so very interesting—it’s something to start with,” he smiled. He had begun to pull off his gloves, which were violently new, and to look encouragingly round the little garden. As a “surrounding” I felt how I myself had already been taken in; I was a little fish in the stomach of a bigger one. “I represent,” our visitor continued, “a syndicate of influential journals, no less than thirty-seven, whose public—whose publics, I may say—are in peculiar sympathy with Mr. Paraday’s line of thought. They would greatly appreciate any expression of his views on the subject of the art he so nobly exemplifies. In addition to my connexion with the syndicate just mentioned I hold a particular commission from *The Tatler*, whose most prominent department, ‘Smatter and Chatter’—I dare say you’ve often enjoyed it—attracts such attention. I was honoured only last week, as a representative of *The Tatler*, with the confidence of Guy Walsingham, the brilliant author of ‘Obsessions.’ She pronounced herself thoroughly pleased with my sketch of her method; she went so far as to say that I had made her genius more comprehensible even to herself.”

Neil Paraday had dropped on the garden-bench and sat there at once detached and confounded; he looked hard at a bare spot in the lawn, as if with an anxiety that had suddenly made him grave. His movement had been interpreted by his visitor as an invitation to sink sympathetically into a wicker chair that stood hard by, and while Mr. Morrow so settled himself I felt he had taken official possession and that there was no undoing it. One had heard of unfortunate people’s having “a man in the house,” and this was just what we had. There was a silence of a moment, during which we seemed to acknowledge in the only way that was possible the presence of universal fate; the sunny stillness took no pity, and my thought, as I was sure Paraday’s was doing, performed within the minute a great distant revolution. I saw just how emphatic I should make my rejoinder to Mr. Pinhorn, and that having come, like Mr. Morrow, to betray, I must remain as long as possible to save. Not because I had brought my mind back, but because our visitors last words were in my ear, I presently enquired with gloomy irrelevance if Guy Walsingham were a woman.

“Oh yes, a mere pseudonym—rather pretty, isn’t it?—and convenient, you know, for a lady who goes in for the larger latitude. ‘Obsessions, by Miss So-and-so,’ would look a little odd, but men are more naturally indelicate. Have you peeped into ‘Obsessions?’” Mr. Morrow continued sociably to our companion.

Paraday, still absent, remote, made no answer, as if he hadn’t heard the question: a form of intercourse that appeared to suit the cheerful Mr. Morrow as well as any other. Imperturbably bland, he was a man of resources—he only needed to be on the spot. He had pocketed the whole poor place while Paraday and I were wool-gathering, and I could imagine that he had already got his “heads.” His system, at any rate, was justified by the inevitability with which I replied, to save my friend the trouble: “Dear no—he hasn’t read it. He doesn’t read such things!” I unwarily added.

“Things that are *too* far over the fence, eh?” I was indeed a godsend to Mr. Morrow. It was the psychological moment; it determined the appearance of his note-book, which, however, he at first kept slightly behind him, even as the dentist approaching his victim keeps the horrible forceps. “Mr. Paraday holds with the good old proprieties—I see!” And thinking of the thirty-seven influential journals, I found myself, as I found poor Paraday, helplessly assisting at the promulgation of this ineptitude. “There’s no point on which distinguished views are so acceptable as on this question—raised perhaps more strikingly than ever by Guy Walsingham—of the permissibility of the larger latitude. I’ve an appointment, precisely in connexion with it, next week, with Dora Forbes, author of ‘The Other Way Round,’ which everybody’s talking about. Has Mr. Paraday glanced at ‘The Other Way Round?’” Mr.

Morrow now frankly appealed to me. I took on myself to repudiate the supposition, while our companion, still silent, got up nervously and walked away. His visitor paid no heed to his withdrawal; but opened out the note-book with a more fatherly pat. "Dora Forbes, I gather, takes the ground, the same as Guy Walsingham's, that the larger latitude has simply got to come. He holds that it has got to be squarely faced. Of course his sex makes him a less prejudiced witness. But an authoritative word from Mr. Paraday—from the point of view of *his* sex, you know—would go right round the globe. He takes the line that we *haven't* got to face it?"

I was bewildered: it sounded somehow as if there were three sexes. My interlocutor's pencil was poised, my private responsibility great. I simply sat staring, none the less, and only found presence of mind to say: "Is this Miss Forbes a gentleman?"

Mr. Morrow had a subtle smile. "It wouldn't be 'Miss'—there's a wife!"

"I mean is she a man?"

"The wife?"—Mr. Morrow was for a moment as confused as myself. But when I explained that I alluded to Dora Forbes in person he informed me, with visible amusement at my being so out of it, that this was the "pen-name" of an indubitable male—he had a big red moustache. "He goes in for the slight mystification because the ladies are such popular favourites. A great deal of interest is felt in his acting on that idea—which *is* clever, isn't it?—and there's every prospect of its being widely imitated." Our host at this moment joined us again, and Mr. Morrow remarked invitingly that he should be happy to make a note of any observation the movement in question, the bid for success under a lady's name, might suggest to Mr. Paraday. But the poor man, without catching the allusion, excused himself, pleading that, though greatly honoured by his visitor's interest, he suddenly felt unwell and should have to take leave of him—have to go and lie down and keep quiet. His young friend might be trusted to answer for him, but he hoped Mr. Morrow didn't expect great things even of his young friend. His young friend, at this moment, looked at Neil Paraday with an anxious eye, greatly wondering if he were doomed to be ill again; but Paraday's own kind face met his question reassuringly, seemed to say in a glance intelligible enough: "Oh I'm not ill, but I'm scared: get him out of the house as quietly as possible." Getting newspaper-men out of the house was odd business for an emissary of Mr. Pinhorn, and I was so exhilarated by the idea of it that I called after him as he left us: "Read the article in *The Empire* and you'll soon be all right!"

CHAPTER V.

"Delicious my having come down to tell him of it!" Mr. Morrow ejaculated. "My cab was at the door twenty minutes after *The Empire* had been laid on my breakfast-table. Now what have you got for me?" he continued, dropping again into his chair, from which, however, he the next moment eagerly rose. "I was shown into the drawing-room, but there must be more to see—his study, his literary sanctum, the little things he has about, or other domestic objects and features. He wouldn't be lying down on his study-table? There's a great interest always felt in the scene of an author's labours. Sometimes we're favoured with very delightful peeps. Dora Forbes showed me all his table-drawers, and almost jammed my hand into one into which I made a dash! I don't ask that of you, but if we could talk things over right there where he sits I feel as if I should get the keynote."

