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THE OUTCRY

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The Outcry

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The Outcry:

Содержание

Henry James
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BOOK FIRST

I

"NO, my lord," Banks had replied, "no stranger has yet arrived. But I'll see if any one has come in—or who has." As he spoke, however, he observed Lady Sandgate's approach to the hall by the entrance giving upon the great terrace, and addressed her on her passing the threshold. "Lord John, my lady." With which, his duty majestically performed, he retired to the quarter —that of the main access to the spacious centre of the house— from which he had ushered the visitor.

This personage, facing Lady Sandgate as she paused there a moment framed by the large doorway to the outer expanses, the small pinkish paper of a folded telegram in her hand, had partly before him, as an immediate effect, the high wide interior, still breathing the quiet air and the fair pannelled security of the couple of hushed and stored centuries, in which certain of the reputed treasures of Dedborough Place beautifully disposed themselves; and then, through ample apertures and

beyond the stately stone outworks of the great seated and supported house—uplifting terrace, balanced, balustraded steps and containing basins where splash and spray were at rest—all the rich composed extension of garden and lawn and park. An ancient, an assured elegance seemed to reign; pictures and preserved "pieces," cabinets and tapestries, spoke, each for itself, of fine selection and high distinction; while the originals of the old portraits, in more or less deserved salience, hung over the happy scene as the sworn members of a great guild might have sat, on the beautiful April day, at one of their annual feasts.

Such was the setting confirmed by generous time, but the handsome woman of considerably more than forty whose entrance had all but coincided with that of Lord John either belonged, for the eye, to no such complacent company or enjoyed a relation to it in which the odd twists and turns of history must have been more frequent than any dull avenue or easy sequence. Lady Sandgate was shiningly modern, and perhaps at no point more so than by the effect of her express repudiation of a mundane future certain to be more and more offensive to women of real quality and of formed taste. Clearly, at any rate, in her hands, the clue to the antique confidence had lost itself, and repose, however founded, had given way to curiosity—that is to speculation—however disguised. She might have consented, or even attained, to being but gracefully stupid, but she would presumably have confessed, if put on her trial for restlessness or for intelligence, that she *was*, after all, almost clever enough to

be vulgar. Unmistakably, moreover, she had still, with her fine stature, her disciplined figure, her cherished complexion, her bright important hair, her kind bold eyes and her large constant smile, the degree of beauty that might pretend to put every other question by.

Lord John addressed her as with a significant manner that he might have had—that of a lack of need, or even of interest, for any explanation about herself: it would have been clear that he was apt to discriminate with sharpness among possible claims on his attention. "I luckily find *you* at least, Lady Sandgate—they tell me Theign's off somewhere."

She replied as with the general habit, on her side, of bland reassurance; it mostly had easier consequences—for herself—than the perhaps more showy creation of alarm. "Only off in the park—open to-day for a school-feast from Dedborough, as you may have made out from the avenue; giving good advice, at the top of his lungs, to four hundred and fifty children."

It was such a scene, and such an aspect of the personage so accounted for, as Lord John could easily take in, and his recognition familiarly smiled. "Oh he's so great on such occasions that I'm sorry to be missing it."

"I've *had* to miss it," Lady Sandgate sighed—"that is to miss the peroration. I've just left them, but he had even then been going on for twenty minutes, and I dare say that if you care to take a look you'll find him, poor dear victim of duty, still *at* it."

"I'll warrant—for, as I often tell him, he makes the idea of

one's duty an awful thing to his friends by the extravagance with which he always overdoes it." And the image itself appeared in some degree to prompt this particular edified friend to look at his watch and consider. "I should like to come in for the grand *finale*, but I rattled over in a great measure to meet a party, as he calls himself—and calls, if you please, even me!—who's motoring down by appointment and whom I think I should be here to receive; as well as a little, I confess, in the hope of a glimpse of Lady Grace: if you can perhaps imagine *that!*"

"I can imagine it perfectly," said Lady Sandgate, whom evidently no perceptions of that general order ever cost a strain. "It quite sticks out of you, and every one moreover has for some time past been waiting to see. But you haven't then," she added, "come from town?"

"No, I'm for three days at Chanter with my mother; whom, as she kindly lent me her car, I should have rather liked to bring."

Lady Sandgate left the unsaid, in this connection, languish no longer than was decent. "But whom you doubtless had to leave, by her preference, just settling down to bridge."

"Oh, to sit down would imply that my mother at some moment of the day gets up–!"

"Which the Duchess never does?"—Lady Sand-gate only asked to be allowed to show how she saw it. "She fights to the last, invincible; gathering in the spoils and only routing her friends?" She abounded genially in her privileged vision. "Ah yes—we know something of that!"

Lord John, who was a young man of a rambling but not of an idle eye, fixed her an instant with a surprise that was yet not steeped in compassion. "You too then?"

She wouldn't, however, too meanly narrow it down. "Well, in this house generally; where I'm so often made welcome, you see, and where–"

"Where," he broke in at once, "your jolly good footing quite sticks out of *you*, perhaps you'll let me say!"

She clearly didn't mind his seeing her ask herself how she should deal with so much rather juvenile intelligence; and indeed she could only decide to deal quite simply. "You can't say more than I feel—and am proud to feel!—at being of comfort when they're worried."

This but fed the light flame of his easy perception—which lighted for him, if she would, all the facts equally. "And they're worried now, you imply, because my terrible mother is capable of heavy gains and of making a great noise if she isn't paid? I ought to mind speaking of that truth," he went on as with a practised glance in the direction of delicacy; "but I think I should like you to know that I myself am not a bit ignorant of why it has made such an impression here."

Lady Sandgate forestalled his knowledge. "Because poor Kitty Imber—who should either never touch a card or else learn to suffer in silence, as I've had to, goodness knows!—has thrown herself, with her impossible big debt, upon her father? whom she thinks herself entitled to 'look to' even more as a lovely young

widow with a good jointure than she formerly did as the mere most beautiful daughter at home."

She had put the picture a shade interrogatively, but this was as nothing to the note of free inquiry in Lord John's reply. "You mean that our lovely young widows—to say nothing of lovely young wives—ought by this time to have made out, in predicaments, how to turn round?"

His temporary hostess, even with his eyes on her, appeared to decide after a moment not wholly to disown his thought. But she smiled for it. "Well, in that set–!"

"My mother's set?" However, if she could smile he could laugh. "I'm much obliged!"

"Oh," she qualified, "I don't criticise her Grace; but the ways and traditions and tone of this house–"

"Make it"—he took her sense straight from her—"the house in England where one feels most the false note of a dishevelled and bankrupt elder daughter breaking in with a list of her gaming debts—to say nothing of others!—and wishing to have at least those wiped out in the interest of her reputation? Exactly so," he went on before she could meet it with a diplomatic ambiguity; "and just that, I assure you, is a large part of the reason I like to come here—since I personally don't come with any such associations."

"Not the association of bankruptcy—no; as you represent the payee!"

The young man appeared to regard this imputation for a

moment almost as a liberty taken. “How do you know so well, Lady Sandgate, what I represent?”

She bethought herself—but briefly and bravely. “Well, don’t you represent, by your own admission, certain fond aspirations? Don’t you represent the belief—very natural, I grant—that more than *one* perverse and extravagant flower will be unlikely on such a fine healthy old stem; and, consistently with that, the hope of arranging with our admirable host here that he shall lend a helpful hand to your commending yourself to dear Grace?”

Lord John might, in the light of these words, have felt any latent infirmity in such a pretension exposed; but as he stood there facing his chances he would have struck a spectator as resting firmly enough on some felt residuum of advantage: whether this were cleverness or luck, the strength of his backing or that of his sincerity. Even with the young woman to whom our friends’ reference thus broadened still a vague quantity for us, you would have taken his sincerity as quite possible—and this despite an odd element in him that you might have described as a certain delicacy of brutality. This younger son of a noble matron recognised even by himself as terrible enjoyed in no immediate or aggressive manner any imputable private heritage or privilege of arrogance. He would on the contrary have irradiated fineness if his lustre hadn’t been a little prematurely dimmed. Active yet insubstantial, he was slight and short and a trifle too punctually, though not yet quite lamentably, bald. Delicacy was in the arch of his eyebrow, the finish of his facial line, the economy of

"treatment" by which his negative nose had been enabled to look important and his meagre mouth to smile its spareness away.

