

ГЕНРИ ДЖЕЙМС

THE GOLDEN
BOWL —
VOLUME 2

Генри Джеймс
The Golden Bowl — Volume 2

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Henry James

The Golden Bowl — Volume 2

PART FOURTH

XXV

It was not till many days had passed that the Princess began to accept the idea of having done, a little, something she was not always doing, or indeed that of having listened to any inward voice that spoke in a new tone. Yet these instinctive postponements of reflection were the fruit, positively, of recognitions and perceptions already active; of the sense, above all, that she had made, at a particular hour, made by the mere touch of her hand, a difference in the situation so long present to her as practically unattackable. This situation had been occupying, for months and months, the very centre of the garden of her life, but it had reared itself there like some strange, tall tower of ivory, or perhaps rather some wonderful, beautiful, but outlandish pagoda, a structure plated with hard, bright porcelain, coloured and figured and adorned, at the overhanging eaves, with silver bells that tinkled, ever so charmingly, when stirred by chance airs. She had walked round and round it—that was what

she felt; she had carried on her existence in the space left her for circulation, a space that sometimes seemed ample and sometimes narrow: looking up, all the while, at the fair structure that spread itself so amply and rose so high, but never quite making out, as yet, where she might have entered had she wished. She had not wished till now—such was the odd case; and what was doubtless equally odd, besides, was that, though her raised eyes seemed to distinguish places that must serve, from within, and especially far aloft, as apertures and outlooks, no door appeared to give access from her convenient garden level. The great decorated surface had remained consistently impenetrable and inscrutable. At present, however, to her considering mind, it was as if she had ceased merely to circle and to scan the elevation, ceased so vaguely, so quite helplessly to stare and wonder: she had caught herself distinctly in the act of pausing, then in that of lingering, and finally in that of stepping unprecedentedly near. The thing might have been, by the distance at which it kept her, a Mahometan mosque, with which no base heretic could take a liberty; there so hung about it the vision of one's putting off one's shoes to enter, and even, verily, of one's paying with one's life if found there as an interloper. She had not, certainly, arrived at the conception of paying with her life for anything she might do; but it was nevertheless quite as if she had sounded with a tap or two one of the rare porcelain plates. She had knocked, in short—though she could scarce have said whether for admission or for what; she had applied her hand to a cool smooth spot and had

waited to see what would happen. Something had happened; it was as if a sound, at her touch, after a little, had come back to her from within; a sound sufficiently suggesting that her approach had been noted.

If this image, however, may represent our young woman's consciousness of a recent change in her life—a change now but a few days old—it must at the same time be observed that she both sought and found in renewed circulation, as I have called it, a measure of relief from the idea of having perhaps to answer for what she had done. The pagoda in her blooming garden figured the arrangement—how otherwise was it to be named?—by which, so strikingly, she had been able to marry without breaking, as she liked to put it, with the past. She had surrendered herself to her husband without the shadow of a reserve or a condition, and yet she had not, all the while, given up her father—the least little inch. She had compassed the high city of seeing the two men beautifully take to each other, and nothing in her marriage had marked it as more happy than this fact of its having practically given the elder, the lonelier, a new friend. What had moreover all the while enriched the whole aspect of success was that the latter's marriage had been no more measurably paid for than her own. His having taken the same great step in the same free way had not in the least involved the relegation of his daughter. That it was remarkable they should have been able at once so to separate and so to keep together had never for a moment, from however far back, been equivocal to her; that it

was remarkable had in fact quite counted, at first and always, and for each of them equally, as part of their inspiration and their support. There were plenty of singular things they were NOT enamoured of—flights of brilliancy, of audacity, of originality, that, speaking at least for the dear man and herself, were not at all in their line; but they liked to think they had given their life this unusual extension and this liberal form, which many families, many couples, and still more many pairs of couples, would not have found workable. That last truth had been distinctly brought home to them by the bright testimony, the quite explicit envy, of most of their friends, who had remarked to them again and again that they must, on all the showing, to keep on such terms, be people of the highest amiability—equally including in the praise, of course, Amerigo and Charlotte. It had given them pleasure—as how should it not?—to find themselves shed such a glamour; it had certainly, that is, given pleasure to her father and herself, both of them distinguishably of a nature so slow to presume that they would scarce have been sure of their triumph without this pretty reflection of it. So it was that their felicity had fructified; so it was that the ivory tower, visible and admirable doubtless, from any point of the social field, had risen stage by stage. Maggie's actual reluctance to ask herself with proportionate sharpness why she had ceased to take comfort in the sight of it represented accordingly a lapse from that ideal consistency on which her moral comfort almost at any time depended. To remain consistent she had always been capable of cutting down

more or less her prior term.

Moving for the first time in her life as in the darkening shadow of a false position, she reflected that she should either not have ceased to be right—that is, to be confident—or have recognised that she was wrong; though she tried to deal with herself, for a space, only as a silken-coated spaniel who has scrambled out of a pond and who rattles the water from his ears. Her shake of her head, again and again, as she went, was much of that order, and she had the resource, to which, save for the rude equivalent of his generalising bark, the spaniel would have been a stranger, of humming to herself hard as a sign that nothing had happened to her. She had not, so to speak, fallen in; she had had no accident and had not got wet; this at any rate was her pretension until after she began a little to wonder if she mightn't, with or without exposure, have taken cold. She could at all events remember no time at which she had felt so excited, and certainly none—which was another special point—that so brought with it as well the necessity for concealing excitement. This birth of a new eagerness became a high pastime, in her view, precisely by reason of the ingenuity required for keeping the thing born out of sight. The ingenuity was thus a private and absorbing exercise, in the light of which, might I so far multiply my metaphors, I should compare her to the frightened but clinging young mother of an unlawful child. The idea that had possession of her would be, by our new analogy, the proof of her misadventure, but likewise, all the while, only another sign of a relation that was more to

her than anything on earth. She had lived long enough to make out for herself that any deep-seated passion has its pangs as well as its joys, and that we are made by its aches and its anxieties most richly conscious of it. She had never doubted of the force of the feeling that bound her to her husband; but to become aware, almost suddenly, that it had begun to vibrate with a violence that had some of the effect of a strain would, rightly looked at, after all but show that she was, like thousands of women, every day, acting up to the full privilege of passion. Why in the world shouldn't she, with every right—if, on consideration, she saw no good reason against it? The best reason against it would have been the possibility of some consequence disagreeable or inconvenient to others—especially to such others as had never incommoded her by the egotism of THEIR passions; but if once that danger were duly guarded against the fulness of one's measure amounted to no more than the equal use of one's faculties or the proper playing of one's part. It had come to the Princess, obscurely at first, but little by little more conceivably, that her faculties had not for a good while been concomitantly used; the case resembled in a manner that of her once-loved dancing, a matter of remembered steps that had grown vague from her ceasing to go to balls. She would go to balls again—that seemed, freely, even crudely, stated, the remedy; she would take out of the deep receptacles in which she had laid them away the various ornaments congruous with the greater occasions, and of which her store, she liked to think, was none of the smallest. She would have been easily to be figured

for us at this occupation; dipping, at off moments and quiet hours, in snatched visits and by draughty candle-light, into her rich collections and seeing her jewels again a little shyly, but all unmistakably, glow. That in fact may pass as the very picture of her semi-smothered agitation, of the diversion she to some extent successfully found in referring her crisis, so far as was possible, to the mere working of her own needs.

It must be added, however, that she would have been at a loss to determine—and certainly at first—to which order, that of self-control or that of large expression, the step she had taken the afternoon of her husband's return from Matcham with his companion properly belonged. For it had been a step, distinctly, on Maggie's part, her deciding to do something, just then and there, which would strike Amerigo as unusual, and this even though her departure from custom had merely consisted in her so arranging that he wouldn't find her, as he would definitely expect to do, in Eaton Square. He would have, strangely enough, as might seem to him, to come back home for it, and there get the impression of her rather pointedly, or at least all impatiently and independently, awaiting him. These were small variations and mild manoeuvres, but they went accompanied on Maggie's part, as we have mentioned, with an infinite sense of intention. Her watching by his fireside for her husband's return from an absence might superficially have presented itself as the most natural act in the world, and the only one, into the bargain, on which he would positively have reckoned. It fell by this circumstance into

the order of plain matters, and yet the very aspect by which it was, in the event, handed over to her brooding fancy was the fact that she had done with it all she had designed. She had put her thought to the proof, and the proof had shown its edge; this was what was before her, that she was no longer playing with blunt and idle tools, with weapons that didn't cut. There passed across her vision ten times a day the gleam of a bare blade, and at this it was that she most shut her eyes, most knew the impulse to cheat herself with motion and sound. She had merely driven, on a certain Wednesday, to Portland Place, instead of remaining in Eaton Square, and she privately repeated it again and again—there had appeared beforehand no reason why she should have seen the mantle of history flung, by a single sharp sweep, over so commonplace a deed. That, all the same, was what had happened; it had been bitten into her mind, all in an hour, that nothing she had ever done would hereafter, in some way yet to be determined, so count for her—perhaps not even what she had done in accepting, in their old golden Rome, Amerigo's proposal of marriage. And yet, by her little crouching posture there, that of a timid tigress, she had meant nothing recklessly ultimate, nothing clumsily fundamental; so that she called it names, the invidious, the grotesque attitude, holding it up to her own ridicule, reducing so far as she could the portee of what had followed it. She had but wanted to get nearer—nearer to something indeed that she couldn't, that she wouldn't, even to herself, describe; and the degree of this achieved nearness was

what had been in advance incalculable. Her actual multiplication of distractions and suppressions, whatever it did for her, failed to prevent her living over again any chosen minute—for she could choose them, she could fix them—of the freshness of relation produced by her having administered to her husband the first surprise to which she had ever treated him. It had been a poor thing, but it had been all her own, and the whole passage was backwardly there, a great picture hung on the wall of her daily life, for her to make what she would of.

It fell, for retrospect, into a succession of moments that were WATCHABLE still; almost in the manner of the different things done during a scene on the stage, some scene so acted as to have left a great impression on the tenant of one of the stalls. Several of these moments stood out beyond the others, and those she could feel again most, count again like the firm pearls on a string, had belonged more particularly to the lapse of time before dinner—dinner which had been so late, quite at nine o'clock, that evening, thanks to the final lateness of Amerigo's own advent. These were parts of the experience—though in fact there had been a good many of them—between which her impression could continue sharply to discriminate. Before the subsequent passages, much later on, it was to be said, the flame of memory turned to an equalising glow, that of a lamp in some side-chapel in which incense was thick. The great moment, at any rate, for conscious repossession, was doubtless the first: the strange little timed silence which she had fully gauged, on the spot, as altogether

beyond her own intention, but which—for just how long? should she ever really know for just how long?—she could do nothing to break. She was in the smaller drawing-room, in which she always "sat," and she had, by calculation, dressed for dinner on finally coming in. It was a wonder how many things she had calculated in respect to this small incident—a matter for the importance of which she had so quite indefinite a measure. He would be late—he would be very late; that was the one certainty that seemed to look her in the face. There was still also the possibility that if he drove with Charlotte straight to Eaton Square he might think it best to remain there even on learning she had come away. She had left no message for him on any such chance; this was another of her small shades of decision, though the effect of it might be to keep him still longer absent. He might suppose she would already have dined; he might stay, with all he would have to tell, just on purpose to be nice to her father. She had known him to stretch the point, to these beautiful ends, far beyond that; he had more than once stretched it to the sacrifice of the opportunity of dressing.