I had no wish whatever to be rude to Mr. Morrow, I was much too initiated not to tend to more diplomacy; but I had a quick inspiration, and I entertained an insurmountable, an almost superstitious objection to his crossing the threshold of my friend's little lonely shabby consecrated workshop. "No, no—we shan't get at his life that way," I said. "The way to get

at his life is to—But wait a moment!” I broke off and went quickly into the house, whence I in three minutes reappeared before Mr. Morrow with the two volumes of Paraday’s new book. “His life’s here,” I went on, “and I’m so full of this admirable thing that I can’t talk of anything else. The artist’s life’s his work, and this is the place to observe him. What he has to tell us he tells us with *this* perfection. My dear sir, the best interviewer is the best reader.”

Mr. Morrow good-humouredly protested. “Do you mean to say that no other source of information should be open to us?”

“None other till this particular one—by far the most copious—has been quite exhausted. Have you exhausted it, my dear sir? Had you exhausted it when you came down here? It seems to me in our time almost wholly neglected, and something should surely be done to restore its ruined credit. It’s the course to which the artist himself at every step, and with such pathetic confidence, refers us. This last book of Mr. Paraday’s is full of revelations.”

“Revelations?” panted Mr. Morrow, whom I had forced again into his chair.

“The only kind that count. It tells you with a perfection that seems to me quite final all the author thinks, for instance, about the advent of the ‘larger latitude.’”

“Where does it do that?” asked Mr. Morrow, who had picked up the second volume and was insincerely thumbing it.

“Everywhere—in the whole treatment of his case. Extract the opinion, disengage the answer—those are the real acts of homage.”

Mr. Morrow, after a minute, tossed the book away. “Ah but you mustn’t take me for a reviewer.”

“Heaven forbid I should take you for anything so dreadful! You came down to perform a little act of sympathy, and so, I may confide to you, did I. Let us perform our little act together. These pages overflow with the testimony we want: let us read them and taste them and interpret them. You’ll of course have perceived for yourself that one scarcely does read Neil Paraday till one reads him aloud; he gives out to the ear an extraordinary full tone, and it’s only when you expose it confidently to that test that you really get near his style. Take up your book again and let me listen, while you pay it out, to that wonderful fifteenth chapter. If you feel you can’t do it justice, compose yourself to attention while I produce for you—I think I can!—this scarcely less admirable ninth.”

Mr. Morrow gave me a straight look which was as hard as a blow between the eyes; he had turned rather red, and a question had formed itself in his mind which reached my sense as distinctly as if he had uttered it: “What sort of a damned fool are *you*?” Then he got up, gathering together his hat and gloves, buttoning his coat, projecting hungrily all over the place the big transparency of his mask. It seemed to flare over Fleet Street and somehow made the actual spot distressingly humble: there was so little for it to feed on unless he counted the blisters of our stucco or saw his way to do something with the roses. Even the poor roses were common kinds. Presently his eyes fell on the manuscript from which Paraday had been reading to me and which still lay on the bench. As my own followed them I saw it looked promising, looked pregnant, as if it gently throbbled with the life the reader had given it. Mr. Morrow indulged in a nod at it and a vague thrust of his umbrella. “What’s that?”

“Oh, it’s a plan—a secret.”

“A secret!” There was an instant’s silence, and then Mr. Morrow made another movement. I may have been mistaken, but it affected me as the translated impulse of the desire to lay hands on the manuscript, and this led me to indulge in a quick anticipatory grab which may very well have seemed ungraceful, or even impertinent, and which at any rate left Mr. Paraday’s two admirers very erect, glaring at each other while one of them held a bundle of papers well behind him. An instant later Mr. Morrow quitted me abruptly, as if he had really carried something off with him. To reassure myself, watching his broad back recede, I only grasped my manuscript the tighter. He went to the back door of the house, the one he had come out from, but on trying the handle he appeared to find it fastened. So he passed round into the front garden, and by listening intently enough I could presently hear the outer gate close behind him with a bang. I thought again of the thirty-seven influential journals and wondered what would be his revenge. I hasten to add that he was magnanimous: which was just the most dreadful thing he could have been. *The Tatler* published a charming chatty familiar account of Mr. Paraday’s “Home-life,” and on the wings of the thirty-seven influential journals it went, to use Mr. Morrow’s own expression, right round the globe.

CHAPTER VI.

A week later, early in May, my glorified friend came up to town, where, it may be veraciously recorded he was the king of the beasts of the year. No advancement was ever more rapid, no exaltation more complete, no bewilderment more teachable. His book sold but moderately, though the article in *The Empire* had done unwonted wonders for it; but he circulated in person to a measure that the libraries might well have envied. His formula had been found—he was a “revelation.” His momentary terror had been real, just as mine had been—the overclouding of his passionate desire to be left to finish his work. He was far from unsociable, but he had the finest conception of being let alone that I’ve ever met. For the time, none the less, he took his profit where it seemed most to crowd on him, having in his pocket the portable sophistries about the nature of the artist’s task. Observation too was a kind of work and experience a kind of success; London dinners were all material and London ladies were fruitful toil. “No one has the faintest conception of what I’m trying for,” he said to me, “and not many have read three pages that I’ve written; but I must dine with them first—they’ll find out why when they’ve time.” It was rather rude justice perhaps; but the fatigue had the merit of being a new sort, while the phantasmagoric town was probably after all less of a battlefield than the haunted study. He once told me that he had had no personal life to speak of since his fortieth year, but had had more than was good for him before. London closed the parenthesis and exhibited him in relations; one of the most inevitable of these being that in which he found himself to Mrs. Weeks Wimbush, wife of the boundless brewer and proprietress of the universal menagerie. In this establishment, as everybody knows, on occasions when the crush is great, the animals rub shoulders freely with the spectators and the lions sit down for whole evenings with the lambs.