He had pleasant but hard little eyes—they glittered, handsomely, without promise—and a neatness, a coolness and an ease, a clear instinct for making point take, on his behalf, the place of weight and immunity that of capacity, which represented somehow the art of living at a high pitch and yet at a low cost. There was that in his satisfied air which still suggested sharp wants—and this was withal the ambiguity; for the temper of these appetites or views was certainly, you would have concluded, not such as always to sacrifice to form. If he really, for instance, wanted Lady Grace, the passion or the sense of his interest in it would scarce have been considerately irritable.

"May I ask what you mean," he inquired of Lady Sandgate, "by the question of my 'arranging'?"

"I mean that you're the very clever son of a very clever mother."

"Oh, I'm less clever than you think," he replied—"if you really think it of me at all; and mamma's a good sight cleverer!"

"Than I think?" Lady Sandgate echoed. "Why, she's the person in all our world I would gladly most resemble—for her general ability to put what she wants through." But she at once added: "That is *if*—!" pausing on it with a smile.

"If what then?"

"Well, if I could be absolutely certain to have all in her kinds of cleverness without exception—and to have them," said Lady

Sandgate, “to the very end.”

He definitely, he almost contemptuously declined to follow her. “The very end of what?”

She took her choice as amid all the wonderful directions there might be, and then seemed both to risk and to reserve something. “Say of her so wonderfully successful *general* career.”

It doubtless, however, warranted him in appearing to cut insinuations short. “When you’re as clever as she you’ll be as good.” To which he subjoined: “You don’t begin to have the opportunity of knowing how good she is.” This pronouncement, to whatever comparative obscurity it might appear to relegate her, his interlocutress had to take—he was so prompt with a more explicit challenge. “What is it exactly that you suppose yourself to know?”

Lady Sandgate had after a moment, in her supreme good humour, decided to take everything. “I always proceed on the assumption that I know everything, because that makes people tell me.”

“It wouldn’t make we,” he quite rang out, “if I didn’t want to! But as it happens,” he allowed, “there’s a question it would be convenient to me to put to you. You must be, with your charming unconventional relation with him, extremely in Theign’s confidence.”

She waited a little as for more. “Is that your question —*whether* I am?”

“No, but if you are you’ll the better answer it”

She had no objection then to answering it beautifully. "We're the best friends in the world; he has been really my providence, as a lone woman with almost nobody and nothing of her own, and I feel my footing here, as so frequent and yet so discreet a visitor, simply perfect But I'm happy to say that—for my pleasure when I'm really curious—this doesn't close to me the sweet resource of occasionally guessing things."

"Then I hope you've ground for believing that if I go the right way about it he's likely to listen to me."

Lady Sandgate measured her ground—which scarce seemed extensive. "The person he most listens to just now—and in fact at any time, as you must have seen for yourself—is that arch-tormentor, or at least beautiful wheedler, his elder daughter."

"Lady Imber's *here?*" Lord John alertly asked.

"She arrived last night and—as we've other visitors—seems to have set up a side-show in the garden."

"Then she'll 'draw' of course immensely, as she always does. But her sister won't be in that case with her," the young man supposed.

"Because Grace feels herself naturally an independent show? So she well may," said Lady Sandgate, "but I must tell you that when I last noticed them there Kitty was in the very act of leading her away."

Lord John figured it a moment. "Lady Imber"—he ironically enlarged the figure—"*can* lead people away."

"Oh, dear Grace," his companion returned, "happens

fortunately to be firm!"

This seemed to strike him for a moment as equivocal. "Not against *me*, however—you don't mean? You don't think she has a beastly prejudice–?"

"Surely you can judge about it; as knowing best what may—or what mayn't—have happened between you."

"Well, I try to judge"—and such candour as was possible to Lord John seemed to sit for a moment on his brow. "But I'm in fear of seeing her too much as I want to see her."

There was an appeal in it that Lady Sandgate might have been moved to meet "Are you absolutely in earnest about her?"

"Of course I am—why shouldn't I be? But," he said with impatience, "I want help."

"Very well then, that's what Lady Imber's giving you." And as it appeared to take him time to read into these words their full sense, she produced others, and so far did help him—though the effort was in a degree that of her exhibiting with some complacency her own unassisted control of stray signs and shy lights. "By telling her, by bringing it home to her, that if she'll make up her mind to accept you the Duchess will do the handsome thing. Handsome, I mean, by Kitty."

Lord John, appropriating for his convenience the truth in this, yet regarded it as open to a becoming, an improving touch from himself. "Well, and by *me*." To which he added with more of a challenge in it: "But you really know what my mother will do?"

"By my system," Lady Sandgate smiled, "you see I've guessed.

What your mother will do is what brought you over!"

"Well, it's that," he allowed—"and something else."

"Something else?" she derisively echoed. "I should think 'that,' for an ardent lover, would have been enough."

"Ah, but it's all one Job! I mean it's one idea," he hastened to explain—"if you think Lady Imber's really acting on her."

"Mightn't you go and see?"

"I would in a moment if I hadn't to look out for another matter too." And he renewed his attention to his watch. "I mean getting straight at my American, the party I just mentioned–"

But she had already taken him up. "You too have an American and a 'party,' and yours also motors down–?"

"Mr. Breckenridge Bender." Lord John named him with a shade of elation.

She gaped at the fuller light "You *know* my Breckenridge?—who I hoped was coming for me!"

Lord John as freely, but more gaily, wondered. "Had he told you so?"

She held out, opened, the telegram she had kept folded in her hand since her entrance. "He has sent me that—which, delivered to me ten minutes ago out there, has brought me in to receive him."

The young man read out this missive. "'Failing to find you in Bruton Street, start in pursuit and hope to overtake you about four.'" It did involve an ambiguity. "Why, he has been engaged these three days to coincide with myself, and not to fail of him

has been part of my business."

Lady Sandgate, in her demonstrative way, appealed to the general rich scene. "Then why does he say it's me he's pursuing?"

He seemed to recognise promptly enough in her the sense of a menaced monopoly. "My dear lady, he's pursuing expensive works of art."

"By which you imply that I'm one?" She might have been wound up by her disappointment to almost any irony.

"I imply—or rather I affirm—that every handsome woman is! But what he arranged with me about," Lord John explained, "was that he should see the Dedborough pictures in general and the great Sir Joshua in particular—of which he had heard so much and to which I've been thus glad to assist him."

This news, however, with its lively interest, but deepened the listener's mystification. "Then why—this whole week that I've been in the house—hasn't our good friend here mentioned to me his coming?"

"Because our good friend here has had no reason"—Lord John could treat it now as simple enough. "Good as he is in all ways, he's so best of all about showing the house and its contents that I haven't even thought necessary to write him that I'm introducing Breckenridge."

"I should have been happy to introduce him," Lady Sandgate just quavered—"if I had at all known he wanted it."

Her companion weighed the difference between them and appeared to pronounce it a trifle he didn't care a fig for. "I

surrender you that privilege then—of presenting him to his host—if I've seemed to you to snatch it from you." To which Lord John added, as with liberality unrestricted, "But I've been taking him about to see what's worth while—as only last week to Lady Lappington's Longhi."

This revelation, though so casual in its form, fairly drew from Lady Sandgate, as she took it in, an interrogative wail. "Her Longhi?"

"Why, don't you know her great Venetian family group, the What-do-you-call-'ems?—seven full-length figures, each one a gem, for which he paid her her price before he left the house."

She could but make it more richly resound—almost stricken, lost in her wistful thought: "Seven full-length figures? Her price?"

"Eight thousand—slap down. Bender knows," said Lord John, "what he wants."

"And does he want only"—her wonder grew and grew—

"What-do-you-call-'ems'?"

"He most usually wants what he can't have." Lord John made scarce more of it than that. "But, awfully hard up as I fancy her, Lady Lappington went *at* him."