If she herself had now avoided any such sacrifice, and had made herself, during the time at her disposal, quite inordinately fresh and quite positively smart, this had probably added, while she waited and waited, to that very tension of spirit in which she was afterwards to find the image of her having crouched. She did her best, quite intensely, by herself, to banish any such appearance; she couldn't help it if she couldn't read her pale novel—ah, that, *par exemple*, was beyond her! but she could at

least sit by the lamp with the book, sit there with her newest frock, worn for the first time, sticking out, all round her, quite stiff and grand; even perhaps a little too stiff and too grand for a familiar and domestic frock, yet marked none the less, this time, she ventured to hope, by incontestable intrinsic merit. She had glanced repeatedly at the clock, but she had refused herself the weak indulgence of walking up and down, though the act of doing so, she knew, would make her feel, on the polished floor, with the rustle and the "hang," still more beautifully bedecked. The difficulty was that it would also make her feel herself still more sharply in a state; which was exactly what she proposed not to do. The only drops of her anxiety had been when her thought strayed complacently, with her eyes, to the front of her gown, which was in a manner a refuge, a beguilement, especially when she was able to fix it long enough to wonder if it would at last really satisfy Charlotte. She had ever been, in respect to her clothes, rather timorous and uncertain; for the last year, above all, she had lived in the light of Charlotte's possible and rather inscrutable judgment of them. Charlotte's own were simply the most charming and interesting that any woman had ever put on; there was a kind of poetic justice in her being at last able, in this particular, thanks to means, thanks quite to omnipotence, freely to exercise her genius. But Maggie would have described herself as, in these connections, constantly and intimately "torn"; conscious on one side of the impossibility of copying her companion and conscious on the

other of the impossibility of sounding her, independently, to the bottom. Yes, it was one of the things she should go down to her grave without having known—how Charlotte, after all had been said, really thought her stepdaughter looked under any supposedly ingenious personal experiment. She had always been lovely about the stepdaughter's material braveries—had done, for her, the very best with them; but there had ever fitfully danced at the back of Maggie's head the suspicion that these expressions were mercies, not judgments, embodying no absolute, but only a relative, frankness. Hadn't Charlotte, with so perfect a critical vision, if the truth were known, given her up as hopeless—hopeless by a serious standard, and thereby invented for her a different and inferior one, in which, as the only thing to be done, she patiently and soothingly abetted her? Hadn't she, in other words, assented in secret despair, perhaps even in secret irritation, to her being ridiculous?—so that the best now possible was to wonder, once in a great while, whether one mightn't give her the surprise of something a little less out of the true note than usual. Something of this kind was the question that Maggie, while the absentees still delayed, asked of the appearance she was endeavouring to present; but with the result, repeatedly again, that it only went and lost itself in the thick air that had begun more and more to hang, for our young woman, over her accumulations of the unanswered. They were THERE, these accumulations; they were like a roomful of confused objects, never as yet "sorted," which for some time now she had been

passing and re-passing, along the corridor of her life. She passed it when she could without opening the door; then, on occasion, she turned the key to throw in a fresh contribution. So it was that she had been getting things out of the way. They rejoined the rest of the confusion; it was as if they found their place, by some instinct of affinity, in the heap. They knew, in short, where to go; and when she, at present, by a mental act, once more pushed the door open, she had practically a sense of method and experience. What she should never know about Charlotte's thought—she tossed THAT in. It would find itself in company, and she might at last have been standing there long enough to see it fall into its corner. The sight moreover would doubtless have made her stare, had her attention been more free—the sight of the mass of vain things, congruous, incongruous, that awaited every addition. It made her in fact, with a vague gasp, turn away, and what had further determined this was the final sharp extinction of the inward scene by the outward. The quite different door had opened and her husband was there.

It had been as strange as she could consent, afterwards, to think it; it had been, essentially, what had made the abrupt bend in her life: he had come back, had followed her from the other house, VISIBLY uncertain—this was written in the face he for the first minute showed her. It had been written only for those seconds, and it had appeared to go, quickly, after they began to talk; but while it lasted it had been written large, and, though she didn't quite know what she had expected of him, she felt

she hadn't expected the least shade of embarrassment. What had made the embarrassment—she called it embarrassment so as to be able to assure herself she put it at the very worst— what had made the particular look was his thus distinguishably wishing to see how he should find her. Why FIRST—that had, later on, kept coming to her; the question dangled there as if it were the key to everything. With the sense of it on the spot, she had felt, overwhelmingly, that she was significant, that so she must instantly strike him, and that this had a kind of violence beyond what she had intended. It was in fact even at the moment not absent from her view that he might easily have made an abject fool of her—at least for the time. She had indeed, for just ten seconds, been afraid of some such turn: the uncertainty in his face had become so, the next thing, an uncertainty in the very air. Three words of impatience the least bit loud, some outbreak of "What in the world are you 'up to', and what do you mean?" any note of that sort would instantly have brought her low—and this all the more that heaven knew she hadn't in any manner designed to be high. It was such a trifle, her small breach with custom, or at any rate with his natural presumption, that all magnitude of wonder had already had, before one could deprecate the shadow of it, the effect of a complication. It had made for him some difference that she couldn't measure, this meeting him at home and alone instead of elsewhere and with others, and back and back it kept coming to her that the blankness he showed her before he was able to SEE might, should she choose to insist

on it, have a meaning—have, as who should say, an historic value— beyond the importance of momentary expressions in general. She had naturally had on the spot no ready notion of what he might want to see; it was enough for a ready notion, not to speak of a beating heart, that he DID see, that he saw his wife in her own drawing-room at the hour when she would most properly be there. He hadn't in any way challenged her, it was true, and, after those instants during which she now believed him to have been harbouring the impression of something unusually prepared and pointed in her attitude and array, he had advanced upon her smiling and smiling, and thus, without hesitation at the last, had taken her into his arms. The hesitation had been at the first, and she at present saw that he had surmounted it without her help. She had given him no help; for if, on the one hand, she couldn't speak for hesitation, so on the other—and especially as he didn't ask her—she couldn't explain why she was agitated. She had known it all the while down to her toes, known it in his presence with fresh intensity, and if he had uttered but a question it would have pressed in her the spring of recklessness. It had been strange that the most natural thing of all to say to him should have had that appearance; but she was more than ever conscious that any appearance she had would come round, more or less straight, to her father, whose life was now so quiet, on the basis accepted for it, that any alteration of his consciousness even in the possible sense of enlivenment, would make their precious equilibrium waver. THAT was at the bottom

of her mind, that their equilibrium was everything, and that it was practically precarious, a matter of a hair's breadth for the loss of the balance. It was the equilibrium, or at all events her conscious fear about it, that had brought her heart into her mouth; and the same fear was, on either side, in the silent look she and Amerigo had exchanged. The happy balance that demanded this amount of consideration was truly thus, as by its own confession, a delicate matter; but that her husband had also HIS habit of anxiety and his general caution only brought them, after all, more closely together. It would have been most beautifully, therefore, in the name of the equilibrium, and in that of her joy at their feeling so exactly the same about it, that she might have spoken if she had permitted the truth on the subject of her behaviour to ring out—on the subject of that poor little behaviour which was for the moment so very limited a case of eccentricity.

"'Why, why' have I made this evening such a point of our not all dining together? Well, because I've all day been so wanting you alone that I finally couldn't bear it, and that there didn't seem any great reason why I should try to. THAT came to me—funny as it may at first sound, with all the things we've so wonderfully got into the way of bearing for each other. You've seemed these last days—I don't know what: more absent than ever before, too absent for us merely to go on so. It's all very well, and I perfectly see how beautiful it is, all round; but there comes a day when something snaps, when the full cup, filled to the very brim, begins to flow over. That's what has happened to

my need of you—the cup, all day, has been too full to carry. So here I am with it, spilling it over you—and just for the reason that is the reason of my life. After all, I've scarcely to explain that I'm as much in love with you now as the first hour; except that there are some hours—which I know when they come, because they almost frighten me—that show me I'm even more so. They come of themselves—and, ah, they've been coming! After all, after all—" Some such words as those were what DIDN'T ring out, yet it was as if even the unuttered sound had been quenched here in its own quaver. It was where utterance would have broken down by its very weight if he had let it get so far. Without that extremity, at the end of a moment, he had taken in what he needed to take—that his wife was TESTIFYING, that she adored and missed and desired him. "After all, after all," since she put it so, she was right. That was what he had to respond to; that was what, from the moment that, as has been said, he "saw," he had to treat as the most pertinent thing possible. He held her close and long, in expression of their personal reunion—this, obviously, was one way of doing so. He rubbed his cheek, tenderly, and with a deep vague murmur, against her face, that side of her face she was not pressing to his breast. That was, not less obviously, another way, and there were ways enough, in short, for his extemporised ease, for the good humour she was afterwards to find herself thinking of as his infinite tact. This last was partly, no doubt, because the question of tact might be felt as having come up at the end of a quarter of an hour during which

he had liberally talked and she had genially questioned. He had told her of his day, the happy thought of his roundabout journey with Charlotte, all their cathedral-hunting adventure, and how it had turned out rather more of an affair than they expected. The moral of it was, at any rate, that he was tired, verily, and must have a bath and dress—to which end she would kindly excuse him for the shortest time possible. She was to remember afterwards something that had passed between them on this—how he had looked, for her, during an instant, at the door, before going out, how he had met her asking him, in hesitation first, then quickly in decision, whether she couldn't help him by going up with him. He had perhaps also for a moment hesitated, but he had declined her offer, and she was to preserve, as I say, the memory of the smile with which he had opined that at that rate they wouldn't dine till ten o'clock and that he should go straighter and faster alone. Such things, as I say, were to come back to her—they played, through her full after-sense, like lights on the whole impression; the subsequent parts of the experience were not to have blurred their distinctness. One of these subsequent parts, the first, had been the not inconsiderable length, to her later and more analytic consciousness, of this second wait for her husband's reappearance. She might certainly, with the best will in the world, had she gone up with him, have been more in his way than not, since people could really, almost always, hurry better without help than with it. Still, she could actually hardly have made him take more time than he struck her taking, though

it must indeed be added that there was now in this much-thinking little person's state of mind no mere crudity of impatience. Something had happened, rapidly, with the beautiful sight of him and with the drop of her fear of having annoyed him by making him go to and fro. Subsidence of the fearsome, for Maggie's spirit, was always, at first, positive emergence of the sweet, and it was long since anything had been so sweet to her as the particular quality suddenly given by her present emotion to the sense of possession.

XXVI

Amerigo was away from her again, as she sat there, as she walked there without him—for she had, with the difference of his presence in the house, ceased to keep herself from moving about; but the hour was filled nevertheless with the effect of his nearness, and above all with the effect, strange in an intimacy so established, of an almost renewed vision of the facts of his aspect. She had seen him last but five days since, yet he had stood there before her as if restored from some far country, some long voyage, some combination of dangers or fatigues. This unquenchable variety in his appeal to her interest, what did it mean but that—reduced to the flatness of mere statement—she was married, by good fortune, to an altogether dazzling person? That was an old, old story, but the truth of it shone out to her like the beauty of some family picture, some mellow portrait of an ancestor, that she might have been looking at, almost in surprise, after a long intermission. The dazzling person was upstairs and she was down, and there were moreover the other facts of the selection and decision that this demonstration of her own had required, and of the constant care that the equilibrium involved; but she had, all the same, never felt so absorbingly married, so abjectly conscious of a master of her fate. He could do what he would with her; in fact what was actually happening was that he was actually doing it. "What he would," what he REALLY would

—only that quantity itself escaped perhaps, in the brightness of the high harmony, familiar naming and discussing. It was enough of a recognition for her that, whatever the thing he might desire, he would always absolutely bring it off. She knew at this moment, without a question, with the fullest surrender, how he had brought off, in her, by scarce more than a single allusion, a perfect flutter of tenderness. If he had come back tired, tired from his long day, the exertion had been, literally, in her service and her father's. They two had sat at home at peace, the Principino between them, the complications of life kept down, the bores sifted out, the large ease of the home preserved, because of the way the others held the field and braved the weather. Amerigo never complained—any more than, for that matter, Charlotte did; but she seemed to see to-night as she had never yet quite done that their business of social representation, conceived as they conceived it, beyond any conception of her own, and conscientiously carried out, was an affair of living always in harness. She remembered Fanny Assingham's old judgment, that friend's description of her father and herself as not living at all, as not knowing what to do or what might be done for them; and there came back to her with it an echo of the long talk they had had together, one September day at Fawns, under the trees, when she put before him this dictum of Fanny's.