It had been ominously clear to me from the first that in Neil Paraday this lady, who, as all the world agreed, was tremendous fun, considered that she had secured a prime attraction, a creature of almost heraldic oddity. Nothing could exceed her enthusiasm over her capture, and nothing could exceed the confused apprehensions it excited in me. I had an instinctive fear of her which I tried without effect to conceal from her victim, but which I let her notice with perfect impunity. Paraday heeded it, but she never did, for her conscience was that of a romping child. She was a blind violent force to which I could attach no more idea of responsibility than to the creaking of a sign in the wind. It was difficult to say what she conduced to but circulation. She was constructed of steel and leather, and all I asked of her for our tractable friend was not to do him to death. He had consented for a time to be of india-rubber, but my thoughts were fixed on the day he should resume his shape or at least

get back into his box. It was evidently all right, but I should be glad when it was well over. I had a special fear—the impression was ineffaceable of the hour when, after Mr. Morrow's departure, I had found him on the sofa in his study. That pretext of indisposition had not in the least been meant as a snub to the envoy of *The Tatler*—he had gone to lie down in very truth. He had felt a pang of his old pain, the result of the agitation wrought in him by this forcing open of a new period. His old programme, his old ideal even had to be changed. Say what one would, success was a complication and recognition had to be reciprocal. The monastic life, the pious illumination of the missal in the convent cell were things of the gathered past. It didn't engender despair, but at least it required adjustment. Before I left him on that occasion we had passed a bargain, my part of which was that I should make it my business to take care of him. Let whoever would represent the interest in his presence (I must have had a mystical prevision of Mrs. Weeks Wimbush) I should represent the interest in his work—or otherwise expressed in his absence. These two interests were in their essence opposed; and I doubt, as youth is fleeting, if I shall ever again know the intensity of joy with which I felt that in so good a cause I was willing to make myself odious.

One day in Sloane Street I found myself questioning Paraday's landlord, who had come to the door in answer to my knock. Two vehicles, a barouche and a smart hansom, were drawn up before the house.

"In the drawing-room, sir? Mrs. Weeks Wimbush."

"And in the dining-room?"

"A young lady, sir—waiting: I think a foreigner."

It was three o'clock, and on days when Paraday didn't lunch out he attached a value to these appropriated hours. On which days, however, didn't the dear man lunch out? Mrs. Wimbush, at such a crisis, would have rushed round immediately after her own repast. I went into the dining-room first, postponing the pleasure of seeing how, upstairs, the lady of the barouche would, on my arrival, point the moral of my sweet solicitude. No one took such an interest as herself in his doing only what was good for him, and she was always on the spot to see that he did it. She made appointments with him to discuss the best means of economising his time and protecting his privacy. She further made his health her special business, and had so much sympathy with my own zeal for it that she was the author of pleasing fictions on the subject of what my devotion had led me to give up. I gave up nothing (I don't count Mr. Pinhorn) because I had nothing, and all I had as yet achieved was to find myself also in the menagerie. I had dashed in to save my friend, but I had only got domesticated and wedged; so that I could do little more for him than exchange with him over people's heads looks of intense but futile intelligence.

CHAPTER VII.

The young lady in the dining-room had a brave face, black hair, blue eyes, and in her lap a big volume. "I've come for his autograph," she said when I had explained to her that I was under bonds to see people for him when he was occupied. "I've been waiting half an hour, but I'm prepared to wait all day." I don't know whether it was this that told me she was American, for the propensity to wait all day is not in general characteristic of her race. I was enlightened probably not so much by the spirit of the utterance as by some quality of its sound. At any rate I saw she had an individual patience and a lovely frock, together with an expression that played among her pretty features like a breeze among flowers. Putting her book on the table she showed me a massive album, showily bound and full of autographs of price. The collection of faded notes, of still more faded "thoughts," of quotations, platitudes, signatures, represented a formidable purpose.

I could only disclose my dread of it. “Most people apply to Mr. Paraday by letter, you know.”

“Yes, but he doesn’t answer. I’ve written three times.”

“Very true,” I reflected; “the sort of letter you mean goes straight into the fire.”

“How do you know the sort I mean?” My interlocutress had blushed and smiled, and in a moment she added: “I don’t believe he gets many like them!”

“I’m sure they’re beautiful, but he burns without reading.” I didn’t add that I had convinced him he ought to.

“Isn’t he then in danger of burning things of importance?”

“He would perhaps be so if distinguished men hadn’t an infallible nose for nonsense.”

She looked at me a moment—her face was sweet and gay. “Do *you* burn without reading too?”—in answer to which I assured her that if she’d trust me with her repository I’d see that Mr. Paraday should write his name in it.

She considered a little. “That’s very well, but it wouldn’t make me see him.”

“Do you want very much to see him?” It seemed ungracious to catechise so charming a creature, but somehow I had never yet taken my duty to the great author so seriously.

“Enough to have come from America for the purpose.”

I stared. “All alone?”

“I don’t see that that’s exactly your business, but if it will make me more seductive I’ll confess that I’m quite by myself. I had to come alone or not come at all.”

She was interesting; I could imagine she had lost parents, natural protectors—could conceive even she had inherited money. I was at a pass of my own fortunes when keeping hansoms at doors seemed to me pure swagger. As a trick of this bold and sensitive girl, however, it became romantic—a part of the general romance of her freedom, her errand, her innocence. The confidence of young Americans was notorious, and I speedily arrived at a conviction that no impulse could have been more generous than the impulse that had operated here. I foresaw at that moment that it would make her my peculiar charge, just as circumstances had made Neil Paraday. She would be another person to look after, so that one’s honour would be concerned in guiding her straight. These things became clearer to me later on; at the instant I had scepticism enough to observe to her, as I turned the pages of her volume, that her net had all the same caught many a big fish. She appeared to have had fruitful access to the great ones of the earth; there were people moreover whose signatures she had presumably secured without a personal interview. She couldn’t have worried George Washington and Friedrich Schiller and Hannah More. She met this argument, to my surprise, by throwing up the album without a pang. It wasn’t even her own; she was responsible for none of its treasures. It belonged to a girl-friend in America, a young lady in a western city. This young lady had insisted on her bringing it, to pick up more autographs: she thought they might like to see, in Europe, in what company they would be. The “girl-friend,” the western city, the immortal names, the curious errand, the idyllic faith, all made a story as strange to me, and as beguiling, as some tale in the Arabian Nights. Thus it was that my informant had encumbered herself with the ponderous tome; but she hastened to assure me that this was the first time she had brought it out. For her visit to Mr. Paraday it had simply been a pretext. She didn’t really care a straw that he should write his name; what she did want was to look straight into his face.