It determined in his friend a boldly critical attitude. "How horrible—at the rate things are leaving us!" But this was far from the end of her interest. "And is that the way he pays?"

"Before he leaves the house?" Lord John lived it amusedly over. "Well, *she* took care of that."

"How incredibly vulgar!" It all had, however, for Lady Sandgate, still other connections—which might have attenuated Lady Lappington's case, though she didn't glance at this. "He makes the most scandalous eyes—the ruffian!—at my great-grandmother." And then as richly to enlighten any blankness: "My tremendous Lawrence, don't you know?—in her wedding-dress, down to her knees; with such extraordinarily speaking eyes, such lovely arms and hands, such wonderful flesh-tints: universally considered the masterpiece of the artist."

Lord John seemed to look a moment not so much at the image evoked, in which he wasn't interested, as at certain possibilities lurking behind it. "And are you going to *sell* the masterpiece of the artist?"

She held her head high. "I've indignantly refused—for all his pressing me so hard."

"Yet that's what he nevertheless pursues you to-day to keep up?"

The question had a little the ring of those of which the occupant of a witness-box is mostly the subject, but Lady Sandgate was so far as this went an imperturbable witness. "I need hardly fear it perhaps if—in the light of what you tell me of your arrangement with him—his pursuit becomes, where I am concerned, a figure of speech."

"Oh," Lord John returned, "he kills two birds with one stone—he sees both Sir Joshua and you."

This version of the case had its effect, for the moment, on his

fair associate. “Does he want to buy *their* pride and glory?”

The young man, however, struck on his own side, became at first but the bright reflector of her thought. “Is that wonder for sale?”

She closed her eyes as with the shudder of hearing such words. “Not, surely, by *any* monstrous chance! Fancy dear, proud Theign–!”

“I can’t fancy him—no!” And Lord John appeared to renounce the effort. “But a cat may look at a king and a sharp funny Yankee at anything.”

These things might be, Lady Sandgate’s face and gesture apparently signified; but another question diverted her. “You’re clearly a wonderful showman, but do you mind my asking you whether you’re on such an occasion a—well, a closely interested one?”

“‘Interested’?” he echoed; though it wasn’t to gain time, he showed, for he would in that case have taken more. “To the extent, you mean, of my little percentage?” And then as in silence she but kept a slightly grim smile on him: “Why do you ask if—with your high delicacy about your great-grandmother—you’ve nothing to place?”

It took her a minute to say, while her fine eye only rolled; but when she spoke that organ boldly rested and the truth vividly appeared. “I ask because people like you, Lord John, strike me as dangerous to the—how shall I name it?—the common weal; and because of my general strong feeling that we don’t want any more

of our national treasures (for I regard my great-grandmother as national) to be scattered about the world."

"There's much in this country and age," he replied in an off-hand manner, "to be said about *that*," The present, however, was not the time to say it all; so he said something else instead, accompanying it with a smile that signified sufficiency. "To my friends, I need scarcely remark to you, I'm all the friend."

She had meanwhile seen the butler reappear by the door that opened to the terrace, and though the high, bleak, impersonal approach of this functionary was ever, and more and more at every step, a process to defy interpretation, long practice evidently now enabled her to suggest, as she turned again to her fellow-visitor a reading of it. "It's the friend then clearly who's wanted in the park."

She might, by the way Banks looked at her, have snatched from his hand a missive addressed to another; though while he addressed himself to her companion he allowed for her indecorum sufficiently to take it up where she had left it. "By her ladyship, my lord, who sends to hope you'll join them below the terrace."

"Ah, Grace hopes," said Lady Sandgate for the young man's encouragement. "There you are!"

Lord John took up the motor-cap he had lain down on coming in. "I rush to Lady Grace, but don't demoralise Bender!" And he went forth to the terrace and the gardens.

Banks looked about as for some further exercise of his high

function. “Will you have tea, my lady?”

This appeared to strike her as premature. “Oh, thanks—when they all come in.”

“They’ll scarcely *all*, my lady”—he indicated respectfully that he knew what he was talking about. “There’s tea in her ladyship’s tent; but,” he qualified, “it has also been ordered for the saloon.”

“Ah then,” she said cheerfully, “Mr. Bender will be glad—!” And she became, with this, aware of the approach of another visitor. Banks considered, up and down, the gentleman ushered in, at the left, by the footman who had received him at the main entrance to the house. “Here he must be, my lady.” With which he retired to the spacious opposite quarter, where he vanished, while the footman, his own office performed, retreated as he had come, and Lady Sandgate, all hospitality, received the many-sided author of her specious telegram, of Lord John’s irritating confidence and of Lady Lappington’s massive cheque.

II

Having greeted him with an explicitly gracious welcome and both hands out, she had at once gone on: "You'll of course have tea?—in the saloon."

But his mechanism seemed of the type that has to expand and revolve before sounding. "Why; the very first thing?"

She only desired, as her laugh showed, to accommodate. "Ah, have it the last if you like!"

"You see your English teas—!" he pleaded as he looked about him, so immediately and frankly interested in the place and its contents that his friend could only have taken this for the very glance with which he must have swept Lady Lappington's inferior scene.

"They're too much for you?"

"Well, they're too many. I think I've had two or three on the road—at any rate my man did. I like to do business before—" But his sequence dropped as his eye caught some object across the wealth of space.

She divertedly picked it up. "Before tea, Mr. Bender?"

"Before everything, Lady Sandgate." He was immensely genial, but a queer, quaint, rough-edged distinctness somehow kept it safe—for himself.

"Then you've *come* to do business?" Her appeal and her emphasis melted as into a caress—which, however, spent

itself on his large high person as he consented, with less of demonstration but more of attention, to look down upon her. She could therefore but reinforce it by an intenser note. “To tell me you *will* treat?”

Mr. Bender had six feet of stature and an air as of having received benefits at the hands of fortune. Substantial, powerful, easy, he shone as with a glorious cleanness, a supplied and equipped and appointed sanity and security; aids to action that might have figured a pair of very ample wings—wide pinions for the present conveniently folded, but that he would certainly on occasion agitate for great efforts and spread for great flights. These things would have made him quite an admirable, even a worshipful, image of full-blown life and character, had not the affirmation and the emphasis halted in one important particular. Fortune, felicity, nature, the perverse or interfering old fairy at his cradle-side—whatever the ministering power might have been—had simply overlooked and neglected his vast wholly-shaven face, which thus showed not so much for perfunctorily scamped as for not treated, as for neither formed nor fondled nor finished, at all. Nothing seemed to have been done for it but what the razor and the sponge, the tooth-brush and the looking-glass could officiously do; it had in short resisted any possibly finer attrition at the hands of fifty years of offered experience. It had developed on the lines, if lines they could be called, of the mere scoured and polished and initialled “mug” rather than to any effect of a composed physiognomy; though we must at

the same time add that its wearer carried this featureless disk as with the warranted confidence that might have attended a warning headlight or a glaring motor-lamp. The object, however one named it, showed you at least where he was, and most often that he was straight upon you. It was fearlessly and resistingly across the path of his advance that Lady Sandgate had thrown herself, and indeed with such success that he soon connected her demonstration with a particular motive. "For your grandmother, Lady Sandgate?" he then returned.

"For my grandmother's *mother*, Mr. Bender—the most beautiful woman of her time and the greatest of all Lawrences, no matter whose; as you quite acknowledged, you know, in our talk in Bruton Street."

Mr. Bender bethought himself further—yet drawing it out; as if the familiar fact of his being "made up to" had never had such special softness and warmth of pressure. "Do you want very, *very* much–?"

She had already caught him up. "'Very, very much' for her? Well, Mr. Bender," she smilingly replied, "I think I should like her full value."

"I mean"—he kindly discriminated—"do you want so badly to work her off?"

"It would be an intense convenience to me—so much so that your telegram made me at once fondly hope you'd be arriving to conclude."

