# ГЕНРИ ДЖЕЙМС

## THE REVERBERATOR

Генри Джеймс

# The Reverberator

**Джеймс Г.**

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# Содержание

# Henry James
# The Reverberator

## I

"I guess my daughter's in here," the old man said leading the way into the little salon de lecture. He was not of the most advanced age, but that is the way George Flack considered him, and indeed he looked older than he was. George Flack had found him sitting in the court of the hotel—he sat a great deal in the court of the hotel—and had gone up to him with characteristic directness and asked him for Miss Francina. Poor Mr. Dosson had with the greatest docility disposed himself to wait on the young man: he had as a matter of course risen and made his way across the court to announce to his child that she had a visitor. He looked submissive, almost servile, as he preceded the visitor, thrusting his head forward in his quest; but it was not in Mr. Flack's line to notice that sort of thing. He accepted the old gentleman's good offices as he would have accepted those of a waiter, conveying no hint of an attention paid also to himself. An observer of these two persons would have assured himself that the degree to which Mr. Dosson thought it natural any one should want to see his daughter was only equalled by the degree to which the young man thought it natural her father should take trouble to produce her. There was a superfluous drapery in the doorway of the salon de lecture, which Mr. Dosson pushed aside while George Flack stepped in after him.

The reading-room of the Hotel de l'Univers et de Cheltenham was none too ample, and had seemed to Mr. Dosson from the first to consist principally of a highly-polished floor on the bareness of which it was easy for a relaxed elderly American to slip. It was composed further, to his perception, of a table with a green velvet cloth, of a fireplace with a great deal of fringe and no fire, of a window with a great deal of curtain and no light, and of the Figaro, which he couldn't read, and the New York Herald, which he had already read. A single person was just now in possession of these conveniences—a young lady who sat with her back to the window, looking straight before her into the conventional room. She was dressed as for the street; her empty hands rested upon the arms of her chair—she had withdrawn her long gloves, which were lying in her lap—and she seemed to be doing nothing as hard as she could. Her face was so much in shadow as to be barely distinguishable; nevertheless the young man had a disappointed cry as soon as he saw her. "Why, it ain't Miss Francie—it's Miss Delia!"

"Well, I guess we can fix that," said Mr. Dosson, wandering further into the room and drawing his feet over the floor without lifting them. Whatever he did he ever seemed to wander: he had an impermanent transitory air, an aspect of weary yet patient non-arrival, even when he sat, as he was capable of sitting for hours, in the court of the inn. As he glanced down at the two newspapers in their desert of green velvet he raised a hopeless uninterested glass to his eye. "Delia dear, where's your little sister?"

Delia made no movement whatever, nor did any expression, so far as could be perceived, pass over her large young face. She only ejaculated: "Why, Mr. Flack, where did you drop from?"

"Well, this is a good place to meet," her father remarked, as if mildly, and as a mere passing suggestion, to deprecate explanations.

"Any place is good where one meets old friends," said George Flack, looking also at the newspapers. He examined the date of the American sheet and then put it down. "Well, how do you like Paris?" he subsequently went on to the young lady.

"We quite enjoy it; but of course we're familiar now."

"Well, I was in hopes I could show you something," Mr. Flack said.

"I guess they've seen most everything," Mr. Dosson observed.

"Well, we've seen more than you!" exclaimed his daughter.

"Well, I've seen a good deal—just sitting there."

A person with delicate ear might have suspected Mr. Dosson of a tendency to "setting"; but he would pronounce the same word in a different manner at different times.

"Well, in Paris you can see everything," said the young man. "I'm quite enthusiastic about Paris."

"Haven't you been here before?" Miss Delia asked.

"Oh yes, but it's ever fresh. And how is Miss Francie?"

"She's all right. She has gone upstairs to get something. I guess we're going out again."

"It's very attractive for the young," Mr. Dosson pleaded to the visitor.

"Well then, I'm one of the young. Do you mind if I go with you?" Mr. Flack continued to the girl.

"It'll seem like old times, on the deck," she replied. "We're going to the Bon Marche."

"Why don't you go to the Louvre? That's the place for YOU."

"We've just come from there: we've had quite a morning."

"Well, it's a good place," the visitor a trifle dryly opined.

"It's good for some things but it doesn't come up to my idea for others."

"Oh they've seen everything," said Mr. Dosson. Then he added: "I guess I'll go and call Francie."

"Well, tell her to hurry," Miss Delia returned, swinging a glove in each hand.

"She knows my pace," Mr. Flack remarked.

"I should think she would, the way you raced!" the girl returned with memories of the Umbria. "I hope you don't expect to rush round Paris that way."

"I always rush. I live in a rush. That's the way to get through."