That occasion might have counted for them—she had already often made the reflection—as the first step in an existence more intelligently arranged. It had been an hour from which the chain

of causes and consequences was definitely traceable—so many things, and at the head of the list her father's marriage, having appeared to her to flow from Charlotte's visit to Fawns, and that event itself having flowed from the memorable talk. But what perhaps most came out in the light of these concatenations was that it had been, for all the world, as if Charlotte had been "had in," as the servants always said of extra help, because they had thus suffered it to be pointed out to them that if their family coach lumbered and stuck the fault was in its lacking its complement of wheels. Having but three, as they might say, it had wanted another, and what had Charlotte done from the first but begin to act, on the spot, and ever so smoothly and beautifully, as a fourth? Nothing had been, immediately, more manifest than the greater grace of the movement of the vehicle—as to which, for the completeness of her image, Maggie was now supremely to feel how every strain had been lightened for herself. So far as SHE was one of the wheels she had but to keep in her place; since the work was done for her she felt no weight, and it wasn't too much to acknowledge that she had scarce to turn round. She had a long pause before the fire during which she might have been fixing with intensity her projected vision, have been conscious even of its taking an absurd, fantastic shape. She might have been watching the family coach pass and noting that, somehow, Amerigo and Charlotte were pulling it while she and her father were not so much as pushing. They were seated inside together, dandling the Principino and holding him up to the windows, to

see and be seen, like an infant positively royal; so that the exertion was ALL with the others. Maggie found in this image a repeated challenge; again and yet again she paused before the fire: after which, each time, in the manner of one for whom a strong light has suddenly broken, she gave herself to livelier movement. She had seen herself at last, in the picture she was studying, suddenly jump from the coach; whereupon, frankly, with the wonder of the sight, her eyes opened wider and her heart stood still for a moment. She looked at the person so acting as if this person were somebody else, waiting with intensity to see what would follow. The person had taken a decision—which was evidently because an impulse long gathering had at last felt a sharpest pressure. Only how was the decision to be applied?— what, in particular, would the figure in the picture do? She looked about her, from the middle of the room, under the force of this question, as if THERE, exactly, were the field of action involved. Then, as the door opened again, she recognised, whatever the action, the form, at any rate, of a first opportunity. Her husband had reappeared—he stood before her refreshed, almost radiant, quite reassuring. Dressed, anointed, fragrant, ready, above all, for his dinner, he smiled at her over the end of their delay. It was as if her opportunity had depended on his look—and now she saw that it was good. There was still, for the instant, something in suspense, but it passed more quickly than on his previous entrance. He was already holding out his arms. It was, for hours and hours, later on, as if she had somehow been lifted aloft, were floated

and carried on some warm high tide beneath which stumbling blocks had sunk out of sight. This came from her being again, for the time, in the enjoyment of confidence, from her knowing, as she believed, what to do. All the next day, and all the next, she appeared to herself to know it. She had a plan, and she rejoiced in her plan: this consisted of the light that, suddenly breaking into her restless reverie, had marked the climax of that vigil. It had come to her as a question—"What if I've abandoned THEM, you know? What if I've accepted too passively the funny form of our life?" There would be a process of her own by which she might do differently in respect to Amerigo and Charlotte—a process quite independent of any process of theirs. Such a solution had but to rise before her to affect her, to charm her, with its simplicity, an advantageous simplicity she had been stupid, for so long, not to have been struck by; and the simplicity meanwhile seemed proved by the success that had already begun to attend her. She had only had herself to do something to see how immediately it answered. This consciousness of its having answered with her husband was the uplifting, sustaining wave. He had "met" her—she so put it to herself; met her with an effect of generosity and of gaiety, in especial, on his coming back to her ready for dinner, which she wore in her breast as the token of an escape for them both from something not quite definite, but clearly, much less good. Even at that moment, in fact, her plan had begun to work; she had been, when he brightly reappeared, in the act of plucking it out of the heart of her earnestness—plucking it, in

the garden of thought, as if it had been some full-blown flower that she could present to him on the spot. Well, it was the flower of participation, and as that, then and there, she held it out to him, putting straightway into execution the idea, so needlessly, so absurdly obscured, of her SHARING with him, whatever the enjoyment, the interest, the experience might be—and sharing also, for that matter, with Charlotte.

She had thrown herself, at dinner, into every feature of the recent adventure of the companions, letting him see, without reserve, that she wished to hear everything about it, and making Charlotte in particular, Charlotte's judgment of Matcham, Charlotte's aspect, her success there, her effect traceably produced, her clothes inimitably worn, her cleverness gracefully displayed, her social utility, in fine, brilliantly exemplified, the subject of endless inquiry. Maggie's inquiry was most empathetic, moreover, for the whole happy thought of the cathedral-hunt, which she was so glad they had entertained, and as to the pleasant results of which, down to the cold beef and bread-and-cheese, the queer old smell and the dirty table-cloth at the inn, Amerigo was good-humouredly responsive. He had looked at her across the table, more than once, as if touched by the humility of this welcome offered to impressions at second-hand, the amusements, the large freedoms only of others—as if recognising in it something fairly exquisite; and at the end, while they were alone, before she had rung for a servant, he had renewed again his condonation of the little irregularity, such as it

was, on which she had ventured. They had risen together to come upstairs; he had been talking at the last about some of the people, at the very last of all about Lady Castledean and Mr. Blint; after which she had once more broken ground on the matter of the "type" of Gloucester. It brought her, as he came round the table to join her, yet another of his kind conscious stares, one of the looks, visibly beguiled, but at the same time not invisibly puzzled, with which he had already shown his sense of this charming grace of her curiosity. It was as if he might for a moment be going to say:—"You needn't PRETEND, dearest, quite so hard, needn't think it necessary to care quite so much!"—it was as if he stood there before her with some such easy intelligence, some such intimate reassurance, on his lips. Her answer would have been all ready—that she wasn't in the least pretending; and she looked up at him, while he took her hand, with the maintenance, the real persistence, of her lucid little plan in her eyes. She wanted him to understand from that very moment that she was going to be WITH him again, quite with them, together, as she doubtless hadn't been since the "funny" changes—that was really all one could call them—into which they had each, as for the sake of the others, too easily and too obligingly slipped. They had taken too much for granted that their life together required, as people in London said, a special "form"—which was very well so long as the form was kept only for the outside world and was made no more of among themselves than the pretty mould of an iced pudding, or something of that sort, into which, to

help yourself, you didn't hesitate to break with the spoon. So much as that she would, with an opening, have allowed herself furthermore to observe; she wanted him to understand how her scheme embraced Charlotte too; so that if he had but uttered the acknowledgment she judged him on the point of making—the acknowledgment of his catching at her brave little idea for their case—she would have found herself, as distinctly, voluble almost to eloquence.

What befell, however, was that even while she thus waited she felt herself present at a process taking place rather deeper within him than the occasion, on the whole, appeared to require— a process of weighing something in the balance, of considering, deciding, dismissing. He had guessed that she was there with an idea, there in fact by reason of her idea; only this, oddly enough, was what at the last stayed his words. She was helped to these perceptions by his now looking at her still harder than he had yet done—which really brought it to the turn of a hair, for her, that she didn't make sure his notion of her idea was the right one. It was the turn of a hair, because he had possession of her hands and was bending toward her, ever so kindly, as if to see, to understand, more, or possibly give more—she didn't know which; and that had the effect of simply putting her, as she would have said, in his power. She gave up, let her idea go, let everything go; her one consciousness was that he was taking her again into his arms. It was not till afterwards that she discriminated as to this; felt how the act operated with him instead of the words he

hadn't uttered—operated, in his view, as probably better than any words, as always better, in fact, at any time, than anything. Her acceptance of it, her response to it, inevitable, foredoomed, came back to her, later on, as a virtual assent to the assumption he had thus made that there was really nothing such a demonstration didn't anticipate and didn't dispose of, and that the spring acting within herself moreover might well have been, beyond any other, the impulse legitimately to provoke it. It made, for any issue, the third time since his return that he had drawn her to his breast; and at present, holding her to his side as they left the room, he kept her close for their moving into the hall and across it, kept her for their slow return together to the apartments above. He had been right, overwhelmingly right, as to the felicity of his tenderness and the degree of her sensibility, but even while she felt these things sweep all others away she tasted of a sort of terror of the weakness they produced in her. It was still, for her, that she had positively something to do, and that she mustn't be weak for this, must much rather be strong. For many hours after, none the less, she remained weak—if weak it was; though holding fast indeed to the theory of her success, since her agitated overture had been, after all, so unmistakably met.

She recovered soon enough on the whole, the sense that this left her Charlotte always to deal with—Charlotte who, at any rate, however SHE might meet overtures, must meet them, at the worst, more or less differently. Of that inevitability, of such other ranges of response as were open to Charlotte, Maggie took the

measure in approaching her, on the morrow of her return from Matcham, with the same show of desire to hear all her story. She wanted the whole picture from her, as she had wanted it from her companion, and, promptly, in Eaton Square, whither, without the Prince, she repaired, almost ostentatiously, for the purpose, this purpose only, she brought her repeatedly back to the subject, both in her husband's presence and during several scraps of independent colloquy. Before her father, instinctively, Maggie took the ground that his wish for interesting echoes would be not less than her own—allowing, that is, for everything his wife would already have had to tell him, for such passages, between them, as might have occurred since the evening before. Joining them after luncheon, reaching them, in her desire to proceed with the application of her idea, before they had quitted the breakfast-room, the scene of their mid-day meal, she referred, in her parent's presence, to what she might have lost by delay, and expressed the hope that there would be an anecdote or two left for her to pick up. Charlotte was dressed to go out, and her husband, it appeared, rather positively prepared not to; he had left the table, but was seated near the fire with two or three of the morning papers and the residuum of the second and third posts on a stand beside him—more even than the usual extravagance, as Maggie's glance made out, of circulars, catalogues, advertisements, announcements of sales, foreign envelopes and foreign handwritings that were as unmistakable as foreign clothes. Charlotte, at the window, looking into the

side-street that abutted on the Square, might have been watching for their visitor's advent before withdrawing; and in the light, strange and coloured, like that of a painted picture, which fixed the impression for her, objects took on values not hitherto so fully shown. It was the effect of her quickened sensibility; she knew herself again in presence of a problem, in need of a solution for which she must intensely work: that consciousness, lately born in her, had been taught the evening before to accept a temporary lapse, but had quickly enough again, with her getting out of her own house and her walking across half the town—for she had come from Portland Place on foot—found breath still in its lungs.

It exhaled this breath in a sigh, faint and unheard; her tribute, while she stood there before speaking, to realities looming through the golden mist that had already begun to be scattered. The conditions facing her had yielded, for the time, to the golden mist—had considerably melted away; but there they were again, definite, and it was for the next quarter of an hour as if she could have counted them one by one on her fingers. Sharp to her above all was the renewed attestation of her father's comprehensive acceptances, which she had so long regarded as of the same quality with her own, but which, so distinctly now, she should have the complication of being obliged to deal with separately. They had not yet struck her as absolutely extraordinary—which had made for her lumping them with her own, since her view of her own had but so lately begun to change; though it instantly stood out for her that there was really no new judgment of them

she should be able to show without attracting in some degree his attention, without perhaps exciting his surprise and making thereby, for the situation she shared with him, some difference. She was reminded and warned by the concrete image; and for a minute Charlotte's face, immediately presented to her, affected her as searching her own to see the reminder tell. She had not less promptly kissed her stepmother, and then had bent over her father, from behind, and laid her cheek upon him; little amenities tantamount heretofore to an easy change of guard—Charlotte's own frequent, though always cheerful, term of comparison for this process of transfer. Maggie figured thus as the relieving sentry, and so smoothly did use and custom work for them that her mate might even, on this occasion, after acceptance of the pass-word, have departed without irrelevant and, in strictness, unsoldierly gossip. This was not, none the less, what happened; inasmuch as if our young woman had been floated over her first impulse to break the existing charm at a stroke, it yet took her but an instant to sound, at any risk, the note she had been privately practising. If she had practised it the day before, at dinner, on Amerigo, she knew but the better how to begin for it with Mrs. Verver, and it immensely helped her, for that matter, to be able at once to speak of the Prince as having done more to quicken than to soothe her curiosity. Frankly and gaily she had come to ask—to ask what, in their unusually prolonged campaign, the two had achieved. She had got out of her husband, she admitted, what she could, but husbands were never the persons who answered such

questions ideally. He had only made her more curious, and she had arrived early, this way, in order to miss as little as possible of Charlotte's story.