Such measure of response as he had good-naturedly given

her was the mere frayed edge of a mastering detachment, the copious, impatient range elsewhere of his true attention. Somehow, however, he still seemed kind even while, turning his back upon her, he moved off to look at one of the several, the famous Dedborough pictures—stray specimens, by every presumption, lost a little in the whole bright bigness. "'Conclude'?" he echoed as he approached a significantly small canvas. "You ladies want to get there before the road's so much as laid or the country's safe! Do you know what this *here* is?" he at once went on.

"Oh, you can't have *that!*" she cried as with full authority —"and you must really understand that you can't have everything. You mustn't expect to ravage Dedborough."

He had his nose meanwhile close to the picture. "I guess it's a bogus Cuyp—but I know Lord Theign *has* things. He won't do business?"

"He's not in the least, and can never be, in my tight place," Lady Sandgate replied; "but he's as proud as he's kind, dear man, and as solid as he's proud; so that if you came down under a different impression—!" Well, she could only exhale the folly of his error with an unction that represented, whatever he might think of it, all her competence to answer for their host.

He scarce thought of it enough, on any side, however, to be diverted from prior dispositions. "I came on an understanding that I should find my friend Lord John, and that Lord Theign would, on his introduction, kindly let me look round. But being

before lunch in Bruton Street I knocked at your door–"

"For another look," she quickly interposed, "at my Lawrence?"

"For another look at *you*, Lady Sandgate—your great-grandmother wasn't required. Informed you were here, and struck with the coincidence of my being myself presently due," he went on, "I despatched you my wire, on coming away, just to keep up your spirits."

"You *don't* keep them up, you depress them to anguish," she almost passionately protested, "when you don't tell me you'll treat!"

He paused in his preoccupation, his perambulation, conscious evidently of no reluctance that was worth a scene with so charming and so hungry a woman. "Well, if it's a question of your otherwise suffering torments, may I have another interview with the old lady?"

"Dear Mr. Bender, she's in the flower of her youth; she only yearns for interviews, and you may have," Lady Sandgate earnestly declared, "as many as you like."

"Oh, you must be there to protect me!"

"Then as soon as I return–!"

"Well,"—it clearly cost him little to say—"I'll come right round."

She joyously registered the vow. "Only meanwhile then, please, never a word!"

"Never a word, certainly. But where all this time," Mr. Bender

asked, “is Lord John?”

Lady Sandgate, as he spoke, found her eyes meeting those of a young woman who, presenting herself from without, stood framed in the doorway to the terrace; a slight fair grave young woman, of middle, stature and simply dressed, whose brow showed clear even under the heavy shade of a large hat surmounted with big black bows and feathers. Her eyes had vaguely questioned those of her elder, who at once replied to the gentleman forming the subject of their inquiry: “Lady Grace must know.” At this the young woman came forward, and Lady Sandgate introduced the visitor. “My dear Grace, this is Mr. Breckenridge Bender.”

The younger daughter of the house might have arrived in preoccupation, but she had urbanity to spare. “Of whom Lord John has told me,” she returned, “and whom I’m glad to see. Lord John,” she explained to his waiting friend, “is detained a moment in the park, open to-day to a big Temperance school-feast, where our party is mostly gathered; so that if you care to go out—!” She gave him in fine his choice.

But this was clearly a thing that, in the conditions, Mr. Bender wasn’t the man to take precipitately; though his big useful smile disguised his prudence. “Are there any pictures in the park?”

Lady Grace’s facial response represented less humour perhaps, but more play. “We find our park itself rather a picture.”

Mr. Bender’s own levity at any rate persisted. “With a big Temperance school-feast?”

"Mr. Bender's a great judge of pictures," Lady Sandgate said as to forestall any impression of excessive freedom.

"Will there be more tea?" he pursued, almost presuming on this.

It showed Lady Grace for comparatively candid and literal. "Oh, there'll be plenty of tea."

This appeared to determine Mr. Bender. "Well, Lady Grace, I'm after pictures, but I take them 'neat.' May I go right round here?"

"Perhaps, love," Lady Sandgate at once said, "you'll let me show him."

"A moment, dear"—Lady Grace gently demurred. "Do go round," she conformably added to Mr. Bender; "take your ease and your time. Everything's open and visible, and, with our whole company dispersed, you'll have the place to yourself."

He rose, in his genial mass, to the opportunity. "I'll be in clover—sure!" But present to him was the richest corner of the pasture, which he could fluently enough name. "And I'll find 'The Beautiful Duchess of Waterbridge'?"

She indicated, off to the right, where a stately perspective opened, the quarter of the saloon to which we have seen Mr. Banks retire. "At the very end of *those* rooms."

He had wide eyes for the vista. "About thirty in a row, hey?" And he was already off. "I'll work right through!"

III

Left with her friend, Lady Grace had a prompt question. “Lord John warned me he was ‘funny’—but you already know him?”

There might have been a sense of embarrassment in the way in which, as to gain time, Lady Sandgate pointed, instead of answering, to the small picture pronounced upon by Mr. Bender. “He thinks your little Cuyp a fraud.”

“That one?” Lady Grace could but stare. “The wretch!” However, she made, without alarm, no more of it; she returned to her previous question. “You’ve met him before?”

“Just a little—in town. Being ‘after pictures’” Lady Sandgate explained, “he has been after my great-grandmother.”

“She,” said Lady Grace with amusement, “must have found him funny! But he can clearly take care of himself, while Kitty takes care of Lord John, and while you, if you’ll be so good, go back to support father—in the hour of his triumph: which he wants you so much to witness that he complains of your desertion and goes so far as to speak of you as sneaking away.”

Lady Sandgate, with a slight flush, turned it over. “I delight in his triumph, and whatever I do is at least above board; but if it’s a question of support, aren’t you yourself failing him quite as much?”

This had, however, no effect on the girl’s confidence. “Ah, my dear, I’m not at all the same thing, and as I’m the person in the

world he least misses—" Well, such a fact spoke for itself.

"You've been free to return and wait for Lord John?"—that was the sense in which the elder woman appeared to prefer to understand it as speaking.

The tone of it, none the less, led her companion immediately, though very quietly, to correct her. "I've not come back to wait for Lord John."

"Then he hasn't told you—if you've talked—with what idea he has come?"

Lady Grace had for a further correction the same shade of detachment. "Kitty has told me—what it suits her to pretend to suppose."

"And Kitty's pretensions and suppositions always go with what happens—at the moment, among all her wonderful happenings—to suit her?"

Lady Grace let that question answer itself—she took the case up further on. "What I can't make out is why this *should* so suit her!"

"And what *I* can't!" said Lady Sandgate without gross honesty and turning away after having watched the girl a moment. She nevertheless presently faced her again to follow this speculation up. "Do you like him enough to risk the chance of Kitty's being for once right?"

Lady Grace gave it a thought—with which she moved away. "I don't know how much I like him!"

"Nor how little!" cried her friend, who evidently found

amusement in the tone of it. “And you’re not disposed to take the time to find out? He’s at least better than the others.”

“The ‘others’?”—Lady Grace was blank for them.

“The others of his set.”

“Oh, his set! That wouldn’t be difficult—by what I imagine of some of them. But he means well enough,” the girl added; “he’s very charming and does me great honour.”

It determined in her companion, about to leave her, another brief arrest. “Then may I tell your father?”

This in turn brought about in Lady Grace an immediate drop of the subject. “Tell my father, please, that I’m expecting Mr. Crimble; of whom I’ve spoken to him even if he doesn’t remember, and who bicycles this afternoon ten miles over from where he’s staying—with some people we don’t know—to look at the pictures, about which he’s awfully keen.”

Lady Sandgate took it in. “Ah, like Mr. Bender?”

“No, not at all, I think, like Mr. Bender.”

This appeared to move in the elder woman some deeper thought “May I ask then—if one’s to meet him—who he is?”

“Oh, father knows—or ought to—that I sat next him, in London, a month ago, at dinner, and that he then told me he was working, tooth and nail, at what he called the wonderful modern science of Connoisseurship—which is upsetting, as perhaps you’re not aware, all the old-fashioned canons of art-criticism, everything we’ve stupidly thought right and held dear; that he was to spend Easter in these parts, and that he should like greatly to be

allowed some day to come over and make acquaintance with our things. I told him," Lady Grace wound up, "that nothing would be easier; a note from him arrived before dinner–"

Lady Sandgate jumped the rest "And it's for him you've come in."