"Well, I AM through, I guess," said Mr. Dosson philosophically.

"Well, I ain't!" his daughter declared with decision.

"Well, you must come round often," he continued to their friend as a leave-taking.

"Oh, I'll come round! I'll have to rush, but I'll do it."

"I'll send down Francie." And Francie's father crept away.

"And please give her some more money!" her sister called after him.

"Does she keep the money?" George Flack enquired.

"KEEP it?" Mr. Dosson stopped as he pushed aside the portiere. "Oh you innocent young man!"

"I guess it's the first time you were ever called innocent!" cried Delia, left alone with the visitor.

"Well, I WAS—before I came to Paris."

"Well, I can't see that it has hurt US. We ain't a speck extravagant."

"Wouldn't you have a right to be?"

"I don't think any one has a right to be," Miss Dosson returned incorruptibly.

The young man, who had seated himself, looked at her a moment.

"That's the way you used to talk."

"Well, I haven't changed."

"And Miss Francie—has she?"

"Well, you'll see," said Delia Dosson, beginning to draw on her gloves.

Her companion watched her, leaning forward with his elbows on the arms of his chair and his hands interlocked. At last he said interrogatively: "Bon Marche?"

"No, I got them in a little place I know."

"Well, they're Paris anyway."

"Of course they're Paris. But you can get gloves anywhere."

"You must show me the little place anyhow," Mr. Flack continued sociably. And he observed further and with the same friendliness: "The old gentleman seems all there."

"Oh he's the dearest of the dear."

"He's a real gentleman—of the old stamp," said George Flack.

“Well, what should you think our father would be?”

“I should think he’d be delighted!”

“Well, he is, when we carry out our plans.”

“And what are they—your plans?” asked the young man.

“Oh I never tell them.”

“How then does he know whether you carry them out?”

“Well, I guess he’d know it if we didn’t,” said the girl.

“I remember how secretive you were last year. You kept everything to yourself.”

“Well, I know what I want,” the young lady pursued.

He watched her button one of her gloves deftly, using a hairpin released from some mysterious office under her bonnet. There was a moment’s silence, after which they looked up at each other. “I’ve an idea you don’t want me,” said George Flack.

“Oh yes, I do—as a friend.”

“Of all the mean ways of trying to get rid of a man that’s the meanest!” he rang out.

“Where’s the meanness when I suppose you’re not so ridiculous as to wish to be anything more!”

“More to your sister, do you mean—or to yourself?”

“My sister IS myself—I haven’t got any other,” said Delia Dosson.

“Any other sister?”

“Don’t be idiotic. Are you still in the same business?” the girl went on.

“Well, I forget which one I WAS in.”

“Why, something to do with that newspaper—don’t you remember?”

“Yes, but it isn’t that paper any more—it’s a different one.”

“Do you go round for news—in the same way?”

“Well, I try to get the people what they want. It’s hard work,” said the young man.

“Well, I suppose if you didn’t some one else would. They will have it, won’t they?”

“Yes, they will have it.” The wants of the people, however, appeared at the present moment to interest Mr. Flack less than his own. He looked at his watch and remarked that the old gentleman didn’t seem to have much authority.

“What do you mean by that?” the girl asked.

“Why with Miss Francie. She’s taking her time, or rather, I mean, she’s taking mine.”

“Well, if you expect to do anything with her you must give her plenty of that,” Delia returned.

“All right: I’ll give her all I have.” And Miss Dosson’s interlocutor leaned back in his chair with folded arms, as to signify how much, if it came to that, she might have to count with his patience. But she sat there easy and empty, giving no sign and fearing no future. He was the first indeed to turn again to restlessness: at the end of a few moments he asked the young lady if she didn’t suppose her father had told her sister who it was.

“Do you think that’s all that’s required?” she made answer with cold gaiety. But she added more familiarly: “Probably that’s the reason. She’s so shy.”

“Oh yes—she used to look it.”

“No, that’s her peculiarity, that she never looks it and yet suffers everything.”

“Well, you make it up for her then, Miss Delia,” the young man ventured to declare. “You don’t suffer much.”

“No, for Francie I’m all there. I guess I could act for her.”

He had a pause. “You act for her too much. If it wasn’t for you I think I could do something.”

“Well, you’ve got to kill me first!” Delia Dosson replied.

“I’ll come down on you somehow in the Reverberator” he went on.

But the threat left her calm. “Oh that’s not what the people want.”

“No, unfortunately they don’t care anything about MY affairs.”

"Well, we do: we're kinder than most, Francie and I," said the girl. "But we desire to keep your affairs quite distinct from ours."