"Wives, papa," she said; "are always much better reporters — though I grant," she added for Charlotte, "that fathers are not much better than husbands. He never," she smiled, "tells me more than a tenth of what you tell him; so I hope you haven't told him everything yet, since in that case I shall probably have lost the best part of it." Maggie went, she went—she felt herself going; she reminded herself of an actress who had been studying a part and rehearsing it, but who suddenly, on the stage, before the footlights, had begun to improvise, to speak lines not in the text. It was this very sense of the stage and the footlights that kept her up, made her rise higher: just as it was the sense of action that logically involved some platform—action quite positively for the first time in her life, or, counting in the previous afternoon, for the second. The platform remained for three or four days thus sensibly under her feet, and she had all the while, with it, the inspiration of quite remarkably, of quite heroically improvising. Preparation and practice had come but a short way; her part opened out, and she invented from moment to moment what to say and to do. She had but one rule of art—to keep within bounds and not lose her head; certainly she might see for a week how far that would take her. She said to herself, in her excitement, that it was perfectly simple: to bring about a difference, touch by touch, without letting either of the three, and least of all her father,

so much as suspect her hand. If they should suspect they would want a reason, and the humiliating truth was that she wasn't ready with a reason—not, that is, with what she would have called a reasonable one. She thought of herself, instinctively, beautifully, as having dealt, all her life, at her father's side and by his example, only in reasonable reasons; and what she would really have been most ashamed of would be to produce for HIM, in this line, some inferior substitute. Unless she were in a position to plead, definitely, that she was jealous she should be in no position to plead, decently, that she was dissatisfied. This latter condition would be a necessary implication of the former; without the former behind it it would HAVE to fall to the ground. So had the case, wonderfully, been arranged for her; there was a card she could play, but there was only one, and to play it would be to end the game. She felt herself—as at the small square green table, between the tall old silver candlesticks and the neatly arranged counters—her father's playmate and partner; and what it constantly came back to, in her mind, was that for her to ask a question, to raise a doubt, to reflect in any degree on the play of the others, would be to break the charm. The charm she had to call it, since it kept her companion so constantly engaged, so perpetually seated and so contentedly occupied. To say anything at all would be, in fine, to have to say WHY she was jealous; and she could, in her private hours, but stare long, with suffused eyes, at that impossibility.

By the end of a week, the week that had begun, especially,

with her morning hour, in Eaton Square, between her father and his wife, her consciousness of being beautifully treated had become again verily greater than her consciousness of anything else; and I must add, moreover, that she at last found herself rather oddly wondering what else, as a consciousness, could have been quite so overwhelming. Charlotte's response to the experiment of being more with her OUGHT, as she very well knew, to have stamped the experiment with the feeling of success; so that if the success itself seemed a boon less substantial than the original image of it, it enjoyed thereby a certain analogy with our young woman's aftertaste of Amerigo's own determined demonstrations. Maggie was to have retained, for that matter, more than one aftertaste, and if I have spoken of the impressions fixed in her as soon as she had, so insidiously, taken the field, a definite note must be made of her perception, during those moments, of Charlotte's prompt uncertainty. She had shown, no doubt—she couldn't not have shown—that she had arrived with an idea; quite exactly as she had shown her husband, the night before, that she was awaiting him with a sentiment. This analogy in the two situations was to keep up for her the remembrance of a kinship of expression in the two faces in respect to which all she as yet professed to herself was that she had affected them, or at any rate the sensibility each of them so admirably covered, in the same way. To make the comparison at all was, for Maggie, to return to it often, to brood upon it, to extract from it the last dregs of its interest—to play with it, in short, nervously, vaguely,

incessantly, as she might have played with a medallion containing on either side a cherished little portrait and suspended round her neck by a gold chain of a firm fineness that no effort would ever snap. The miniatures were back to back, but she saw them forever face to face, and when she looked from one to the other she found in Charlotte's eyes the gleam of the momentary "What does she really want?" that had come and gone for her in the Prince's. So again, she saw the other light, the light touched into a glow both in Portland Place and in Eaton Square, as soon as she had betrayed that she wanted no harm—wanted no greater harm of Charlotte, that is, than to take in that she meant to go out with her. She had been present at that process as personally as she might have been present at some other domestic incident—the hanging of a new picture, say, or the fitting of the Principino with his first little trousers.

She remained present, accordingly, all the week, so charmingly and systematically did Mrs. Verver now welcome her company. Charlotte had but wanted the hint, and what was it but the hint, after all, that, during the so subdued but so ineffaceable passage in the breakfast-room, she had seen her take? It had been taken moreover not with resignation, not with qualifications or reserves, however bland; it had been taken with avidity, with gratitude, with a grace of gentleness that supplanted explanations. The very liberality of this accommodation might indeed have appeared in the event to give its own account of the matter—as if it had fairly written the Princess down as a

person of variations and had accordingly conformed but to a rule of tact in accepting these caprices for law. The caprice actually prevailing happened to be that the advent of one of the ladies anywhere should, till the fit had changed, become the sign, unfailingly, of the advent of the other; and it was emblazoned, in rich colour, on the bright face of this period, that Mrs. Verver only wished to know, on any occasion, what was expected of her, only held herself there for instructions, in order even to better them if possible. The two young women, while the passage lasted, became again very much the companions of other days, the days of Charlotte's prolonged visits to the admiring and bountiful Maggie, the days when equality of condition for them had been all the result of the latter's native vagueness about her own advantages. The earlier elements flushed into life again, the frequency, the intimacy, the high pitch of accompanying expression—appreciation, endearment, confidence; the rarer charm produced in each by this active contribution to the felicity of the other: all enhanced, furthermore—enhanced or qualified, who should say which?—by a new note of diplomacy, almost of anxiety, just sensible on Charlotte's part in particular; of intensity of observance, in the matter of appeal and response, in the matter of making sure the Princess might be disposed or gratified, that resembled an attempt to play again, with more refinement, at disparity of relation. Charlotte's attitude had, in short, its moments of flowering into pretty excesses of civility, self-effacements in the presence of others, sudden little formalisms

of suggestion and recognition, that might have represented her sense of the duty of not "losing sight" of a social distinction. This impression came out most for Maggie when, in their easier intervals, they had only themselves to regard, and when her companion's inveteracy of never passing first, of not sitting till she was seated, of not interrupting till she appeared to give leave, of not forgetting, too, familiarly, that in addition to being important she was also sensitive, had the effect of throwing over their intercourse a kind of silver tissue of decorum. It hung there above them like a canopy of state, a reminder that though the lady-in-waiting was an established favourite, safe in her position, a little queen, however, good-natured, was always a little queen and might, with small warning, remember it.

And yet another of these concomitants of feverish success, all the while, was the perception that in another quarter too things were being made easy. Charlotte's alacrity in meeting her had, in one sense, operated slightly overmuch as an intervention: it had begun to reabsorb her at the very hour of her husband's showing her that, to be all there, as the phrase was, he likewise only required—as one of the other phrases was too—the straight tip. She had heard him talk about the straight tip, in his moods of amusement at English slang, in his remarkable displays of assimilative power, power worthy of better causes and higher inspirations; and he had taken it from her, at need, in a way that, certainly in the first glow of relief, had made her brief interval seem large. Then, however, immediately, and even

though superficially, there had declared itself a readjustment of relations to which she was, once more, practically a little sacrificed. "I must do everything," she had said, "without letting papa see what I do—at least till it's done!" but she scarce knew how she proposed, even for the next few days, to blind or beguile this participant in her life. What had in fact promptly enough happened, she presently recognised, was that if her stepmother had beautifully taken possession of her, and if she had virtually been rather snatched again thereby from her husband's side, so, on the other hand, this had, with as little delay, entailed some very charming assistance for her in Eaton Square. When she went home with Charlotte, from whatever happy demonstration, for the benefit of the world in which they supposed themselves to live, that there was no smallest reason why their closer association shouldn't be public and acclaimed—at these times she regularly found that Amerigo had come either to sit with his father-in-law in the absence of the ladies, or to make, on his side, precisely some such display of the easy working of the family life as would represent the equivalent of her excursions with Charlotte. Under this particular impression it was that everything in Maggie most melted and went to pieces—every thing, that is, that belonged to her disposition to challenge the perfection of their common state. It divided them again, that was true, this particular turn of the tide—cut them up afresh into pairs and parties; quite as if a sense for the equilibrium was what, between them all, had most power of insistence; quite as if Amerigo himself were

all the while, at bottom, equally thinking of it and watching it. But, as against that, he was making her father not miss her, and he could have rendered neither of them a more excellent service. He was acting in short on a cue, the cue given him by observation; it had been enough for him to see the shade of change in her behaviour; his instinct for relations, the most exquisite conceivable, prompted him immediately to meet and match the difference, to play somehow into its hands. That was what it was, she renewedly felt, to have married a man who was, sublimely, a gentleman; so that, in spite of her not wanting to translate ALL their delicacies into the grossness of discussion, she yet found again and again, in Portland Place, moments for saying: "If I didn't love you, you know, for yourself, I should still love you for HIM." He looked at her, after such speeches, as Charlotte looked, in Eaton Square, when she called HER attention to his benevolence: through the dimness of the almost musing smile that took account of her extravagance, harmless though it might be, as a tendency to reckon with. "But my poor child," Charlotte might under this pressure have been on the point of replying, "that's the way nice people ARE, all round—so that why should one be surprised about it? We're all nice together—as why shouldn't we be? If we hadn't been we wouldn't have gone far—and I consider that we've gone very far indeed. Why should you 'take on' as if you weren't a perfect dear yourself, capable of all the sweetest things?—as if you hadn't in fact grown up in an atmosphere, the atmosphere of all the good things that

I recognised, even of old, as soon as I came near you, and that you've allowed me now, between you, to make so blessedly my own." Mrs. Verver might in fact have but just failed to make another point, a point charmingly natural to her as a grateful and irreproachable wife. "It isn't a bit wonderful, I may also remind you, that your husband should find, when opportunity permits, worse things to do than to go about with mine. I happen, love, to appreciate my husband—I happen perfectly to understand that his acquaintance should be cultivated and his company enjoyed."

Some such happily-provoked remarks as these, from Charlotte, at the other house, had been in the air, but we have seen how there was also in the air, for our young woman, as an emanation from the same source, a distilled difference of which the very principle was to keep down objections and retorts. That impression came back—it had its hours of doing so; and it may interest us on the ground of its having prompted in Maggie a final reflection, a reflection out of the heart of which a light flashed for her like a great flower grown in a night. As soon as this light had spread a little it produced in some quarters a surprising distinctness, made her of a sudden ask herself why there should have been even for three days the least obscurity. The perfection of her success, decidedly, was like some strange shore to which she had been noiselessly ferried and where, with a start, she found herself quaking at the thought that the boat might have put off again and left her. The word for it, the word that flashed the light, was that they were **TREATING** her, that they were proceeding

with her—and, for that matter, with her father—by a plan that was the exact counterpart of her own. It was not from her that they took their cue, but—and this was what in particular made her sit up—from each other; and with a depth of unanimity, an exact coincidence of inspiration that, when once her attention had begun to fix it, struck her as staring out at her in recovered identities of behaviour, expression and tone. They had a view of her situation, and of the possible forms her own consciousness of it might take—a view determined by the change of attitude they had had, ever so subtly, to recognise in her on their return from Matcham. They had had to read into this small and all-but-suppressed variation a mute comment—on they didn't quite know what; and it now arched over the Princess's head like a vault of bold span that important communication between them on the subject couldn't have failed of being immediate. This new perception bristled for her, as we have said, with odd intimations, but questions unanswered played in and out of it as well—the question, for instance, of why such promptitude of harmony SHOULD have been important. Ah, when she began to recover, piece by piece, the process became lively; she might have been picking small shining diamonds out of the sweepings of her ordered house. She bent, in this pursuit, over her dust-bin; she challenged to the last grain the refuse of her innocent economy. Then it was that the dismissed vision of Amerigo, that evening, in arrest at the door of her salottino while her eyes, from her placed chair, took him in—then it was that this immense little memory

gave out its full power. Since the question was of doors, she had afterwards, she now saw, shut it out; she had responsibly shut in, as we have understood, shut in there with her sentient self, only the fact of his reappearance and the plenitude of his presence. These things had been testimony, after all, to supersede any other, for on the spot, even while she looked, the warmly-washing wave had travelled far up the strand. She had subsequently lived, for hours she couldn't count, under the dizzying, smothering welter positively in submarine depths where everything came to her through walls of emerald and mother-of-pearl; though indeed she had got her head above them, for breath, when face to face with Charlotte again, on the morrow, in Eaton Square. Meanwhile, none the less, as was so apparent, the prior, the prime impression had remained, in the manner of a spying servant, on the other side of the barred threshold; a witness availing himself, in time, of the lightest pretext to re-enter. It was as if he had found this pretext in her observed necessity of comparing—comparing the obvious common elements in her husband's and her stepmother's ways of now "taking" her. With or without her witness, at any rate, she was led by comparison to a sense of the quantity of earnest intention operating, and operating so harmoniously, between her companions; and it was in the mitigated midnight of these approximations that she had made out the promise of her dawn.