"It's for him I've come in," the girl assented with serenity.

"Very good—though he sounds most detrimental! But will you first just tell me *this*—whether when you sent in ten minutes ago for Lord John to come out to you it was wholly of your own movement?" And she followed it up as her young friend appeared to hesitate. "Was it because you knew why he had arrived?"

The young friend hesitated still. "'Why '?"

"So particularly to speak to you."

"Since he was expected and mightn't know where I was," Lady Grace said after an instant, "I wanted naturally to be civil to him."

"And had he time there to tell you," Lady Sand-gate asked, "how very civil he wants to be to you?"

"No, only to tell me that his friend—who's off there—was coming; for Kitty at once appropriated him and was still in possession when I came away." Then, as deciding at last on perfect frankness, Lady Grace went on: "If you want to know, I sent for news of him because Kitty insisted on my doing so; saying, so very oddly and quite in her own way, that she herself didn't wish to 'appear in it.' She had done nothing but say to me for an hour, rather worryingly, what you've just said—that it's me he's what, like Mr. Bender, she calls 'after'; but as soon as he

appeared she pounced on him, and I left him—I assure you quite resignedly—in her hands."

"She wants"—it was easy for Lady Sandgate to remark—"to talk of you to him."

"I don't know *what* she wants," the girl replied as with rather a tired patience; "Kitty wants so many things at once. She always wants money, in quantities, to begin with—and all to throw so horribly away; so that whenever I see her 'in' so very deep with any one I always imagine her appealing for some new tip as to how it's to be come by."

"Kitty's an abyss, I grant you, and with my disinterested devotion to your father—in requital of all his kindness to me since Lord Sandgate's death and since your mother's—I can never be too grateful to you, my dear, for your being so different a creature. But what is she going to gain financially," Lady Sandgate pursued with a strong emphasis on her adverb, "by working up our friend's confidence in your listening to him—if you *are* to listen?"

"I haven't in the least engaged to listen," said Lady Grace—"it will depend on the music he makes!" But she added with light cynicism: "Perhaps she's to gain a commission!"

"On his fairly getting you?" And then as the girl assented by silence: "Is he in a position to pay her one?" Lady Sandgate asked.

"I dare say the Duchess is!"

"But do you see the Duchess *producing* money—with all that Kitty, as we're not ignorant, owes her? Hundreds and hundreds

and hundreds!"—Lady Sandgate piled them up.

Her young friend's gesture checked it. "Ah, don't tell me how many—it's too sad and too ugly and too wrong!" To which, however, Lady Grace added: "But perhaps that will be just her way!" And then as her companion seemed for the moment not quite to follow: "By letting Kitty off her debt."

"You mean that Kitty goes free if Lord John wins your promise?"

"Kitty goes free."

"She has her creditor's release?"

"For every shilling."

"And if he only fails?"

"Why then of course," said now quite lucid Lady Grace, "she throws herself more than ever on poor father."

"Poor father indeed!"—Lady Sandgate richly sighed it

It appeared even to create in the younger woman a sense of excess. "Yes—but he after all and in spite of everything adores her."

"To the point, you mean"—for Lady Sandgate could clearly but wonder—"of really sacrificing you?"

The weight of Lady Grace's charming deep eyes on her face made her pause while, at some length, she gave back this look and the interchange determined in the girl a grave appeal. "You think I *should* be sacrificed if I married him?"

Lady Sandgate replied, though with an equal emphasis, indirectly. "*Could* you marry him?"

Lady Grace waited a moment "Do you mean for Kitty?"

"For himself even—if they should convince you, among them, that he cares for you."

Lady Grace had another delay. "Well, he's his awful mother's son."

"Yes—but you wouldn't marry his mother."

"No—but I should only be the more uncomfortably and intimately conscious of her."

"Even when," Lady Sandgate optimistically put it, "she so markedly likes you?"

This determined in the girl a fine impatience. "She doesn't 'like' me, she only *wants* me—which is a very different thing; wants me for my father's so particularly beautiful position, and my mother's so supremely great people, and for everything we have been and have done, and still are and still have: except of course poor not-at-all-model Kitty."

To this luminous account of the matter Lady Sand-gate turned as to a genial sun-burst. "I see indeed—for the general immaculate connection."

The words had no note of irony, but Lady Grace, in her great seriousness, glanced with deprecation at the possibility. "Well, we *haven't* had false notes. We've scarcely even had bad moments."

"Yes, you've been beatific!"—Lady Sandgate enviously, quite ruefully, felt it. But any further treatment of the question was checked by the re-entrance of the footman—a demonstration

explained by the concomitant appearance of a young man in eyeglasses and with the ends of his trousers clipped together as for cycling. “This must be your friend,” she had only time to say to the daughter of the house; with which, alert and reminded of how she was awaited elsewhere, she retreated before her companion’s visitor, who had come in with his guide from the vestibule. She passed away to the terrace and the gardens, Mr. Hugh Crimble’s announced name ringing in her ears—to some effect that we are as yet not qualified to discern.

IV

Lady Grace had turned to meet Mr. Hugh Crimble, whose pleasure in at once finding her lighted his keen countenance and broke into easy words. “So awfully kind of you—in the midst of the great doings I noticed—to have found a beautiful minute for me.”

“I left the great doings, which are almost over, to every one’s relief, I think,” the girl returned, “so that your precious time shouldn’t be taken to hunt for me.”

It was clearly for him, on this bright answer, as if her white hand were holding out the perfect flower of felicity. “You came in from your revels on purpose—with the same charity you showed me from that first moment?” They stood smiling at each other as in an exchange of sympathy already confessed—and even as if finding that their relation had grown during the lapse of contact; she recognising the effect of what they had originally felt as bravely as he might name it. What the fine, slightly long oval of her essentially quiet face—quiet in spite of certain vague depths of reference to forces of the strong high order, forces involved and implanted, yet also rather spent in the process—kept in range from under her redundant black hat was the strength of expression, the directness of communication, that her guest appeared to borrow from the unframed and unattached nippers unceasingly perched, by their mere ground-glass rims,

as she remembered, on the bony bridge of his indescribably authoritative (since it was at the same time decidedly inquisitive) young nose. She must, however, also have embraced in this contemplation, she must more or less again have interpreted, his main physiognomic mark, the degree to which his clean jaw was underhung and his lower lip protruded; a lapse of regularity made evident by a suppression of beard and moustache as complete as that practised by Mr. Bender—though without the appearance consequent in the latter's case, that of the flagrantly vain appeal in the countenance for some other exhibition of a history, of a process of production, than this so superficial one. With the interested and interesting girl sufficiently under our attention while we thus try to evoke her, we may even make out some wonder in her as to why the so perceptibly protrusive lower lip of this acquaintance of an hour or two should positively have contributed to his being handsome instead of much more logically interfering with it. We might in fact in such a case even have followed her into another and no less refined a speculation —the question of whether the surest seat of his good looks mightn't after all be his high, fair, if somewhat narrow, forehead, crowned with short crisp brown hair and which, after a fashion of its own, predominated without overhanging. He spoke after they had stood just face to face almost long enough for awkwardness. "I haven't forgotten one item of your kindness to me on that rather bleak occasion."

"Bleak do you call it?" she laughed. "Why I found it, rather,

tropical—'lush.' My neighbour on the other side wanted to talk to me of the White City."

"Then you made it doubtless bleak for *him*, let us say. *I* couldn't let you alone, I remember, about *this*—it was like a shipwrecked signal to a sail on the horizon." "This" obviously meant for the young man exactly what surrounded him; he had begun, like Mr. Bender, to be conscious of a thick solicitation of the eye—and much more than he, doubtless, of a tug at the imagination; and he broke—characteristically, you would have been sure—into a great free gaiety of recognition.

"Oh, we've nothing particular in the hall," Lady Grace amiably objected.

"Nothing, I see, but Claudes and Cuyps! I'm an ogre," he said —"before a new and rare feast!"

She happily took up his figure. "Then won't you begin—as a first course—with tea after your ride? If the other, that is—for there has been an ogre before you—has left any."