I demurred a little. “And why do you require to do that?”

“Because I just love him!” Before I could recover from the agitating effect of this crystal ring my companion had continued: “Hasn’t there ever been any face that you’ve wanted to look into?”

How could I tell her so soon how much I appreciated the opportunity of looking into hers? I could only assent in general to the proposition that there were certainly for every one such yearnings, and even such faces; and I felt the crisis demand all my lucidity, all my wisdom. “Oh yes, I’m a student of physiognomy. Do you mean,” I pursued, “that you’ve a passion for Mr. Paraday’s books?”

“They’ve been everything to me and a little more beside—I know them by heart. They’ve completely taken hold of me. There’s no author about whom I’m in such a state as I’m in about Neil Paraday.”

“Permit me to remark then,” I presently returned, “that you’re one of the right sort.”

“One of the enthusiasts? Of course I am!”

“Oh there are enthusiasts who are quite of the wrong. I mean you’re one of those to whom an appeal can be made.”

“An appeal?” Her face lighted as if with the chance of some great sacrifice.

If she was ready for one it was only waiting for her, and in a moment I mentioned it. “Give up this crude purpose of seeing him! Go away without it. That will be far better.”

She looked mystified, then turned visibly pale. “Why, hasn’t he any personal charm?” The girl was terrible and laughable in her bright directness.

“Ah that dreadful word ‘personally’!” I wailed; “we’re dying of it, for you women bring it out with murderous effect. When you meet with a genius as fine as this idol of ours let him off the dreary duty of being a personality as well. Know him only by what’s best in him and spare him for the same sweet sake.”

My young lady continued to look at me in confusion and mistrust, and the result of her reflexion on what I had just said was to make her suddenly break out: “Look here, sir—what’s the matter with him?”

“The matter with him is that if he doesn’t look out people will eat a great hole in his life.”

She turned it over. “He hasn’t any disfigurement?”

“Nothing to speak of!”

“Do you mean that social engagements interfere with his occupations?”

“That but feebly expresses it.”

“So that he can’t give himself up to his beautiful imagination?”

“He’s beset, badgered, bothered—he’s pulled to pieces on the pretext of being applauded. People expect him to give them his time, his golden time, who wouldn’t themselves give five shillings for one of his books.”

“Five? I’d give five thousand!”

“Give your sympathy—give your forbearance. Two-thirds of those who approach him only do it to advertise themselves.”

“Why it’s too bad!” the girl exclaimed with the face of an angel. “It’s the first time I was ever called crude!” she laughed.

I followed up my advantage. “There’s a lady with him now who’s a terrible complication, and who yet hasn’t read, I’m sure, ten pages he ever wrote.”

My visitor’s wide eyes grew tenderer. “Then how does she talk—?”

“Without ceasing. I only mention her as a single case. Do you want to know how to show a superlative consideration? Simply avoid him.”

“Avoid him?” she despairingly breathed.

“Don’t force him to have to take account of you; admire him in silence, cultivate him at a distance and secretly appropriate his message. Do you want to know,” I continued, warming to my idea, “how to perform an act of homage really sublime?” Then as she hung on my words: “Succeed in never seeing him at all!”

“Never at all?”—she suppressed a shriek for it.

“The more you get into his writings the less you’ll want to, and you’ll be immensely sustained by the thought of the good you’re doing him.”

She looked at me without resentment or spite, and at the truth I had put before her with candour, credulity, pity. I was afterwards happy to remember that she must have gathered from my face the liveliness of my interest in herself. “I think I see what you mean.”

“Oh I express it badly, but I should be delighted if you’d let me come to see you—to explain it better.”

She made no response to this, and her thoughtful eyes fell on the big album, on which she presently laid her hands as if to take it away. “I did use to say out West that they might write a little less for autographs—to all the great poets, you know—and study the thoughts and style a little more.”

“What do they care for the thoughts and style? They didn’t even understand you. I’m not sure,” I added, “that I do myself, and I dare say that you by no means make me out.”

She had got up to go, and though I wanted her to succeed in not seeing Neil Paraday I wanted her also, inconsequently, to remain in the house. I was at any rate far from desiring to hustle her off. As Mrs. Weeks Wimbush, upstairs, was still saving our friend in her own way, I asked my young lady to let me briefly relate, in illustration of my point, the little incident of my having gone down into the country for a profane purpose and been converted on the spot to holiness. Sinking again into her chair to listen she showed a deep interest in the anecdote. Then thinking it over gravely she returned with her odd intonation: “Yes, but you do see him!” I had to admit that this was the case; and I wasn’t so prepared with an effective attenuation as I could have wished. She eased the situation off, however, by the charming quaintness with which she finally said: “Well, I wouldn’t want him to be lonely!” This time she rose in earnest, but I persuaded her to let me keep the album to show Mr. Paraday. I assured her I’d bring it back to her myself. “Well, you’ll find my address somewhere in it on a paper!” she sighed all resignedly at the door.

CHAPTER VIII.

I blush to confess it, but I invited Mr. Paraday that very day to transcribe into the album one of his most characteristic passages. I told him how I had got rid of the strange girl who had brought it—her ominous name was Miss Hurter and she lived at an hotel; quite agreeing with him moreover as to the wisdom of getting rid with equal promptitude of the book itself. This