It was a worked-out scheme for their not wounding her, for their behaving to her quite nobly; to which each had, in

some winning way, induced the other to contribute, and which therefore, so far as that went, proved that she had become with them a subject of intimate study. Quickly, quickly, on a certain alarm taken, eagerly and anxiously, before they SHOULD, without knowing it, wound her, they had signalled from house to house their clever idea, the idea by which, for all these days, her own idea had been profiting. They had built her in with their purpose—which was why, above her, a vault seemed more heavily to arch; so that she sat there, in the solid chamber of her helplessness, as in a bath of benevolence artfully prepared for her, over the brim of which she could but just manage to see by stretching her neck. Baths of benevolence were very well, but, at least, unless one were a patient of some sort, a nervous eccentric or a lost child, one was usually not so immersed save by one's request. It wasn't in the least what she had requested. She had flapped her little wings as a symbol of desired flight, not merely as a plea for a more gilded cage and an extra allowance of lumps of sugar. Above all she hadn't complained, not by the quaver of a syllable—so what wound in particular had she shown her fear of receiving? What wound HAD she received—as to which she had exchanged the least word with them? If she had ever whined or moped they might have had some reason; but she would be hanged—she conversed with herself in strong language—if she had been, from beginning to end, anything but pliable and mild. It all came back, in consequence, to some required process of their own, a process operating, quite positively, as a precaution and a

policy. They had got her into the bath and, for consistency with themselves—which was with each other—must keep her there. In that condition she wouldn't interfere with the policy, which was established, which was arranged. Her thought, over this, arrived at a great intensity—had indeed its pauses and timidities, but always to take afterwards a further and lighter spring. The ground was well-nigh covered by the time she had made out her husband and his colleague as directly interested in preventing her freedom of movement. Policy or no policy, it was they themselves who were arranged. She must be kept in position so as not to DISarrange them. It fitted immensely together, the whole thing, as soon as she could give them a motive; for, strangely as it had by this time begun to appear to herself, she had hitherto not imagined them sustained by an ideal distinguishably different from her own. Of course they were arranged—all four arranged; but what had the basis of their life been, precisely, but that they were arranged together? Amerigo and Charlotte were arranged together, but she—to confine the matter only to herself—was arranged apart. It rushed over her, the full sense of all this, with quite another rush from that of the breaking wave of ten days before; and as her father himself seemed not to meet the vaguely-clutching hand with which, during the first shock of complete perception, she tried to steady herself, she felt very much alone.

XXVII

There had been, from far back—that is from the Christmas time on—a plan that the parent and the child should "do something lovely" together, and they had recurred to it on occasion, nursed it and brought it up theoretically, though without as yet quite allowing it to put its feet to the ground. The most it had done was to try a few steps on the drawing-room carpet, with much attendance, on either side, much holding up and guarding, much anticipation, in fine, of awkwardness or accident. Their companions, by the same token, had constantly assisted at the performance, following the experiment with sympathy and gaiety, and never so full of applause, Maggie now made out for herself, as when the infant project had kicked its little legs most wildly—kicked them, for all the world, across the Channel and half the Continent, kicked them over the Pyrenees and innocently crowed out some rich Spanish name. She asked herself at present if it had been a "real" belief that they were but wanting, for some such adventure, to snatch their moment; whether either had at any instant seen it as workable, save in the form of a toy to dangle before the other, that they should take flight, without wife or husband, for one more look, "before they died," at the Madrid pictures as well as for a drop of further weak delay in respect to three or four possible prizes, privately offered, rarities of the first water, responsibly reported on and profusely

photographed, still patiently awaiting their noiseless arrival in retreats to which the clue had not otherwise been given away. The vision dallied with during the duskier days in Eaton Square had stretched to the span of three or four weeks of springtime for the total adventure, three or four weeks in the very spirit, after all, of their regular life, as their regular life had been persisting; full of shared mornings, afternoons, evenings, walks, drives, "looks-in," at old places, on vague chances; full also, in especial, of that purchased social ease, the sense of the comfort and credit of their house, which had essentially the perfection of something paid for, but which "came," on the whole, so cheap that it might have been felt as costing—as costing the parent and child—nothing. It was for Maggie to wonder, at present, if she had been sincere about their going, to ask herself whether she would have stuck to their plan even if nothing had happened.

Her view of the impossibility of sticking to it now may give us the measure of her sense that everything had happened. A difference had been made in her relation to each of her companions, and what it compelled her to say to herself was that to behave as she might have behaved before would be to act, for Amerigo and Charlotte, with the highest hypocrisy. She saw in these days that a journey abroad with her father would, more than anything else, have amounted, on his part and her own, to a last expression of an ecstasy of confidence, and that the charm of the idea, in fact, had been in some such sublimity. Day after day she put off the moment of "speaking," as she inwardly and very

comprehensively, called it—speaking, that is, to her father; and all the more that she was ridden by a strange suspense as to his himself breaking silence. She gave him time, gave him, during several days, that morning, that noon, that night, and the next and the next and the next; even made up her mind that if he stood off longer it would be proof conclusive that he too wasn't at peace. They would then have been, all successfully, throwing dust in each other's eyes; and it would be at last as if they must turn away their faces, since the silver mist that protected them had begun to grow sensibly thin. Finally, at the end of April, she decided that if he should say nothing for another period of twenty-four hours she must take it as showing that they were, in her private phraseology, lost; so little possible sincerity could there be in pretending to care for a journey to Spain at the approach of a summer that already promised to be hot. Such a proposal, on his lips, such an extravagance of optimism, would be HIS way of being consistent—for that he didn't really want to move, or to move further, at the worst, than back to Fawns again, could only signify that he wasn't, at heart, contented. What he wanted, at any rate, and what he didn't want were, in the event, put to the proof for Maggie just in time to give her a fresh wind. She had been dining, with her husband, in Eaton Square, on the occasion of hospitality offered by Mr. and Mrs. Verver to Lord and Lady Castledean. The propriety of some demonstration of this sort had been for many days before our group, the question reduced to the mere issue of which of the two houses should first take the field.

The issue had been easily settled—in the manner of every issue referred in any degree to Amerigo and Charlotte: the initiative obviously belonged to Mrs. Verver, who had gone to Matcham while Maggie had stayed away, and the evening in Eaton Square might have passed for a demonstration all the more personal that the dinner had been planned on "intimate" lines. Six other guests only, in addition to the host and the hostess of Matcham, made up the company, and each of these persons had for Maggie the interest of an attested connection with the Easter revels at that visionary house. Their common memory of an occasion that had clearly left behind it an ineffaceable charm—this air of beatific reference, less subdued in the others than in Amerigo and Charlotte, lent them, together, an inscrutable comradeship against which the young woman's imagination broke in a small vain wave.

It wasn't that she wished she had been of the remembered party and possessed herself of its secrets; for she didn't care about its secrets—she could concern herself at present, absolutely, with no secret but her own. What occurred was simply that she became aware, at a stroke, of the quantity of further nourishment required by her own, and of the amount of it she might somehow extract from these people; whereby she rose, of a sudden, to the desire to possess and use them, even to the extent of braving, of fairly defying, of directly exploiting, of possibly quite enjoying, under cover of an evil duplicity, the felt element of curiosity with which they regarded her. Once she

was conscious of the flitting wing of this last impression—the perception, irresistible, that she was something for their queer experience, just as they were something for hers—there was no limit to her conceived design of not letting them escape. She went and went, again, to-night, after her start was taken; went, positively, as she had felt herself going, three weeks before, on the morning when the vision of her father and his wife awaiting her together in the breakfast-room had been so determinant. In this other scene it was Lady Castledean who was determinant, who kindled the light, or at all events the heat, and who acted on the nerves; Lady Castledean whom she knew she, so oddly, didn't like, in spite of reasons upon reasons, the biggest diamonds on the yellowest hair, the longest lashes on the prettiest, falsest eyes, the oldest lace on the most violet velvet, the rightest manner on the wrongest assumption. Her ladyship's assumption was that she kept, at every moment of her life, every advantage—it made her beautifully soft, very nearly generous; so she didn't distinguish the little protuberant eyes of smaller social insects, often endowed with such a range, from the other decorative spots on their bodies and wings. Maggie had liked, in London, and in the world at large, so many more people than she had thought it right to fear, right even to so much as judge, that it positively quickened her fever to have to recognise, in this case, such a lapse of all the sequences. It was only that a charming clever woman wondered about her—that is wondered about her as Amerigo's wife, and wondered, moreover, with the intention of kindness

and the spontaneity, almost, of surprise.

The point of view—that one—was what she read in their free contemplation, in that of the whole eight; there was something in Amerigo to be explained, and she was passed about, all tenderly and expertly, like a dressed doll held, in the right manner, by its firmly-stuffed middle, for the account she could give. She might have been made to give it by pressure of her stomach; she might have been expected to articulate, with a rare imitation of nature, "Oh yes, I'm **HERE** all the while; I'm also in my way a solid little fact and I cost originally a great deal of money: cost, that is, my father, for my outfit, and let in my husband for an amount of pains—toward my training—that money would scarce represent." Well, she **WOULD** meet them in some such way, and she translated her idea into action, after dinner, before they dispersed, by engaging them all, unconventionally, almost violently, to dine with her in Portland Place, just as they were, if they didn't mind the same party, which was the party she wanted. Oh she was going, she was going—she could feel it afresh; it was a good deal as if she had sneezed ten times or had suddenly burst into a comic song. There were breaks in the connection, as there would be hitches in the process; she didn't wholly see, yet, what they would do for her, nor quite how, herself, she should handle them; but she was dancing up and down, beneath her propriety, with the thought that she had at least begun something—she so fairly liked to feel that she was a point for convergence of wonder. It wasn't after all, either, that **THEIR** wonder so much signified—

that of the cornered six, whom it glimmered before her that she might still live to drive about like a flock of sheep: the intensity of her consciousness, its sharpest savour, was in the theory of her having diverted, having, as they said, captured the attention of Amerigo and Charlotte, at neither of whom, all the while, did she so much as once look. She had pitched them in with the six, for that matter, so far as they themselves were concerned; they had dropped, for the succession of minutes, out of contact with their function—had, in short, startled and impressed, abandoned their post. "They're paralysed, they're paralysed!" she commented, deep within; so much it helped her own apprehension to hang together that they should suddenly lose their bearings.

Her grasp of appearances was thus out of proportion to her view of causes; but it came to her then and there that if she could only get the facts of appearance straight, only jam them down into their place, the reasons lurking behind them, kept uncertain, for the eyes, by their wavering and shifting, wouldn't perhaps be able to help showing. It wasn't of course that the Prince and Mrs. Verver marvelled to see her civil to their friends; it was rather, precisely, that civil was just what she wasn't: she had so departed from any such custom of delicate approach—approach by the permitted note, the suggested "if," the accepted vagueness—as would enable the people in question to put her off if they wished. And the profit of her plan, the effect of the violence she was willing to let it go for, was exactly in their BEING the people in question, people she had seemed to be rather shy of

before and for whom she suddenly opened her mouth so wide. Later on, we may add, with the ground soon covered by her agitated but resolute step, it was to cease to matter what people they were or weren't; but meanwhile the particular sense of them that she had taken home to-night had done her the service of seeming to break the ice where that formation was thickest. Still more unexpectedly, the service might have been the same for her father; inasmuch as, immediately, when everyone had gone, he did exactly what she had been waiting for and despairing of—and did it, as he did everything, with a simplicity that left any purpose of sounding him deeper, of drawing him out further, of going, in his own frequent phrase, "behind" what he said, nothing whatever to do. He brought it out straight, made it bravely and beautifully irrelevant, save for the plea of what they should lose by breaking the charm: "I guess we won't go down there after all, will we, Mag?—just when it's getting so pleasant here." That was all, with nothing to lead up to it; but it was done for her at a stroke, and done, not less, more rather, for Amerigo and Charlotte, on whom the immediate effect, as she secretly, as she almost breathlessly measured it, was prodigious. Everything now so fitted for her to everything else that she could feel the effect as prodigious even while sticking to her policy of giving the pair no look. There were thus some five wonderful minutes during which they loomed, to her sightless eyes, on either side of her, larger than they had ever loomed before, larger than life, larger than thought, larger than any danger or any safety. There was thus a

space of time, in fine, fairly vertiginous for her, during which she took no more account of them than if they were not in the room.