"Some tea, with pleasure"—he looked all his longing; "though when you talk of a fellow-feaster I should have supposed that, on such a day as this especially, you'd find yourselves running a continuous *table d'hôte*."

"Ah, we can't work sports in our gallery and saloon—the banging or whacking and shoving amusements that are all most people care for; unless, perhaps," Lady Grace went on, "your own peculiar one, as I understand you, of playing football with the old benighted traditions and attributions you everywhere meet:

in fact I think you said the old idiotic superstitions."

Hugh Crimble went more than half-way to meet this description of his fondest activity; he indeed even beckoned it on. "The names and stories and styles—the so often vain legend, not to be too invidious—of author or subject or school?" But he had a drop, no less, as from the sense of a cause sometimes lost. "Ah, that's a game at which we *all* can play!"

"Though scarcely," Lady Grace suggested, "at which we all can score."

The words appeared indeed to take meaning from his growing impression of the place and its charm—of the number of objects, treasures of art, that pressed for appreciation of their importance. "Certainly," he said, "no one can ever have scored much on sacred spots of *this* order—which express so the grand impunity of their pride, their claims, their assurance!"

"We've had great luck," she granted—"as I've just been reminded; but ever since those terrible things you told me in town —about the tremendous tricks of the whirligig of time and the aesthetic fools' paradise in which so many of us live—I've gone about with my heart in my mouth. Who knows that while I talk Mr. Bender mayn't be pulling us to pieces?"

Hugh Crimble had a shudder of remembrance. "Mr. Bender?"

"The rich American who's going round."

It gave him a sharper shock. "The wretch who bagged Lady Lappington's Longhi?"

Lady Grace showed surprise. "Is he a wretch?"

Her visitor but asked to be extravagant. “Rather—the scoundrel. He offered his infernal eight thousand down.”

“Oh, I thought you meant he had played some trick!”

“I wish he had—he could then have been collared.”

“Well,” Lady Grace peacefully smiled, “it’s no use his offering *us* eight thousand—or eighteen or even eighty!”

Hugh Crimble stared as at the odd superfluity of this reassurance, almost crude on exquisite lips and contradicting an imputation no one would have indecently made. “Gracious goodness, I hope not! The man surely doesn’t *suppose* you’d traffic.”

She might, while she still smiled at him, have been fairly enjoying the friendly horror she produced. “I don’t quite know what he supposes. But people *have* trafficked; people do; people are trafficking all round.”

“Ah,” Hugh Crimble cried, “that’s what deprives me of my rest and, as a lover of our vast and beneficent art-wealth, poisons my waking hours. That art-wealth is at the mercy of a leak there appears no means of stopping.” She had tapped a spring in him, clearly, and the consequent flood might almost at any moment become copious. “Precious things are going out of our distracted country at a quicker rate than the very quickest—a century and more ago—of their ever coming in.”

She was sharply struck, but was also unmistakably a person in whom stirred thought soon found connections and relations. “Well, I suppose our art-wealth came in—save for those

awkward Elgin Marbles!—mainly by purchase too, didn't it? We ourselves largely took it away from somewhere, didn't we? We didn't *grow* it all."

"We grew some of the loveliest flowers—and on the whole to-day the most exposed." He had been pulled up but for an instant. "Great Gainsboroughs and Sir Joshuas and Romneys and Sargents, great Turners and Constables and old Cromes and Brabazons, form, you'll recognise, a vast garden in themselves. What have we ever for instance more successfully grown than your splendid 'Duchess of Waterbridge'?"

The girl showed herself ready at once to recognise under his eloquence anything he would. "Yes—it's our Sir Joshua, I believe, that Mr. Bender has proclaimed himself particularly 'after.'"

It brought a cloud to her friend's face. "Then he'll be capable of anything."

"Of anything, no doubt, but of making my father capable—! And you haven't at any rate," she said, "so much as seen the picture."

"I beg your pardon—I saw it at the Guildhall three years ago; and am almost afraid of getting again, with a fresh sense of its beauty, a livelier sense of its danger."

Lady Grace, however, was so far from fear that she could even afford pity. "Poor baffled Mr. Bender!"

"Oh, rich and confident Mr. Bender!" Crimble cried. "Once given his money, his confidence is a horrid engine in itself—

there's the rub! I dare say"—the young man saw it all—"he has brought his poisonous cheque."

She gave it her less exasperated wonder. "One has heard of that, but only in the case of some particularly pushing dealer."

"And Mr. Bender, to do him justice, isn't a particularly pushing dealer?"

"No," Lady Grace judiciously returned; "I think he's not a dealer at all, but just what you a moment ago spoke of yourself as being."

He gave a glance at his possibly wild recent past. "A fond true lover?"

"As we *all* were in our lucky time—when we rum-aged Italy and Spain."

He appeared to recognise this complication—of Bender's voracious integrity; but only to push it away. "Well, I don't know whether the best lovers are, or ever were, the best buyers—but I feel to-day that they're the best keepers."

The breath of his emphasis blew, as her eyes showed, on the girl's dimmer fire. "It's as if it were suddenly in the air that you've brought us some light or some help—that you may do something really good for us."

"Do you mean 'mark down,' as they say at the shops, all your greatest claims?"

His chord of sensibility had trembled all gratefully into derision, and not to seem to swagger he had put his possible virtue at its lowest. This she beautifully showed that she

beautifully saw. “I dare say that if you did even that we should have to take it from you.”

“Then it may very well be,” he laughed back, “the reason why I feel, under my delightful, wonderful impression, a bit anxious and nervous and afraid.”

“That shows,” she returned, “that you suspect us of horrors hiding from justice, and that your natural kindness yet shrinks from handing us over!”

Well, clearly, she might put it as she liked—it all came back to his being more charmed. “Heaven knows I’ve wanted a chance at you, but what should you say if, having then at last just taken you in in your so apparent perfection, I should feel it the better part of valour simply to mount my ‘bike’ again and spin away?”

“I should be sure that at the end of the avenue you’d turn right round and come back. You’d think again of Mr. Bender.”

“Whom I don’t, however, you see—if he’s prowling off there—in the least want to meet.” Crimble made the point with gaiety. “I don’t know what I mightn’t do to him—and yet it’s not of my temptation to violence, after all, that I’m most afraid. It’s of the brutal mistake of one’s breaking—with one’s priggish, precious modernity and one’s possibly futile discriminations—into a *general* situation or composition, as we say, so serene and sound and right. What should one do here, out of respect for that felicity, but hold one’s breath and walk on tip-toe? The very celebrations and consecrations, as you tell me, instinctively stay outside. I saw that all,” the young man went on with more weight

in his ardour, "I saw it, while we talked in London, as your natural setting and your native air—and now ten minutes on the spot have made it sink into my spirit. You're a case, all together, of enchanted harmony, of perfect equilibrium—there's nothing to be done or said."

His friend listened to this eloquence with her eyes lowered, then raising them to meet, with a vague insistence, his own; after which something she had seen there appeared to determine in her another motion. She indicated the small landscape that Mr. Bender had, by Lady Sandgate's report, rapidly studied and denounced. "For what do you take that little picture?"

Hugh Crimble went over and looked. "Why, don't you know? It's a jolly little Vandermeer of Delft."

"It's not a base imitation?"

He looked again, but appeared at a loss. "An imitation of Vandermeer?"

"Mr. Bender thinks of Cuyp."

It made the young man ring out: "Then Mr. Bender's doubly dangerous!"

"Singly is enough!" Lady Grace laughed. "But you see you *have* to speak."

"Oh, to *him*, rather, after that—if you'll just take me to him."

"Yes then," she said; but even while she spoke Lord John, who had returned, by the terrace, from his quarter of an hour passed with Lady Imber, was there practically between them; a fact that she had to notice for her other visitor, to whom she was hastily

reduced to naming him.

His lordship eagerly made the most of this tribute of her attention, which had reached his ear; he treated it—her "Oh Lord John!"—as a direct greeting. "Ah Lady Grace! I came back particularly to find you."