was why I carried it to Albemarle Street no later than on the morrow. I failed to find her at home, but she wrote to me and I went again; she wanted so much to hear more about Neil Paraday. I returned repeatedly, I may briefly declare, to supply her with this information. She had been immensely taken, the more she thought of it, with that idea of mine about the act of homage: it had ended by filling her with a generous rapture. She positively desired to do something sublime for him, though indeed I could see that, as this particular flight was difficult, she appreciated the fact that my visits kept her up. I had it on my conscience to keep her up: I neglected nothing that would contribute to it, and her conception of our cherished author's independence became at last as fine as his very own. "Read him, read him—*that* will be an education in decency," I constantly repeated; while, seeking him in his works even as God in nature, she represented herself as convinced that, according to my assurance, this was the system that had, as she expressed it, weaned her. We read him together when I could find time, and the generous creature's sacrifice was fed by our communion. There were twenty selfish women about whom I told her and who stirred her to a beautiful rage. Immediately after my first visit her sister, Mrs. Milsom, came over from Paris, and the two ladies began to present, as they called it, their letters. I thanked our stars that none had been presented to Mr. Paraday. They received invitations and dined out, and some of these occasions enabled Fanny Hurter to perform, for consistency's sake, touching feats of submission. Nothing indeed would now have induced her even to look at the object of her admiration. Once, hearing his name announced at a party, she instantly left the room by another door and then straightway quitted the house. At another time when I was at the opera with them—Mrs. Milsom had invited me to their box—I attempted to point Mr. Paraday out to her in the stalls. On this she asked her sister to change places with her and, while that lady devoured the great man through a powerful glass, presented, all the rest of the evening, her inspired back to the house. To torment her tenderly I pressed the glass upon her, telling her how wonderfully near it brought our friend's handsome head. By way of answer she simply looked at me in charged silence, letting me see that tears had gathered in her eyes. These tears, I may remark, produced an effect on me of which the end is not yet. There was a moment when I felt it my duty to mention them to Neil Paraday, but I was deterred by the reflexion that there were questions more relevant to his happiness.

These question indeed, by the end of the season, were reduced to a single one—the question of reconstituting so far as might be possible the conditions under which he had produced his best work. Such conditions could never all come back, for there was a new one that took up too much place; but some perhaps were not beyond recall. I wanted above all things to see him sit down to the subject he had, on my making his acquaintance, read me that admirable sketch of. Something told me there was no security but in his doing so before the new factor, as we used to say at Mr. Pinhorn's, should render the problem incalculable. It only half-reassured me that the sketch itself was so copious and so eloquent that even at the worst there would be the making of a small but complete book, a tiny volume which, for the faithful, might well become an object of adoration. There would even not be wanting critics to declare, I foresaw, that the plan was a thing to be more thankful for than the structure to have been reared on it. My impatience for the structure, none the less, grew and grew with the interruptions. He had on coming up to town begun to sit for his portrait to a young painter, Mr. Rumble, whose little game, as we also used to say at Mr. Pinhorn's, was to be the first to perch on the shoulders of renown. Mr. Rumble's studio was a circus in which the man of the hour, and still more the woman, leaped through the hoops of his showy frames almost as electrically as they burst into telegrams and "specials." He pranced into the exhibitions on their back; he was the reporter on canvas, the Vandyke up to date, and there was one roaring year in which Mrs. Bounder and Miss Braby, Guy Walsingham and Dora Forbes proclaimed in chorus from the same pictured walls that no one had yet got ahead of him.

Paraday had been promptly caught and saddled, accepting with characteristic good-humour his confidential hint that to figure in his show was not so much a consequence as a cause of immortality. From Mrs. Wimbush to the last “representative” who called to ascertain his twelve favourite dishes, it was the same ingenuous assumption that he would rejoice in the repercussion. There were moments when I fancied I might have had more patience with them if they hadn’t been so fatally benevolent. I hated at all events Mr. Rumble’s picture, and had my bottled resentment ready when, later on, I found my distracted friend had been stuffed by Mrs. Wimbush into the mouth of another cannon. A young artist in whom she was intensely interested, and who had no connexion with Mr. Rumble, was to show how far he could make him go. Poor Paraday, in return, was naturally to write something somewhere about the young artist. She played her victims against each other with admirable ingenuity, and her establishment was a huge machine in which the tiniest and the biggest wheels went round to the same treadle. I had a scene with her in which I tried to express that the function of such a man was to exercise his genius—not to serve as a hoarding for pictorial posters. The people I was perhaps angriest with were the editors of magazines who had introduced what they called new features, so aware were they that the newest feature of all would be to make him grind their axes by contributing his views on vital topics and taking part in the periodical prattle about the future of fiction. I made sure that before I should have done with him there would scarcely be a current form of words left me to be sick of; but meanwhile I could make surer still of my animosity to bustling ladies for whom he drew the water that irrigated their social flower-beds.

I had a battle with Mrs. Wimbush over the artist she protected, and another over the question of a certain week, at the end of July, that Mr. Paraday appeared to have contracted to spend with her in the country. I protested against this visit; I intimated that he was too unwell for hospitality without a nuance, for caresses without imagination; I begged he might rather take the time in some restorative way. A sultry air of promises, of ponderous parties, hung over his August, and he would greatly profit by the interval of rest. He hadn’t told me he was ill again that he had had a warning; but I hadn’t needed this, for I found his reticence his worst symptom. The only thing he said to me was that he believed a comfortable attack of something or other would set him up: it would put out of the question everything but the exemptions he prized. I’m afraid I shall have presented him as a martyr in a very small cause if I fail to explain that he surrendered himself much more liberally than I surrendered him. He filled his lungs, for the most part; with the comedy of his queer fate: the tragedy was in the spectacles through which I chose to look. He was conscious of inconvenience, and above all of a great renouncement; but how could he have heard a mere dirge in the bells of his accession? The sagacity and the jealousy were mine, and his the impressions and the harvest. Of course, as regards Mrs. Wimbush, I was worsted in my encounters, for wasn’t the state of his health the very reason for his coming to her at Prestidge? Wasn’t it precisely at Prestidge that he was to be coddled, and wasn’t the dear Princess coming to help her to coddle him? The dear Princess, now on a visit to England, was of a famous foreign house, and, in her gilded cage, with her retinue of keepers and feeders, was the most expensive specimen in the good lady’s collection. I don’t think her august presence had had to do with Paraday’s consenting to go, but it’s not impossible he had operated as a bait to the illustrious stranger. The party had been made up for him, Mrs. Wimbush averred, and every one was counting on it, the dear Princess most of all. If he was well enough he was to read them something absolutely fresh, and it was on that particular prospect the Princess had set her heart. She was so fond of genius in *any* walk of life, and was so used to it and understood it so well: she was the greatest of Mr. Paraday’s admirers, she devoured everything he wrote. And then he read like an angel. Mrs. Wimbush reminded me that he had again and again given her, Mrs. Wimbush, the privilege of listening to him.

I looked at her a moment. “What has he read to you?” I crudely enquired.

For a moment too she met my eyes, and for the fraction of a moment she hesitated and coloured. “Oh all sorts of things!”