She had never, never treated them in any such way—not even just now, when she had plied her art upon the Matcham band; her present manner was an intenser exclusion, and the air was charged with their silence while she talked with her other companion as if she had nothing but him to consider. He had given her the note amazingly, by his allusion to the pleasantness—that of such an occasion as his successful dinner—which might figure as their bribe for renouncing; so that it was all as if they were speaking selfishly, counting on a repetition of just such extensions of experience. Maggie achieved accordingly an act of unprecedented energy, threw herself into her father's presence as by the absolute consistency with which she held his eyes; saying to herself, at the same time that she smiled and talked and inaugurated her system, "What does he mean by it? That's the question—what does he mean?" but studying again all the signs in him that recent anxiety had made familiar and counting the stricken minutes on the part of the others. It was in their silence that the others loomed, as she felt; she had had no measure, she afterwards knew, of this duration, but it drew out and out—really to what would have been called in simpler conditions awkwardness—as if she herself were stretching the cord. Ten minutes later, however, in the homeward carriage, to which her husband, cutting delay short, had proceeded at the first announcement, ten minutes later she was to stretch it

almost to breaking. The Prince had permitted her to linger much less, before his move to the door, than they usually lingered at the gossiping close of such evenings; which she, all responsive, took for a sign of his impatience to modify for her the odd effect of his not having, and of Charlotte's not having, instantly acclaimed the issue of the question debated, or more exactly, settled, before them. He had had time to become aware of this possible impression in her, and his virtually urging her into the carriage was connected with his feeling that he must take action on the new ground. A certain ambiguity in her would absolutely have tormented him; but he had already found something to soothe and correct—as to which she had, on her side, a shrewd notion of what it would be. She was herself, for that matter, prepared, and she was, of a truth, as she took her seat in the brougham, amazed at her preparation. It allowed her scarce an interval; she brought it straight out.

"I was certain that was what father would say if I should leave him alone. I HAVE been leaving him alone, and you see the effect. He hates now to move—he likes too much to be with us. But if you see the effect"—she felt herself magnificently keeping it up—"perhaps you don't see the cause. The cause, my dear, is too lovely."

Her husband, on taking his place beside her, had, during a minute or two, for her watching sense, neither said nor done anything; he had been, for that sense, as if thinking, waiting, deciding: yet it was still before he spoke that he, as she felt it to

be, definitely acted. He put his arm round her and drew her close — indulged in the demonstration, the long, firm embrace by his single arm, the infinite pressure of her whole person to his own, that such opportunities had so often suggested and prescribed. Held, accordingly, and, as she could but too intimately feel, exquisitely solicited, she had said the thing she was intending and desiring to say, and as to which she felt, even more than she felt anything else, that whatever he might do she mustn't be irresponsible. Yes, she was in his exerted grasp, and she knew what that was; but she was at the same time in the grasp of her conceived responsibility, and the extraordinary thing was that, of the two intensities, the second was presently to become the sharper. He took his time for it meanwhile, but he met her speech after a fashion.

"The cause of your father's deciding not to go?"

"Yes, and of my having wanted to let it act for him quietly — I mean without my insistence." She had, in her compressed state, another pause, and it made her feel as if she were immensely resisting. Strange enough was this sense for her, and altogether new, the sense of possessing, by miraculous help, some advantage that, absolutely then and there, in the carriage, as they rolled, she might either give up or keep. Strange, inexpressibly strange—so distinctly she saw that if she did give it up she should somehow give up everything for ever. And what her husband's grasp really meant, as her very bones registered, was that she **SHOULD** give it up: it was exactly for this that he

had resorted to unfailing magic. He KNEW HOW to resort to it—he could be, on occasion, as she had lately more than ever learned, so munificent a lover: all of which was, precisely, a part of the character she had never ceased to regard in him as princely, a part of his large and beautiful ease, his genius for charm, for intercourse, for expression, for life. She should have but to lay her head back on his shoulder with a certain movement to make it definite for him that she didn't resist. To this, as they went, every throb of her consciousness prompted her—every throb, that is, but one, the throb of her deeper need to know where she "really" was. By the time she had uttered the rest of her idea, therefore, she was still keeping her head and intending to keep it; though she was also staring out of the carriage-window with eyes into which the tears of suffered pain had risen, indistinguishable, perhaps, happily, in the dusk. She was making an effort that horribly hurt her, and, as she couldn't cry out, her eyes swam in her silence. With them, all the same, through the square opening beside her, through the grey panorama of the London night, she achieved the feat of not losing sight of what she wanted; and her lips helped and protected her by being able to be gay. "It's not to leave YOU, my dear—for that he'll give up anything; just as he would go off anywhere, I think, you know, if you would go with him. I mean you and he alone," Maggie pursued with her gaze out of her window.

For which Amerigo's answer again took him a moment. "Ah, the dear old boy! You would like me to propose him something

—?"

"Well, if you think you could bear it."

"And leave," the Prince asked, "you and Charlotte alone?"

"Why not?" Maggie had also to wait a minute, but when she spoke it came clear. "Why shouldn't Charlotte be just one of MY reasons—my not liking to leave her? She has always been so good, so perfect, to me—but never so wonderfully as just now. We have somehow been more together—thinking, for the time, almost only of each other; it has been quite as in old days." And she proceeded consummately, for she felt it as consummate: "It's as if we had been missing each other, had got a little apart—though going on so side by side. But the good moments, if one only waits for them," she hastened to add, "come round of themselves. Moreover you've seen for yourself, since you've made it up so to father; feeling, for yourself, in your beautiful way, every difference, every air that blows; not having to be told or pushed, only being perfect to live with, through your habit of kindness and your exquisite instincts. But of course you've seen, all the while, that both he and I have deeply felt how you've managed; managed that he hasn't been too much alone and that I, on my side, haven't appeared, to—what you might call—neglect him. This is always," she continued, "what I can never bless you enough for; of all the good things you've done for me you've never done anything better." She went on explaining as for the pleasure of explaining—even though knowing he must recognise, as a part of his easy way too, her description of his large liberality. "Your

taking the child down yourself, those days, and your coming, each time, to bring him away—nothing in the world, nothing you could have invented, would have kept father more under the charm. Besides, you know how you've always suited him, and how you've always so beautifully let it seem to him that he suits you. Only it has been, these last weeks, as if you wished—just in order to please him—to remind him of it afresh. So there it is," she wound up; "it's your doing. You've produced your effect—that of his wanting not to be, even for a month or two, where you're not. He doesn't want to bother or bore you—THAT, I think, you know, he never has done; and if you'll only give me time I'll come round again to making it my care, as always, that he shan't. But he can't bear you out of his sight."

She had kept it up and up, filling it out, crowding it in; and all, really, without difficulty, for it was, every word of it, thanks to a long evolution of feeling, what she had been primed to the brim with. She made the picture, forced it upon him, hung it before him; remembering, happily, how he had gone so far, one day, supported by the Principino, as to propose the Zoo in Eaton Square, to carry with him there, on the spot, under this pleasant inspiration, both his elder and his younger companion, with the latter of whom he had taken the tone that they were introducing Granddaddy, Granddaddy nervous and rather funking it, to lions and tigers more or less at large. Touch by touch she thus dropped into her husband's silence the truth about his good nature and his good manners; and it was this demonstration of his virtue,

precisely, that added to the strangeness, even for herself, of her failing as yet to yield to him. It would be a question but of the most trivial act of surrender, the vibration of a nerve, the mere movement of a muscle; but the act grew important between them just through her doing perceptibly nothing, nothing but talk in the very tone that would naturally have swept her into tenderness. She knew more and more—every lapsing minute taught her—how he might by a single rightness make her cease to watch him; that rightness, a million miles removed from the queer actual, falling so short, which would consist of his breaking out to her divinely, indulgently, with the last happy inconsequence. "Come away with me, somewhere, YOU—and then we needn't think, we needn't even talk, of anything, of anyone else:" five words like that would answer her, would break her utterly down. But they were the only ones that would so serve. She waited for them, and there was a supreme instant when, by the testimony of all the rest of him, she seemed to feel them in his heart and on his lips; only they didn't sound, and as that made her wait again so it made her more intensely watch. This in turn showed her that he too watched and waited, and how much he had expected something that he now felt wouldn't come. Yes, it wouldn't come if he didn't answer her, if he but said the wrong things instead of the right. If he could say the right everything would come—it hung by a hair that everything might crystallise for their recovered happiness at his touch. This possibility glowed at her, however, for fifty seconds, only then to turn cold, and as it fell

away from her she felt the chill of reality and knew again, all but pressed to his heart and with his breath upon her cheek, the slim rigour of her attitude, a rigour beyond that of her natural being. They had silences, at last, that were almost crudities of mutual resistance—silences that persisted through his felt effort to treat her recurrence to the part he had lately played, to interpret all the sweetness of her so talking to him, as a manner of making love to him. Ah, it was no such manner, heaven knew, for Maggie; she could make love, if this had been in question, better than that! On top of which it came to her presently to say, keeping in with what she had already spoken: "Except of course that, for the question of going off somewhere, he'd go readily, quite delightedly, with you. I verily believe he'd like to have you for a while to himself."

"Do you mean he thinks of proposing it?" the Prince after a moment sounded.

"Oh no—he doesn't ask, as you must so often have seen. But I believe he'd go 'like a shot,' as you say, if you were to suggest it."

It had the air, she knew, of a kind of condition made, and she had asked herself while she spoke if it wouldn't cause his arm to let her go. The fact that it didn't suggested to her that she had made him, of a sudden, still more intensely think, think with such concentration that he could do but one thing at once. And it was precisely as if the concentration had the next moment been proved in him. He took a turn inconsistent with the superficial impression—a jump that made light of their approach to gravity and represented for her the need in him to gain time. That

she made out, was his drawback—that the warning from her had come to him, and had come to Charlotte, after all, too suddenly. That they were in face of it rearranging, that they had to rearrange, was all before her again; yet to do as they would like they must enjoy a snatch, longer or shorter, of recovered independence. Amerigo, for the instant, was but doing as he didn't like, and it was as if she were watching his effort without disguise. "What's your father's idea, this year, then, about Fawns? Will he go at Whitsuntide, and will he then stay on?"

Maggie went through the form of thought. "He will really do, I imagine, as he has, in so many ways, so often done before; do whatever may seem most agreeable to yourself. And there's of course always Charlotte to be considered. Only their going early to Fawns, if they do go," she said, "needn't in the least entail your and my going."

"Ah," Amerigo echoed, "it needn't in the least entail your and my going?"

"We can do as we like. What they may do needn't trouble us, since they're by good fortune perfectly happy together."

"Oh," the Prince returned, "your father's never so happy as with you near him to enjoy his being so."

"Well, I may enjoy it," said Maggie, "but I'm not the cause of it."

"You're the cause," her husband declared, "of the greater part of everything that's good among us." But she received this tribute in silence, and the next moment he pursued: "If Mrs. Verver has

arrears of time with you to make up, as you say, she'll scarcely do it—or you scarcely will—by our cutting, your and my cutting, too loose."

"I see what you mean," Maggie mused.

He let her for a little to give her attention to it; after which, "Shall I just quite, of a sudden," he asked, "propose him a journey?"

Maggie hesitated, but she brought forth the fruit of reflection. "It would have the merit that Charlotte then would be with me — with me, I mean, so much more. Also that I shouldn't, by choosing such a time for going away, seem unconscious and ungrateful, seem not to respond, seem in fact rather to wish to shake her off. I should respond, on the contrary, very markedly —by being here alone with her for a month."

"And would you like to be here alone with her for a month?"

"I could do with it beautifully. Or we might even," she said quite gaily, "go together down to Fawns."

"You could be so very content without me?" the Prince presently inquired.

"Yes, my own dear—if you could be content for a while with father. That would keep me up. I might, for the time," she went on, "go to stay there with Charlotte; or, better still, she might come to Portland Place."

"Oho!" said the Prince with cheerful vagueness.

"I should feel, you see," she continued, "that the two of us were showing the same sort of kindness."

Amerigo thought. "The two of us? Charlotte and I?"

Maggie again hesitated. "You and I, darling."

"I see, I see"—he promptly took it in. "And what reason shall I give—give, I mean, your father?"

"For asking him to go off? Why, the very simplest—if you conscientiously can. The desire," said Maggie, "to be agreeable to him. Just that only."

Something in this reply made her husband again reflect. "Conscientiously?" Why shouldn't I conscientiously? It wouldn't, by your own contention," he developed, "represent any surprise for him. I must strike him sufficiently as, at the worst, the last person in the world to wish to do anything to hurt him."

Ah, there it was again, for Maggie—the note already sounded, the note of the felt need of not working harm! Why this precautionary view, she asked herself afresh, when her father had complained, at the very least, as little as herself? With their stillness together so perfect, what had suggested so, around them, the attitude of sparing them? Her inner vision fixed it once more, this attitude, saw it, in the others, as vivid and concrete, extended it straight from her companion to Charlotte. Before she was well aware, accordingly, she had echoed in this intensity of thought Amerigo's last words. "You're the last person in the world to wish to do anything to hurt him."