She could but explain her predicament. "I was taking Mr. Crimble to see the pictures." And then more pointedly, as her manner had been virtually an introduction of that gentleman, an introduction which Lord John's mere noncommittal stare was as little as possible a response to: "Mr. Crimble's one of the quite new connoisseurs."

"Oh, I'm at the very lowest round of the ladder. But I aspire!" Hugh laughed.

"You'll mount!" said Lady Grace with friendly confidence.

He took it again with gay deprecation. "Ah, if by that time there's anything left here to mount *on!*"

"Let us hope there will be at least what Mr. Bender, poor man, won't have been able to carry off." To which Lady Grace added, as to strike a helpful spark from the personage who had just joined them, but who had the air of wishing to preserve his detachment: "It's to Lord John that we owe Mr. Bender's acquaintance."

Hugh looked at the gentleman to whom they were so indebted. "Then do you happen to know, sir, what your friend means to *do* with his spoil?"

The question got itself but dryly treated, as if it might be

a commercially calculating or interested one. “Oh, not sell it again.”

“Then ship it to New York?” the inquirer pursued, defining himself somehow as not snubbed and, from this point, not snubbable.

That appearance failed none the less to deprive Lord John of a betrayed relish for being able to displease Lady Grace’s odd guest by large assent. “As fast as ever he can—and you can land things there *now*, can’t you? in three or four days.”

“I dare say. But can’t he be induced to have a little mercy?” Hugh sturdily pursued.

Lord John pushed out his lips. “A ‘little’? How much do you want?”

“Well, one wants to be able somehow to stay his hand.”

“I doubt if you can any more stay Mr. Bender’s hand than you can empty his purse.”

“Ah, the Despoilers!” said Crimble with strong expression. “But it’s *we*,” he added, “who are base.”

“‘Base’?”—and Lord John’s surprise was apparently genuine.

“To want only to ‘do business,’ I mean, with our treasures, with our glories.”

Hugh’s words exhaled such a sense of peril as to draw at once Lady Grace. “Ah, but if we’re above that *here*, as you know–!”

He stood smilingly corrected and contrite. “Of course I know—but you must forgive me if I have it on the brain. And show me first of all, won’t you? the Moretto of Brescia.”

"You know then about the Moretto of Brescia?"

"Why, didn't you tell me yourself?" It went on between them for the moment quite as if there had been no Lord John.

"Probably, yes," she recalled; "so how I must have swaggered!" After which she turned to the other visitor with a kindness strained clear of urgency. "Will you also come?"

He confessed to a difficulty—which his whole face begged her also to take account of. "I hoped you'd be at leisure—for something I've so at heart!"

This had its effect; she took a rapid decision and turned persuasively to Crimble—for whom, in like manner, there must have been something in *her* face. "Let Mr. Bender himself then show you. And there are things in the library too."

"Oh yes, there are things in the library." Lord John, happy in his gained advantage and addressing Hugh from the strong ground of an initiation already complete, quite sped him on the way.

Hugh clearly made no attempt to veil the penetration with which he was moved to look from one of these counsellors to the other, though with a ready "Thank-you!" for Lady Grace he the next instant started in pursuit of Mr. Bender.

V

"Your friend seems remarkably hot!" Lord John remarked to his young hostess as soon as they had been left together.

"He has cycled twenty miles. And indeed," she smiled, "he does appear to care for what he cares for!"

Her companion then, during a moment's silence, might have been noting the emphasis of her assent. "Have you known him long?"

"No—not long."

"Nor seen him often?"

"Only once—till now."

"Oh!" said Lord John with another pause. But he soon proceeded. "Let us leave him then to cool! I haven't cycled twenty miles, but I've motored forty very much in the hope of *this*, Lady Grace—the chance of being able to assure you that I too care very much for what I care for." To which he added on an easier note, as to carry off a slight awkwardness while she only waited: "You certainly mustn't let yourself—between us all—be worked to death."

"Oh, such days as this—I" She made light enough of her burden.

"They don't come often to *me* at least, Lady Grace! I hadn't grasped in advance the scale of your fête," he went on; "but since I've the great luck to find you alone—!" He paused for breath,

however, before the full sequence.

She helped him out as through common kindness, but it was a trifle colourless. “Alone or in company, Lord John, I’m always very glad to see you.”

“Then that assurance helps me to wonder if you don’t perhaps gently guess what it is I want to say.” This time indeed she left him to his wonder, so that he had to support himself. “I’ve tried, all considerately—these three months—to let you see for yourself how I feel. I feel very strongly, Lady Grace; so that at last”—and his impatient sincerity took after another instant the jump—“well, I regularly worship you. You’re my absolute ideal. I think of you the whole time.”

She measured out consideration as if it had been a yard of pretty ribbon. “Are you sure you *know* me enough?”

“I think I know a perfect woman when I see one!” Nothing now at least could have been more prompt, and while a decent pity for such a mistake showed in her smile he followed it up. “Isn’t what you rather mean that you haven’t cared sufficiently to know *me?* If so, that can be little by little mended, Lady Grace.” He was in fact altogether gallant about it. “I’m aware of the limits of what I have to show or to offer, but I defy you to find a limit to my possible devotion.”

She deferred to that, but taking it in a lower key. “I believe you’d be very good to me.”

“Well, isn’t *that* something to start with?”—he fairly pounced on it. “I’ll do any blest thing in life you like, I’ll accept any

condition you impose, if you'll only tell me you see your way."

"Shouldn't I have a little more first to see yours?" she asked. "When you say you'll do anything in life I like, isn't there anything you yourself want strongly enough to do?"

He cast a stare about on the suggestions of the scene. "Anything that will make money, you mean?"

"Make money or make reputation—or even just make the time pass."

"Oh, what I have to look to in the way of a career?" If that was her meaning he could show after an instant that he didn't fear it. "Well, your father, dear delightful man, has been so good as to give me to understand that he backs me for a decent deserving creature; and I've noticed, as you doubtless yourself have, that when Lord Theign backs a fellow–!"

He left the obvious moral for her to take up—which she did, but all interrogatively. "The fellow at once comes in for something awfully good?"

"I don't in the least mind your laughing at me," Lord John returned, "for when I put him the question of the lift he'd give me by speaking to you first he bade me simply remember the complete personal liberty in which he leaves you, and yet which doesn't come—take my word!" said the young man sagely —"from his being at all indifferent."

"No," she answered—"father isn't indifferent. But father's 'great'"

"Great indeed!"—her friend took it as with full

comprehension. This appeared not to prevent, however, a second and more anxious thought. "Too great for *you?*"

"Well, he makes me feel—even as his daughter—my extreme comparative smallness."

It was easy, Lord John indicated, to see what she meant "He's a *grand seigneur*, and a serious one—that's what he is: the very type and model of it, down to the ground. So you can imagine," the young man said, "what he makes me feel—most of all when he's so awfully good-natured to me. His being as 'great' as you say and yet backing me—such as I am!—doesn't *that* strike you as a good note for me, the best you could possibly require? For he really *would* like what I propose to you."

She might have been noting, while she thought, that he had risen to ingenuity, to fineness, on the wings of his argument; under the effect of which her reply had the air of a concession. "Yes—he would like it."

"Then he *has* spoken to you?" her suitor eagerly asked.

"He hasn't needed—he has ways of letting one know."

"Yes, yes, he has ways; all his own—like everything else he has. He's wonderful."

She fully agreed. "He's wonderful."

The tone of it appeared somehow to shorten at once for Lord John the rest of his approach to a conclusion. "So you do see your way?"

"Ah—!" she said with a quick sad shrinkage.

"I mean," her visitor hastened to explain, "if he does put it to

you as the very best idea he has for you. When he does that—as I believe him ready to do—will you really and fairly listen to him? I'm certain, honestly, that when you know me better—!" His confidence in short donned a bravery.

"I've been feeling this quarter of an hour," the girl returned, "that I do know you better."

"Then isn't that all I want?—unless indeed I ought perhaps to ask rather if it isn't all *you* do! At any rate," said Lord John, "I may see you again here?"

She waited a moment. "You must have patience with me."

"I *am* having it But *after* your father's appeal."

"Well," she said, "that must come first."