I wondered if this were an imperfect recollection or only a perfect fib, and she quite understood my unuttered comment on her measure of such things. But if she could forget Neil Paraday’s beauties she could of course forget my rudeness, and three days later she invited me, by telegraph, to join the party at Prestidge. This time she might indeed have had a story about what I had given up to be near the master. I addressed from that fine residence several communications to a young lady in London, a young lady whom, I confess, I quitted with reluctance and whom the reminder of what she herself could give up was required to make me quit at all. It adds to the gratitude I owe her on other grounds that she kindly allows me to transcribe from my letters a few of the passages in which that hateful sojourn is candidly commemorated.

CHAPTER IX.

“I suppose I ought to enjoy the joke of what’s going on here,” I wrote, “but somehow it doesn’t amuse me. Pessimism on the contrary possesses me and cynicism deeply engages. I positively feel my own flesh sore from the brass nails in Neil Paraday’s social harness. The house is full of people who like him, as they mention, awfully, and with whom his talent for talking nonsense has prodigious success. I delight in his nonsense myself; why is it therefore that I grudge these happy folk their artless satisfaction? Mystery of the human heart—abyss of the critical spirit! Mrs. Wimbush thinks she can answer that question, and as my want of gaiety has at last worn out her patience she has given me a glimpse of her shrewd guess. I’m made restless by the selfishness of the insincere friend—I want to monopolise Paraday in order that he may push me on. To be intimate with him is a feather in my cap; it gives me an importance that I couldn’t naturally pretend to, and I seek to deprive him of social refreshment because I fear that meeting more disinterested people may enlighten him as to my real motive. All the disinterested people here are his particular admirers and have been carefully selected as such. There’s supposed to be a copy of his last book in the house, and in the hall I come upon ladies, in attitudes, bending gracefully over the first volume. I discreetly avert my eyes, and when I next look round the precarious joy has been superseded by the book of life. There’s a sociable circle or a confidential couple, and the relinquished volume lies open on its face and as dropped under extreme coercion. Somebody else presently finds it and transfers it, with its air of momentary desolation, to another piece of furniture. Every one’s asking every one about it all day, and every one’s telling every one where they put it last. I’m sure it’s rather smudgy about the twentieth page. I’ve a strong impression, too, that the second volume is lost—has been packed in the bag of some departing guest; and yet everybody has the impression that somebody else has read to the end. You see therefore that the beautiful book plays a great part in our existence. Why should I take the occasion of such distinguished honours to say that I begin to see deeper into Gustave Flaubert’s doleful refrain about the hatred of literature? I refer you again to the perverse constitution of man.

“The Princess is a massive lady with the organisation of an athlete and the confusion of tongues of a valet de place. She contrives to commit herself extraordinarily little in a great many languages, and is entertained and conversed with in detachments and relays, like an institution which goes on from generation to generation or a big building contracted for under a forfeit. She can’t have a personal taste any more than, when her husband succeeds, she can have a personal crown, and her opinion on any matter is rusty and heavy and plain—made, in the night of ages, to last and be transmitted. I feel as if I ought to ‘tip’ some custode for my glimpse of it. She has been told everything in the world and has never perceived anything,

and the echoes of her education respond awfully to the rash footfall—I mean the casual remark—in the cold Valhalla of her memory. Mrs. Wimbush delights in her wit and says there's nothing so charming as to hear Mr. Paraday draw it out. He's perpetually detailed for this job, and he tells me it has a peculiarly exhausting effect. Every one's beginning—at the end of two days—to sidle obsequiously away from her, and Mrs. Wimbush pushes him again and again into the breach. None of the uses I have yet seen him put to infuriate me quite so much. He looks very fagged and has at last confessed to me that his condition makes him uneasy—has even promised me he'll go straight home instead of returning to his final engagements in town. Last night I had some talk with him about going to-day, cutting his visit short; so sure am I that he'll be better as soon as he's shut up in his lighthouse. He told me that this is what he would like to do; reminding me, however, that the first lesson of his greatness has been precisely that he can't do what he likes. Mrs. Wimbush would never forgive him if he should leave her before the Princess has received the last hand. When I hint that a violent rupture with our hostess would be the best thing in the world for him he gives me to understand that if his reason assents to the proposition his courage hangs woefully back. He makes no secret of being mortally afraid of her, and when I ask what harm she can do him that she hasn't already done he simply repeats: 'I'm afraid, I'm afraid! Don't enquire too closely,' he said last night; 'only believe that I feel a sort of terror. It's strange, when she's so kind! At any rate, I'd as soon overturn that piece of priceless Sèvres as tell her I must go before my date.' It sounds dreadfully weak, but he has some reason, and he pays for his imagination, which puts him (I should hate it) in the place of others and makes him feel, even against himself, their feelings, their appetites, their motives. It's indeed inveterately against himself that he makes his imagination act. What a pity he has such a lot of it! He's too beastly intelligent. Besides, the famous reading's still to come off, and it has been postponed a day to allow Guy Walsingham to arrive. It appears this eminent lady's staying at a house a few miles off, which means of course that Mrs. Wimbush has forcibly annexed her. She's to come over in a day or two—Mrs. Wimbush wants her to hear Mr. Paraday.

“To-day's wet and cold, and several of the company, at the invitation of the Duke, have driven over to luncheon at Bigwood. I saw poor Paraday wedge himself, by command, into the little supplementary seat of a brougham in which the Princess and our hostess were already ensconced. If the front glass isn't open on his dear old back perhaps he'll survive. Bigwood, I believe, is very grand and frigid, all marble and precedence, and I wish him well out of the adventure. I can't tell you how much more and more your attitude to him, in the midst of all this, shines out by contrast. I never willingly talk to these people about him, but see what a comfort I find it to scribble to you! I appreciate it—it keeps me warm; there are no fires in the house. Mrs. Wimbush goes by the calendar, the temperature goes by the weather, the weather goes by God knows what, and the Princess is easily heated. I've nothing but my acrimony to warm me, and have been out under an umbrella to restore my circulation. Coming in an hour ago I found Lady Augusta Minch rummaging about the hall. When I asked her what she was looking for she said she had mislaid something that Mr. Paraday had lent her. I ascertained in a moment that the article in question is a manuscript, and I've a foreboding that it's the noble morsel he read me six weeks ago. When I expressed my surprise that he should have bandied about anything so precious (I happen to know it's his only copy—in the most beautiful hand in all the world) Lady Augusta confessed to me that she hadn't had it from himself, but from Mrs. Wimbush, who had wished to give her a glimpse of it as a salve for her not being able to stay and hear it read.