She heard herself, heard her tone, after she had spoken, and heard it the more that, for a minute after, she felt her husband's eyes on her face, very close, too close for her to see him. He

was looking at her because he was struck, and looking hard—though his answer, when it came, was straight enough. "Why, isn't that just what we have been talking about—that I've affected you as fairly studying his comfort and his pleasure? He might show his sense of it," the Prince went on, "by proposing to ME an excursion."

"And you would go with him?" Maggie immediately asked.

He hung fire but an instant. "Per Dio!"

She also had her pause, but she broke it—since gaiety was in the air—with an intense smile. "You can say that safely, because the proposal's one that, of his own motion, he won't make."

She couldn't have narrated afterwards—and in fact was at a loss to tell herself—by what transition, what rather marked abruptness of change in their personal relation, their drive came to its end with a kind of interval established, almost confessed to, between them. She felt it in the tone with which he repeated, after her, "'Safely'—?"

"Safely as regards being thrown with him perhaps after all, in such a case, too long. He's a person to think you might easily feel yourself to be. So it won't," Maggie said, "come from father. He's too modest."

Their eyes continued to meet on it, from corner to corner of the brougham. "Oh your modesty, between you—!" But he still smiled for it. "So that unless I insist—?"

"We shall simply go on as we are."

"Well, we're going on beautifully," he answered—though

by no means with the effect it would have had if their mute transaction, that of attempted capture and achieved escape, had not taken place. As Maggie said nothing, none the less, to gainsay his remark, it was open to him to find himself the next moment conscious of still another idea. "I wonder if it would do. I mean for me to break in."

"To break in'—?"

"Between your father and his wife. But there would be a way," he said—"we can make Charlotte ask him." And then as Maggie herself now wondered, echoing it again: "We can suggest to her to suggest to him that he shall let me take him off."

"Oh!" said Maggie.

"Then if he asks her why I so suddenly break out she'll be able to tell him the reason."

They were stopping, and the footman, who had alighted, had rung at the house-door. "That you think it would be so charming?"

"That I think it would be so charming. That we've persuaded HER will be convincing."

"I see," Maggie went on while the footman came back to let them out. "I see," she said again; though she felt a little disconcerted. What she really saw, of a sudden, was that her stepmother might report her as above all concerned for the proposal, and this brought her back her need that her father shouldn't think her concerned in any degree for anything. She alighted the next instant with a slight sense of defeat; her

husband, to let her out, had passed before her, and, a little in advance, he awaited her on the edge of the low terrace, a step high, that preceded their open entrance, on either side of which one of their servants stood. The sense of a life tremendously ordered and fixed rose before her, and there was something in Amerigo's very face, while his eyes again met her own through the dusky lamplight, that was like a conscious reminder of it. He had answered her, just before, distinctly, and it appeared to leave her nothing to say. It was almost as if, having planned for the last word, she saw him himself enjoying it. It was almost as if—in the strangest way in the world—he were paying her back, by the production of a small pang, that of a new uneasiness, for the way she had slipped from him during their drive.

XXVIII

Maggie's new uneasiness might have had time to drop, inasmuch as she not only was conscious, during several days that followed, of no fresh indication for it to feed on, but was even struck, in quite another way, with an augmentation of the symptoms of that difference she had taken it into her head to work for. She recognised by the end of a week that if she had been in a manner caught up her father had been not less so—with the effect of her husband's and his wife's closing in, together, round them, and of their all having suddenly begun, as a party of four, to lead a life gregarious, and from that reason almost hilarious, so far as the easy sound of it went, as never before. It might have been an accident and a mere coincidence—so at least she said to herself at first; but a dozen chances that furthered the whole appearance had risen to the surface, pleasant pretexts, oh certainly pleasant, as pleasant as Amerigo in particular could make them, for associated undertakings, quite for shared adventures, for its always turning out, amusingly, that they wanted to do very much the same thing at the same time and in the same way. Funny all this was, to some extent, in the light of the fact that the father and daughter, for so long, had expressed so few positive desires; yet it would be sufficiently natural that if Amerigo and Charlotte HAD at last got a little tired of each other's company they should find their relief not so

much in sinking to the rather low level of their companions as in wishing to pull the latter into the train in which they so constantly moved. "We're in the train," Maggie mutely reflected after the dinner in Eaton Square with Lady Castledean; "we've suddenly waked up in it and found ourselves rushing along, very much as if we had been put in during sleep—shoved, like a pair of labelled boxes, into the van. And since I wanted to 'go' I'm certainly going," she might have added; "I'm moving without trouble—they're doing it all for us: it's wonderful how they understand and how perfectly it succeeds." For that was the thing she had most immediately to acknowledge: it seemed as easy for them to make a quartette as it had formerly so long appeared for them to make a pair of couples—this latter being thus a discovery too absurdly belated. The only point at which, day after day, the success appeared at all qualified was represented, as might have been said, by her irresistible impulse to give her father a clutch when the train indulged in one of its occasional lurches. Then—there was no denying it—his eyes and her own met; so that they were themselves doing active violence, as against the others, to that very spirit of union, or at least to that very achievement of change, which she had taken the field to invoke.

The maximum of change was reached, no doubt, the day the Matcham party dined in Portland Place; the day, really perhaps, of Maggie's maximum of social glory, in the sense of its showing for her own occasion, her very own, with every one else extravagantly rallying and falling in, absolutely conspiring

to make her its heroine. It was as if her father himself, always with more initiative as a guest than as a host, had dabbled too in the conspiracy; and the impression was not diminished by the presence of the Assinghams, likewise very much caught-up, now, after something of a lull, by the side-wind of all the rest of the motion, and giving our young woman, so far at least as Fanny was concerned, the sense of some special intention of encouragement and applause. Fanny, who had not been present at the other dinner, thanks to a preference entertained and expressed by Charlotte, made a splendid show at this one, in new orange-coloured velvet with multiplied turquoises, and with a confidence, furthermore, as different as possible, her hostess inferred, from her too-marked betrayal of a belittled state at Matcham. Maggie was not indifferent to her own opportunity to redress this balance—which seemed, for the hour, part of a general rectification; she liked making out for herself that on the high level of Portland Place, a spot exempt, on all sorts of grounds, from jealous jurisdictions, her friend could feel as "good" as any one, and could in fact at moments almost appear to take the lead in recognition and celebration, so far as the evening might conduce to intensify the lustre of the little Princess. Mrs. Assingham produced on her the impression of giving her constantly her cue for this; and it was in truth partly by her help, intelligently, quite gratefully accepted, that the little Princess, in Maggie, was drawn out and emphasised. She couldn't definitely have said how it happened, but she felt herself, for

the first time in her career, living up to the public and popular notion of such a personage, as it pressed upon her from all round; rather wondering, inwardly too, while she did so, at that strange mixture in things through which the popular notion could be evidenced for her by such supposedly great ones of the earth as the Castledeans and their kind. Fanny Assingham might really have been there, at all events, like one of the assistants in the ring at the circus, to keep up the pace of the sleek revolving animal on whose back the lady in short spangled skirts should brilliantly caper and posture. That was all, doubtless Maggie had forgotten, had neglected, had declined, to be the little Princess on anything like the scale open to her; but now that the collective hand had been held out to her with such alacrity, so that she might skip up into the light, even, as seemed to her modest mind, with such a show of pink stocking and such an abbreviation of white petticoat, she could strike herself as perceiving, under arched eyebrows, where her mistake had been. She had invited for the later hours, after her dinner, a fresh contingent, the whole list of her apparent London acquaintance—which was again a thing in the manner of little princesses for whom the princely art was a matter of course. That was what she was learning to do, to fill out as a matter of course her appointed, her expected, her imposed character; and, though there were latent considerations that somewhat interfered with the lesson, she was having to-night an inordinate quantity of practice, none of it so successful as when, quite wittingly, she directed it at Lady Castledean, who

was reduced by it at last to an unprecedented state of passivity. The perception of this high result caused Mrs. Assingham fairly to flush with responsive joy; she glittered at her young friend, from moment to moment, quite feverishly; it was positively as if her young friend had, in some marvellous, sudden, supersubtle way, become a source of succour to herself, become beautifully, divinely retributive. The intensity of the taste of these registered phenomena was in fact that somehow, by a process and through a connexion not again to be traced, she so practised, at the same time, on Amerigo and Charlotte—with only the drawback, her constant check and second-thought, that she concomitantly practised perhaps still more on her father.

This last was a danger indeed that, for much of the ensuing time, had its hours of strange beguilement—those at which her sense for precautions so suffered itself to lapse that she felt her communion with him more intimate than any other. It COULDN'T but pass between them that something singular was happening—so much as this she again and again said to herself; whereby the comfort of it was there, after all, to be noted, just as much as the possible peril, and she could think of the couple they formed together as groping, with sealed lips, but with mutual looks that had never been so tender, for some freedom, some fiction, some figured bravery, under which they might safely talk of it. The moment was to come—and it finally came with an effect as penetrating as the sound that follows the pressure of an electric button—when she read the least helpful of meanings into

the agitation she had created. The merely specious description of their case would have been that, after being for a long time, as a family, delightfully, uninterruptedly happy, they had still had a new felicity to discover; a felicity for which, blessedly, her father's appetite and her own, in particular, had been kept fresh and grateful. This livelier march of their intercourse as a whole was the thing that occasionally determined in him the clutching instinct we have glanced at; very much as if he had said to her, in default of her breaking silence first: "Everything is remarkably pleasant, isn't it?—but WHERE, for it, after all, are we? up in a balloon and whirling through space, or down in the depths of the earth, in the glimmering passages of a gold-mine?" The equilibrium, the precious condition, lasted in spite of rearrangement; there had been a fresh distribution of the different weights, but the balance persisted and triumphed: all of which was just the reason why she was forbidden, face to face with the companion of her adventure, the experiment of a test. If they balanced they balanced—she had to take that; it deprived her of every pretext for arriving, by however covert a process, at what he thought.

But she had her hours, thus, of feeling supremely linked to him by the rigour of their law, and when it came over her that, all the while, the wish, on his side, to spare her might be what most worked with him, this very fact of their seeming to have nothing "inward" really to talk about wrapped him up for her in a kind of sweetness that was wanting, as a consecration, even

in her yearning for her husband. She was powerless, however, was only more utterly hushed, when the interrupting flash came, when she would have been all ready to say to him, "Yes, this is by every appearance the best time we've had yet; but don't you see, all the same, how they must be working together for it, and how my very success, my success in shifting our beautiful harmony to a new basis, comes round to being their success, above all; their cleverness, their amiability, their power to hold out, their complete possession, in short, of our life?" For how could she say as much as that without saying a great deal more? without saying "They'll do everything in the world that suits us, save only one thing—prescribe a line for us that will make them separate." How could she so much as imagine herself even faintly murmuring that without putting into his mouth the very words that would have made her quail? "Separate, my dear? Do you want them to separate? Then you want US to—you and me? For how can the one separation take place without the other?" That was the question that, in spirit, she had heard him ask—with its dread train, moreover, of involved and connected inquiries. Their own separation, his and hers, was of course perfectly thinkable, but only on the basis of the sharpest of reasons. Well, the sharpest, the very sharpest, would be that they could no longer afford, as it were, he to let his wife, she to let her husband, "run" them in such compact formation. And say they accepted this account of their situation as a practical finality, acting upon it and proceeding to a division, would no sombre ghosts of the

smothered past, on either side, show, across the widening strait, pale unappeased faces, or raise, in the very passage, deprecating, denouncing hands?