"Then you won't dodge it?"

She looked at him straight "I don't dodge, Lord John."

He admired the manner of it "You look awfully handsome as you say so—and you see what *that* does to me." As to attentuate a little the freedom of which he went on: "May I fondly hope that if Lady Imber too should wish to put in another word for me–?"

"Will I listen to her?"—it brought Lady Grace straight down. "No, Lord John, let me tell you at once that I'll do nothing of the sort Kitty's quite another affair, and I never listen to her a bit more than I can help."

Lord John appeared to feel, on this, that he mustn't too easily, in honour, abandon a person who had presented herself to him as an ally. "Ah, you strike me as a little hard on her. Your father himself—in his looser moments!—takes pleasure in what she

says."

Our young woman's eyes, as they rested on him after this remark, had no mercy for its extreme feebleness. "If you mean that she's the most reckless rattle one knows, and that she never looks so beautiful as when she's at her worst, and that, always clever for where she makes out her interest, she has learnt to 'get round' him till he only sees through her eyes—if you mean *that* I understand you perfectly. But even if you think me horrid for reflecting so on my nearest and dearest, it's not on the side on which he has most confidence in his elder daughter that his youngest is moved to have most confidence in *him*."

Lord John stared as if she had shaken some odd bright fluttering object in his face; but then recovering himself: "He hasn't perhaps an absolutely boundless confidence—"

"In any one in the world but himself?"—she had taken him straight up. "He hasn't indeed, and that's what we must come to; so that even if he likes you as much as you doubtless very justly feel, it won't be because you are right about your being nice, but because *he* is!"

"You mean that if I were wrong about it he would still insist that he isn't?"

Lady Grace was indeed sure. "Absolutely—if he had begun so! He began so with Kitty—that is with allowing her everything."

Lord John appeared struck. "Yes—and he still allows her two thousand."

"I'm glad to hear it—she has never told me how much!" the girl undisguisedly smiled.

"Then perhaps I oughtn't!"—he glowed with the light of contrition.

"Well, you can't help it now," his companion remarked with amusement.

"You mean that he ought to allow *you* as much?" Lord John inquired. "I'm sure you're right, and that he will," he continued quite as in good faith; "but I want you to understand that I don't care in the least what it may be!"

The subject of his suit took the longest look at him she had taken yet. "You're very good to say so!"

If this was ironic the touch fell short, thanks to his perception that they had practically just ceased to be alone. They were in presence of a third figure, who had arrived from the terrace, but whose approach to them was not so immediate as to deprive Lord John of time for another question. "Will you let *him* tell you, at all events, how good he thinks me?—and then let me come back and have it from you again?"

Lady Grace's answer to this was to turn, as he drew nearer, to the person by whom they were now joined. "Lord John desires you should tell me, father, how good you think him."

"'Good,' my dear?—good for what?" said Lord Theign a trifle absurdly, but looking from one of them to the other.

"I feel I must ask *him* to tell you."

"Then I shall give him a chance—as I should particularly like

you to go back and deal with those overwhelming children."

"Ah, they don't overwhelm *you*, father!"—the girl put it with some point.

"If you mean to say I overwhelmed *them*, I dare say I did," he replied—"from my view of that vast collective gape of six hundred painfully plain and perfectly expressionless faces. But that was only for the time: I pumped advice—oh *such* advice!—and they held the large bucket as still as my pet pointer, when I scratch him, holds his back. The bucket, under the stream—"

"Was bound to overflow?" Lady Grace suggested.

"Well, the strong recoil of the wave of intelligence has been not unnaturally followed by the formidable break. You must really," Lord Theign insisted, "go and deal with it."

His daughter's smile, for all this, was perceptibly cold. "You work people up, father, and then leave others to let them down."

"The two things," he promptly replied, "require different natures." To which he simply added, as with the habit of authority, though not of harshness, "Go!"

It was absolute and she yielded; only pausing an instant to look as with a certain gathered meaning from one of the men to the other. Faintly and resignedly sighing she passed away to the terrace and disappeared.

"The nature that *can* let you down—I rather like it, you know!" Lord John threw off. Which, for an airy elegance in them, were perhaps just slightly rash words—his companion gave him so sharp a look as the two were left together.

VI

Face to face with his visitor the master of Dedborough betrayed the impression his daughter appeared to have given him. "She didn't want to go?" And then before Lord John could reply: "What the deuce is the matter with her?"

Lord John took his time. "I think perhaps a little Mr. Crimble."

"And who the deuce is a little Mr. Crimble?"

"A young man who was just with her—and whom she appears to have invited."

"Where is he then?" Lord Theign demanded.

"Off there among the pictures—which he seems partly to have come for."

"Oh!"—it made his lordship easier. "Then he's all right—on such a day."

His companion could none the less just wonder. "Hadn't Lady Grace told you?"

"That he was coming? Not that I remember." But Lord Theign, perceptibly preoccupied, made nothing of this. "We've had other fish to fry, and you know the freedom I allow her."

His friend had a vivid gesture. "My dear man, I only ask to profit by it!" With which there might well have been in Lord John's face a light of comment on the pretension in such a quarter to allow freedom.

Yet it was a pretension that Lord Theign sustained—as to show himself far from all bourgeois narrowness. "She has her friends by the score—at this time of day." There was clearly a claim here also—to *know* the time of day. "But in the matter of friends where, by the way, is your own—of whom I've but just heard?"

"Oh, off there among the pictures too; so they'll have met and taken care of each other." Accounting for this inquirer would be clearly the least of Lord John's difficulties. "I mustn't appear to Bender to have failed him; but I must at once let you know, before I join him, that, seizing my opportunity, I have just very definitely, in fact very pressingly, spoken to Lady Grace. It hasn't been perhaps," he continued, "quite the pick of a chance; but that seemed never to come, and if I'm not too fondly mistaken, at any rate, she listened to me without abhorrence. Only I've led her to expect—for our case—that you'll be so good, without loss of time, as to say the clinching word to her yourself."

"Without loss, you mean, of—a—my daughter's time?" Lord Theign, confessedly and amiably interested, had accepted these intimations—yet with the very blandness that was not accessible to hustling and was never forgetful of its standing privilege of criticism. He had come in from his public duty, a few minutes before, somewhat flushed and blown; but that had presently dropped—to the effect, we should have guessed, of his appearing to Lord John at least as cool as the occasion required. His appearance, we ourselves certainly should have felt, was in all respects charming—with the great note of it the

beautiful restless, almost suspicious, challenge to you, on the part of deep and mixed things in him, his pride and his shyness, his conscience, his taste and his temper, to deny that he was admirably simple. Obviously, at this rate, he had a passion for simplicity—simplicity, above all, of relation with you, and would show you, with the last subtlety of displeasure, his impatience of your attempting anything more with himself. With such an ideal of decent ease he would, confound you, "sink" a hundred other attributes—or the recognition at least and the formulation of them—that you might abjectly have taken for granted in him: just to show you that in a beastly vulgar age you had, and small wonder, a beastly vulgar imagination. He sank thus, surely, in defiance of insistent vulgarity, half his consciousness of his advantages, flattering himself that mere facility and amiability, a true effective, a positively ideal suppression of reference in any one to anything that might complicate, alone floated above. This would be quite his religion, you might infer—to cause his hands to ignore in whatever contact any opportunity, however convenient, for an unfair pull. Which habit it was that must have produced in him a sort of ripe and radiant fairness; if it be allowed us, that is, to figure in so shining an air a nobleman of fifty-three, of an undecided rather than a certified frame or outline, of a head thinly though neatly covered and not measureably massive, of an almost trivial freshness, of a face marked but by a fine inwrought line or two and lighted by a merely charming expression. You might somehow have traced

back the whole character so presented to an ideal privately invoked—that of his establishing in the formal garden of his suffered greatness such easy seats and short perspectives, such winding paths and natural-looking waters, as would mercifully break up the scale. You would perhaps indeed have reflected at the same time that the thought of so much mercy was almost more than anything else the thought of a great option and a great margin—in fine of fifty alternatives. Which remarks of ours, however, leave his lordship with his last immediate question on his hands.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.