“‘Is that the piece he's to read,’ I asked, ‘when Guy Walsingham arrives?’

“It’s not for Guy Walsingham they’re waiting now, it’s for Dora Forbes,” Lady Augusta said. “She’s coming, I believe, early to-morrow. Meanwhile Mrs. Wimbush has found out about him, and is actively wiring to him. She says he also must hear him.”

“You bewilder me a little,” I replied; “in the age we live in one gets lost among the genders and the pronouns. The clear thing is that Mrs. Wimbush doesn’t guard such a treasure so jealously as she might.”

“Poor dear, she has the Princess to guard! Mr. Paraday lent her the manuscript to look over.”

“She spoke, you mean, as if it were the morning paper?”

“Lady Augusta stared—my irony was lost on her. ‘She didn’t have time, so she gave me a chance first; because unfortunately I go to-morrow to Bigwood.’

“And your chance has only proved a chance to lose it?”

“I haven’t lost it. I remember now—it was very stupid of me to have forgotten. I told my maid to give it to Lord Dorimont—or at least to his man.”

“And Lord Dorimont went away directly after luncheon.”

“Of course he gave it back to my maid—or else his man did,” said Lady Augusta. “I dare say it’s all right.”

“The conscience of these people is like a summer sea. They haven’t time to look over a priceless composition; they’ve only time to kick it about the house. I suggested that the ‘man,’ fired with a noble emulation, had perhaps kept the work for his own perusal; and her ladyship wanted to know whether, if the thing shouldn’t reappear for the grand occasion appointed by our hostess, the author wouldn’t have something else to read that would do just as well. Their questions are too delightful! I declared to Lady Augusta briefly that nothing in the world can ever do so well as the thing that does best; and at this she looked a little disconcerted. But I added that if the manuscript had gone astray our little circle would have the less of an effort of attention to make. The piece in question was very long—it would keep them three hours.

“Three hours! Oh the Princess will get up!” said Lady Augusta.

“I thought she was Mr. Paraday’s greatest admirer.”

“I dare say she is—she’s so awfully clever. But what’s the use of being a Princess—”

“If you can’t dissemble your love?” I asked as Lady Augusta was vague. She said at any rate she’d question her maid; and I’m hoping that when I go down to dinner I shall find the manuscript has been recovered.”

CHAPTER X.

“It has *not* been recovered,” I wrote early the next day, “and I’m moreover much troubled about our friend. He came back from Bigwood with a chill and, being allowed to have a fire in his room, lay down a while before dinner. I tried to send him to bed and indeed thought I had put him in the way of it; but after I had gone to dress Mrs. Wimbush came up to see him, with the inevitable result that when I returned I found him under arms and flushed and feverish, though decorated with the rare flower she had brought him for his button-hole. He came down to dinner, but Lady Augusta Minch was very shy of him. To-day he’s in great pain, and the advent of ces dames—I mean of Guy Walsingham and Dora Forbes—doesn’t at all console me. It does Mrs. Wimbush, however, for she has consented to his remaining in bed so that he may be all right to-morrow for the listening circle. Guy Walsingham’s already on the scene, and the Doctor for Paraday also arrived early. I haven’t yet seen the author of

‘Obsessions,’ but of course I’ve had a moment by myself with the Doctor. I tried to get him to say that our invalid must go straight home—I mean to-morrow or next day; but he quite refuses to talk about the future. Absolute quiet and warmth and the regular administration of an important remedy are the points he mainly insists on. He returns this afternoon, and I’m to go back to see the patient at one o’clock, when he next takes his medicine. It consoles me a little that he certainly won’t be able to read—an exertion he was already more than unfit for. Lady Augusta went off after breakfast, assuring me her first care would be to follow up the lost manuscript. I can see she thinks me a shocking busybody and doesn’t understand my alarm, but she’ll do what she can, for she’s a good-natured woman. ‘So are they all honourable men.’ That was precisely what made her give the thing to Lord Dorimont and made Lord Dorimont bag it. What use *he* has for it God only knows. I’ve the worst forebodings, but somehow I’m strangely without passion—desperately calm. As I consider the unconscious, the well-meaning ravages of our appreciative circle I bow my head in submission to some great natural, some universal accident; I’m rendered almost indifferent, in fact quite gay (ha-ha!) by the sense of immitigable fate. Lady Augusta promises me to trace the precious object and let me have it through the post by the time Paraday’s well enough to play his part with it. The last evidence is that her maid did give it to his lordship’s valet. One would suppose it some thrilling number of *The Family Budget*. Mrs. Wimbush, who’s aware of the accident, is much less agitated by it than she would doubtless be were she not for the hour inevitably engrossed with Guy Walsingham.”

Later in the day I informed my correspondent, for whom indeed I kept a loose diary of the situation, that I had made the acquaintance of this celebrity and that she was a pretty little girl who wore her hair in what used to be called a crop. She looked so juvenile and so innocent that if, as Mr. Morrow had announced, she was resigned to the larger latitude, her superiority to prejudice must have come to her early. I spent most of the day hovering about Neil Paraday’s room, but it was communicated to me from below that Guy Walsingham, at Prestidge, was a success. Toward evening I became conscious somehow that her superiority was contagious, and by the time the company separated for the night I was sure the larger latitude had been generally accepted. I thought of Dora Forbes and felt that he had no time to lose. Before dinner I received a telegram from Lady Augusta Minch. “Lord Dorimont thinks he must have left bundle in train—enquire.” How could I enquire—if I was to take the word as a command? I was too worried and now too alarmed about Neil Paraday. The Doctor came back, and it was an immense satisfaction to me to be sure he was wise and interested. He was proud of being called to so distinguished a patient, but he admitted to me that night that my friend was gravely ill. It was really a relapse, a recrudescence of his old malady. There could be no question of moving him: we must at any rate see first, on the spot, what turn his condition would take. Meanwhile, on the morrow, he was to have a nurse. On the morrow the dear man was easier, and my spirits rose to such cheerfulness that I could almost laugh over Lady Augusta’s second telegram: “Lord Dorimont’s servant been to station—nothing found. Push enquiries.” I did laugh, I’m sure, as I remembered this to be the mystic scroll I had scarcely allowed poor Mr. Morrow to point his umbrella at. Fool that I had been: the thirty-seven influential journals wouldn’t have destroyed it, they’d only have printed it. Of course I said nothing to Paraday.