Meanwhile, however such things might be, she was to have occasion to say to herself that there might be but a deeper treachery in recoveries and reassurances. She was to feel alone again, as she had felt at the issue of her high tension with her husband during their return from meeting the Castledeans in Eaton Square. The evening in question had left her with a larger alarm, but then a lull had come—the alarm, after all, was yet to be confirmed. There came an hour, inevitably, when she knew, with a chill, what she had feared and why; it had taken, this hour, a month to arrive, but to find it before her was thoroughly to recognise it, for it showed her sharply what Amerigo had meant in alluding to a particular use that they might make, for their reaffirmed harmony and prosperity, of Charlotte. The more she thought, at present, of the tone he had employed to express their enjoyment of this resource, the more it came back to her as the product of a conscious art of dealing with her. He had been conscious, at the moment, of many things—conscious even, not a little, of desiring; and thereby of needing, to see what she would do in a given case. The given case would be that of her being to a certain extent, as she might fairly make it out, **MENACED**—horrible as it was to impute to him any intention represented by such a word. Why it was that to speak of making her stepmother intervene, as they might call it, in a question that

seemed, just then and there, quite peculiarly their own business—why it was that a turn so familiar and so easy should, at the worst, strike her as charged with the spirit of a threat, was an oddity disconnected, for her, temporarily, from its grounds, the adventure of an imagination within her that possibly had lost its way. That, precisely, was doubtless why she had learned to wait, as the weeks passed by, with a fair, or rather indeed with an excessive, imitation of resumed serenity. There had been no prompt sequel to the Prince's equivocal light, and that made for patience; yet she was none the less to have to admit, after delay, that the bread he had cast on the waters had come home, and that she should thus be justified of her old apprehension. The consequence of this, in turn, was a renewed pang in presence of his remembered ingenuity. To be ingenious with HER—what DIDN'T, what mightn't that mean, when she had so absolutely never, at any point of contact with him, put him, by as much as the value of a penny, to the expense of sparing, doubting, fearing her, of having in any way whatever to reckon with her? The ingenuity had been in his simply speaking of their use of Charlotte as if it were common to them in an equal degree, and his triumph, on the occasion, had been just in the simplicity. She couldn't—and he knew it—say what was true: "Oh, you 'use' her, and I use her, if you will, yes; but we use her ever so differently and separately—not at all in the same way or degree. There's nobody we really use together but ourselves, don't you see?—by which I mean that where our interests are the same I can so

beautifully, so exquisitely serve you for everything, and you can so beautifully, so exquisitely serve me. The only person either of us needs is the other of us; so why, as a matter of course, in such a case as this, drag in Charlotte?"

She couldn't so challenge him, because it would have been—and there she was paralysed—the NOTE. It would have translated itself on the spot, for his ear, into jealousy; and, from reverberation to repercussion, would have reached her father's exactly in the form of a cry piercing the stillness of peaceful sleep. It had been for many days almost as difficult for her to catch a quiet twenty minutes with her father as it had formerly been easy; there had been in fact, of old—the time, so strangely, seemed already far away—an inevitability in her longer passages with him, a sort of domesticated beauty in the calculability, round about them, of everything. But at present Charlotte was almost always there when Amerigo brought her to Eaton Square, where Amerigo was constantly bringing her; and Amerigo was almost always there when Charlotte brought her husband to Portland Place, where Charlotte was constantly bringing HIM. The fractions of occasions, the chance minutes that put them face to face had, as yet, of late, contrived to count but little, between them, either for the sense of opportunity or for that of exposure; inasmuch as the lifelong rhythm of their intercourse made against all cursory handling of deep things. They had never availed themselves of any given quarter-of-an-hour to gossip about fundamentals; they moved slowly through large still spaces;

they could be silent together, at any time, beautifully, with much more comfort than hurriedly expressive. It appeared indeed to have become true that their common appeal measured itself, for vividness, just by this economy of sound; they might have been talking "at" each other when they talked with their companions, but these latter, assuredly, were not in any directer way to gain light on the current phase of their relation. Such were some of the reasons for which Maggie suspected fundamentals, as I have called them, to be rising, by a new movement, to the surface—suspected it one morning late in May, when her father presented himself in Portland Place alone. He had his pretext—of that she was fully aware: the Principino, two days before, had shown signs, happily not persistent, of a feverish cold and had notoriously been obliged to spend the interval at home. This was ground, ample ground, for punctual inquiry; but what it wasn't ground for, she quickly found herself reflecting, was his having managed, in the interest of his visit, to dispense so unwontedly—as their life had recently come to be arranged—with his wife's attendance. It had so happened that she herself was, for the hour, exempt from her husband's, and it will at once be seen that the hour had a quality all its own when I note that, remembering how the Prince had looked in to say he was going out, the Princess whimsically wondered if their respective sposi mightn't frankly be meeting, whimsically hoped indeed they were temporarily so disposed of. Strange was her need, at moments, to think of them as not attaching an excessive importance to their repudiation of

the general practice that had rested only a few weeks before on such a consecrated rightness. Repudiations, surely, were not in the air—they had none of them come to that; for wasn't she at this minute testifying directly against them by her own behaviour? When she should confess to fear of being alone with her father, to fear of what he might then—ah, with such a slow, painful motion as she had a horror of!—say to her, THEN would be time enough for Amerigo and Charlotte to confess to not liking to appear to foregather.

She had this morning a wonderful consciousness both of dreading a particular question from him and of being able to check, yes even to disconcert, magnificently, by her apparent manner of receiving it, any restless imagination he might have about its importance. The day, bright and soft, had the breath of summer; it made them talk, to begin with, of Fawns, of the way Fawns invited—Maggie aware, the while, that in thus regarding, with him, the sweetness of its invitation to one couple just as much as to another, her humbugging smile grew very nearly convulsive. That was it, and there was relief truly, of a sort, in taking it in: she was humbugging him already, by absolute necessity, as she had never, never done in her life—doing it up to the full height of what she had allowed for. The necessity, in the great dimly-shining room where, declining, for his reasons, to sit down, he moved about in Amerigo's very footsteps, the necessity affected her as pressing upon her with the very force of the charm itself; of the old pleasantness, between them, so

candidly playing up there again; of the positive flatness of their tenderness, a surface all for familiar use, quite as if generalised from the long succession of tapestried sofas, sweetly faded, on which his theory of contentment had sat, through unmeasured pauses, beside her own. She KNEW, from this instant, knew in advance and as well as anything would ever teach her, that she must never intermit for a solitary second her so highly undertaking to prove that there was nothing the matter with her. She saw, of a sudden, everything she might say or do in the light of that undertaking, established connections from it with any number of remote matters, struck herself, for instance, as acting all in its interest when she proposed their going out, in the exercise of their freedom and in homage to the season, for a turn in the Regent's Park. This resort was close at hand, at the top of Portland Place, and the Principino, beautifully better, had already proceeded there under high attendance: all of which considerations were defensive for Maggie, all of which became, to her mind, part of the business of cultivating continuity.

Upstairs, while she left him to put on something to go out in, the thought of his waiting below for her, in possession of the empty house, brought with it, sharply if briefly, one of her abrupt arrests of consistency, the brush of a vain imagination almost paralysing her, often, for the minute, before her glass—the vivid look, in other words, of the particular difference his marriage had made. The particular difference seemed at such instants the loss, more than anything else, of their old freedom, their

never having had to think, where they were together concerned, of any one, of anything but each other. It hadn't been HER marriage that did it; that had never, for three seconds, suggested to either of them that they must act diplomatically, must reckon with another presence—no, not even with her husband's. She groaned to herself, while the vain imagination lasted, "WHY did he marry? ah, why DID he?" and then it came up to her more than ever that nothing could have been more beautiful than the way in which, till Charlotte came so much more closely into their life, Amerigo hadn't interfered. What she had gone on owing him for this mounted up again, to her eyes, like a column of figures—or call it even, if one would, a house of cards; it was her father's wonderful act that had tipped the house down and made the sum wrong. With all of which, immediately after her question, her "Why did he, why did he?" rushed back, inevitably, the confounding, the overwhelming wave of the knowledge of his reason. "He did it for ME, he did it for me," she moaned, "he did it, exactly, that our freedom—meaning, beloved man, simply and solely mine—should be greater instead of less; he did it, divinely, to liberate me so far as possible from caring what became of him." She found time upstairs, even in her haste, as she had repeatedly found time before, to let the wonderments involved in these recognitions flash at her with their customary effect of making her blink: the question in especial of whether she might find her solution in acting, herself, in the spirit of what he had done, in forcing her "care" really to grow as much less as he had

tried to make it. Thus she felt the whole weight of their case drop afresh upon her shoulders, was confronted, unmistakably, with the prime source of her haunted state. It all came from her not having been able not to mind—not to mind what became of him; not having been able, without anxiety, to let him go his way and take his risk and lead his life. She had made anxiety her stupid little idol; and absolutely now, while she stuck a long pin, a trifle fallaciously, into her hat—she had, with an approach to irritation, told her maid, a new woman, whom she had lately found herself thinking of as abysmal, that she didn't want her—she tried to focus the possibility of some understanding between them in consequence of which he should cut loose.

Very near indeed it looked, any such possibility! that consciousness, too, had taken its turn by the time she was ready; all the vibration, all the emotion of this present passage being, precisely, in the very sweetness of their lapse back into the conditions of the simpler time, into a queer resemblance between the aspect and the feeling of the moment and those of numberless other moments that were sufficiently far away. She had been quick in her preparation, in spite of the flow of the tide that sometimes took away her breath; but a pause, once more, was still left for her to make, a pause, at the top of the stairs, before she came down to him, in the span of which she asked herself if it weren't thinkable, from the perfectly practical point of view, that she should simply sacrifice him. She didn't go into the detail of what sacrificing him would mean—she didn't need to; so distinct

was it, in one of her restless lights, that there he was awaiting her, that she should find him walking up and down the drawing-room in the warm, fragrant air to which the open windows and the abundant flowers contributed; slowly and vaguely moving there and looking very slight and young and, superficially, manageable, almost as much like her child, putting it a little freely, as like her parent; with the appearance about him, above all, of having perhaps arrived just on purpose to SAY it to her, himself, in so many words: "Sacrifice me, my own love; do sacrifice me, do sacrifice me!" Should she want to, should she insist on it, she might verily hear him bleating it at her, all conscious and all accommodating, like some precious, spotless, exceptionally intelligent lamb. The positive effect of the intensity of this figure, however, was to make her shake it away in her resumed descent; and after she had rejoined him, after she had picked him up, she was to know the full pang of the thought that her impossibility was MADE, absolutely, by his consciousness, by the lucidity of his intention: this she felt while she smiled there for him, again, all hypocritically; while she drew on fair, fresh gloves; while she interrupted the process first to give his necktie a slightly smarter twist and then to make up to him for her hidden madness by rubbing her nose into his cheek according to the tradition of their frankest levity.

From the instant she should be able to convict him of intending, every issue would be closed and her hypocrisy would have to redouble. The only way to sacrifice him would be to do

so without his dreaming what it might be for. She kissed him, she arranged his cravat, she dropped remarks, she guided him out, she held his arm, not to be led, but to lead him, and taking it to her by much the same intimate pressure she had always used, when a little girl, to mark the inseparability of her doll—she did all these things so that he should sufficiently fail to dream of what they might be for.

XXIX

There was nothing to show that her effort in any degree fell short till they got well into the Park and he struck her as giving, unexpectedly, the go-by to any serious search for the Principino. The way they sat down awhile in the sun was a sign of that; his dropping with her into the first pair of sequestered chairs they came across and waiting a little, after they were placed, as if now at last she might bring out, as between them, something more specific. It made her but feel the more sharply how the specific, in almost any direction, was utterly forbidden her—how the use of it would be, for all the world, like undoing the leash of a dog eager to follow up a scent. It would come out, the specific, where the dog would come out; would run to earth, somehow, the truth—for she was believing herself in relation to the truth!—at which she mustn't so much as indirectly point. Such, at any rate, was the fashion in which her passionate prudence played over possibilities of danger, reading symptoms and betrayals into everything she looked at, and yet having to make it evident, while she recognised them, that she didn't wince. There were moments between them, in their chairs, when he might have been watching her guard herself and trying to think of something new that would trip her up. There were pauses during which, with her affection as sweet and still as the sunshine, she might yet, as at some hard game, over a table, for money, have been defying him to fasten

upon her the least little complication of consciousness. She was positively proud, afterwards, of the great style in which she had kept this up; later on, at the hour's end, when they had retraced their steps to find Amerigo and Charlotte awaiting them at the house, she was able to say to herself that, truly, she had put her plan through; even though once more setting herself the difficult task of making their relation, every minute of the time, not fall below the standard of that other hour, in the treasured past, which hung there behind them like a framed picture in a museum, a high watermark for the history of their old fortune; the summer evening, in the park at Fawns, when, side by side under the trees just as now, they had let their happy confidence lull them with its most golden tone. There had been the possibility of a trap for her, at present, in the very question of their taking up anew that residence; wherefore she had not been the first to sound it, in spite of the impression from him of his holding off to see what she would do. She was saying to herself in secret: "CAN we again, in this form, migrate there? Can I, for myself, undertake it? face all the intenser keeping-up and stretching-out, indefinitely, impossibly, that our conditions in the country, as we've established and accepted them, would stand for?" She had positively lost herself in this inward doubt—so much she was subsequently to remember; but remembering then too that her companion, though perceptibly perhaps as if not to be eager, had broken the ice very much as he had broken it in Eaton Square after the banquet to the Castledeans.

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