When the nurse arrived she turned me out of the room, on which I went downstairs. I should premise that at breakfast the news that our brilliant friend was doing well excited universal complacency, and the Princess graciously remarked that he was only to be commiserated for missing the society of Miss Collop. Mrs. Wimbush, whose social gift never shone brighter than in the dry decorum with which she accepted this fizzle in her fireworks, mentioned to me that Guy Walsingham had made a very favourable impression on her Imperial

Highness. Indeed I think every one did so, and that, like the money-market or the national honour, her Imperial Highness was constitutionally sensitive. There was a certain gladness, a perceptible bustle in the air, however, which I thought slightly anomalous in a house where a great author lay critically ill. “Le roy est mort—vive le roy”: I was reminded that another great author had already stepped into his shoes. When I came down again after the nurse had taken possession I found a strange gentleman hanging about the hall and pacing to and fro by the closed door of the drawing-room. This personage was florid and bald; he had a big red moustache and wore showy knickerbockers—characteristics all that fitted to my conception of the identity of Dora Forbes. In a moment I saw what had happened: the author of “The Other Way Round” had just alighted at the portals of Prestidge, but had suffered a scruple to restrain him from penetrating further. I recognised his scruple when, pausing to listen at his gesture of caution, I heard a shrill voice lifted in a sort of rhythmic uncanny chant. The famous reading had begun, only it was the author of “Obsessions” who now furnished the sacrifice. The new visitor whispered to me that he judged something was going on he oughtn’t to interrupt.

“Miss Collop arrived last night,” I smiled, “and the Princess has a thirst for the inédit.”

Dora Forbes lifted his bushy brows. “Miss Collop?”

“Guy Walsingham, your distinguished confrère—or shall I say your formidable rival?”

“Oh!” growled Dora Forbes. Then he added: “Shall I spoil it if I go in?”

“I should think nothing could spoil it!” I ambiguously laughed.

Dora Forbes evidently felt the dilemma; he gave an irritated crook to his moustache. “*Shall I go in?*” he presently asked.

We looked at each other hard a moment; then I expressed something bitter that was in me, expressed it in an infernal “Do!” After this I got out into the air, but not so fast as not to hear, when the door of the drawing-room opened, the disconcerted drop of Miss Collop’s public manner: she must have been in the midst of the larger latitude. Producing with extreme rapidity, Guy Walsingham has just published a work in which amiable people who are not initiated have been pained to see the genius of a sister-novelist held up to unmistakable ridicule; so fresh an exhibition does it seem to them of the dreadful way men have always treated women. Dora Forbes, it’s true, at the present hour, is immensely pushed by Mrs. Wimbush and has sat for his portrait to the young artists she protects, sat for it not only in oils but in monumental alabaster.

What happened at Prestidge later in the day is of course contemporary history. If the interruption I had whimsically sanctioned was almost a scandal, what is to be said of that general scatter of the company which, under the Doctor’s rule, began to take place in the evening? His rule was soothing to behold, small comfort as I was to have at the end. He decreed in the interest of his patient an absolutely soundless house and a consequent break-up of the party. Little country practitioner as he was, he literally packed off the Princess. She departed as promptly as if a revolution had broken out, and Guy Walsingham emigrated with her. I was kindly permitted to remain, and this was not denied even to Mrs. Wimbush. The privilege was withheld indeed from Dora Forbes; so Mrs. Wimbush kept her latest capture temporarily concealed. This was so little, however, her usual way of dealing with her eminent friends that a couple of days of it exhausted her patience, and she went up to town with him in great publicity. The sudden turn for the worse her afflicted guest had, after a brief improvement, taken on the third night raised an obstacle to her seeing him before her retreat; a fortunate circumstance doubtless, for she was fundamentally disappointed in him. This was not the kind of performance for which she had invited him to Prestidge, let

alone invited the Princess. I must add that none of the generous acts marking her patronage of intellectual and other merit have done so much for her reputation as her lending Neil Paraday the most beautiful of her numerous homes to die in. He took advantage to the utmost of the singular favour. Day by day I saw him sink, and I roamed alone about the empty terraces and gardens. His wife never came near him, but I scarcely noticed it: as I paced there with rage in my heart I was too full of another wrong. In the event of his death it would fall to me perhaps to bring out in some charming form, with notes, with the tenderest editorial care, that precious heritage of his written project. But where was that precious heritage and were both the author and the book to have been snatched from us? Lady Augusta wrote me that she had done all she could and that poor Lord Dorimont, who had really been worried to death, was extremely sorry. I couldn't have the matter out with Mrs. Wimbush, for I didn't want to be taunted by her with desiring to aggrandise myself by a public connexion with Mr. Paraday's sweepings. She had signified her willingness to meet the expense of all advertising, as indeed she was always ready to do. The last night of the horrible series, the night before he died, I put my ear closer to his pillow.

"That thing I read you that morning, you know."

"In your garden that dreadful day? Yes!"

"Won't it do as it is?"

"It would have been a glorious book."

"It *is* a glorious book," Neil Paraday murmured. "Print it as it stands—beautifully."

"Beautifully!" I passionately promised.

It may be imagined whether, now that he's gone, the promise seems to me less sacred. I'm convinced that if such pages had appeared in his lifetime the Abbey would hold him to-day. I've kept the advertising in my own hands, but the manuscript has not been recovered. It's impossible, and at any rate intolerable, to suppose it can have been wantonly destroyed. Perhaps some hazard of a blind hand, some brutal fatal ignorance has lighted kitchen-fires with it. Every stupid and hideous accident haunts my meditations. My undiscourageable search for the lost treasure would make a long chapter. Fortunately I've a devoted associate in the person of a young lady who has every day a fresh indignation and a fresh idea, and who maintains with intensity that the prize will still turn up. Sometimes I believe her, but I've quite ceased to believe myself. The only thing for us at all events is to go on seeking and hoping together; and we should be closely united by this firm tie even were we not at present by another.

THE END

I'm Julie, the woman who runs [Global Grey](#) - the website where this ebook was published. These are my own formatted editions, and I hope you enjoyed reading this particular one.

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