"Oh your—yours: if I could only discover what they are!" cried George Flack. And during the rest of the time that they waited the young journalist tried to find out. If an observer had chanced to be present for the quarter of an hour that elapsed, and had had any attention to give to these vulgar young persons, he would have wondered perhaps at there being so much mystery on one side and so much curiosity on the other—wondered at least at the elaboration of inscrutable projects on the part of a girl who looked to the casual eye as if she were stolidly passive. Fidelia Dosson, whose name had been shortened, was twenty-five years old and had a large white face, in which the eyes were far apart. Her forehead was high but her mouth was small, her hair was light and colourless and a certain inelegant thickness of figure made her appear shorter than she was. Elegance indeed had not been her natural portion, and the Bon Marche and other establishments had to make up for that. To a casual sister's eye they would scarce have appeared to have acquitted themselves of their office, but even a woman wouldn't have guessed how little Fidelia cared. She always looked the same; all the contrivances of Paris couldn't fill out that blank, and she held them, for herself, in no manner of esteem. It was a plain clean round pattern face, marked for recognition among so many only perhaps by a small figure, the sprig on a china plate, that might have denoted deep obstinacy; and yet, with its settled smoothness, it was neither stupid nor hard. It was as calm as a room kept dusted and aired for candid earnest occasions, the meeting of unanimous committees and the discussion of flourishing businesses. If she had been a young man—and she had a little the head of one—it would probably have been thought of her that she was likely to become a Doctor or a Judge.

An observer would have gathered, further, that Mr. Flack's acquaintance with Mr. Dosson and his daughters had had its origin in his crossing the Atlantic eastward in their company more than a year before, and in some slight association immediately after disembarking, but that each party had come and gone a good deal since then—come and gone however without meeting again. It was to be inferred that in this interval Miss Dosson had led her father and sister back to their native land and had then a second time directed their course to Europe. This was a new departure, said Mr. Flack, or rather a new arrival: he understood that it wasn't, as he called it, the same old visit. She didn't repudiate the accusation, launched by her companion as if it might have been embarrassing, of having spent her time at home in Boston, and even in a suburban quarter of it: she confessed that as Bostonians they had been capable of that. But now they had come abroad for longer—ever so much: what they had gone home for was to make arrangements for a European stay of which the limits were not to be told. So far as this particular future opened out to her she freely acknowledged it. It appeared to meet with George Flack's approval—he also had a big undertaking on that side and it might require years, so that it would be pleasant to have his friends right there. He knew his way round in Paris—or any place like that—much better than round Boston; if they had been poked away in one of those clever suburbs they would have been lost to him.

"Oh, well, you'll see as much as you want of us—the way you'll have to take us," Delia Dosson said: which led the young man to ask which that way was and to guess he had never known but one way to take anything—which was just as it came. "Oh well, you'll see what you'll make of it," the girl returned; and she would give for the present no further explanation of her somewhat chilling speech. In spite if it however she professed an interest in Mr. Flack's announced undertaking—an interest springing apparently from an interest in the personage himself. The man of wonderments and measurements we have smuggled into the scene would have gathered that Miss Dosson's attention was founded on a conception of Mr. Flack's intrinsic brilliancy. Would his own impression have justified that?—would he have found such a conception contagious? I forbear to ridicule the thought, for that would saddle me with the care of showing what right our officious observer might have had to his particular standard. Let us therefore simply note that George Flack had grounds for looming publicly large to an uninformed young woman. He was connected, as she supposed, with literature, and wasn't

a sympathy with literature one of the many engaging attributes of her so generally attractive little sister? If Mr. Flack was a writer Francie was a reader: hadn't a trail of forgotten Tauchnitzes marked the former line of travel of the party of three? The elder girl grabbed at them on leaving hotels and railway-carriages, but usually found that she had brought odd volumes. She considered however that as a family they had an intellectual link with the young journalist, and would have been surprised if she had heard the advantage of his acquaintance questioned.

Mr. Flack's appearance was not so much a property of his own as a prejudice or a fixed liability of those who looked at him: whoever they might be what they saw mainly in him was that they had seen him before. And, oddly enough, this recognition carried with it in general no ability to remember —that is to recall—him: you couldn't conveniently have prefigured him, and it was only when you were conscious of him that you knew you had already somehow paid for it. To carry him in your mind you must have liked him very much, for no other sentiment, not even aversion, would have taught you what distinguished him in his group: aversion in especial would have made you aware only of what confounded him. He was not a specific person, but had beyond even Delia Dosson, in whom we have facially noted it, the quality of the sample or advertisement, the air of representing a "line of goods" for which there is a steady popular demand. You would scarce have expected him to be individually designated: a number, like that of the day's newspaper, would have served all his, or at least all your purpose, and you would have vaguely supposed the number high—somewhere up in the millions. As every copy of the newspaper answers to its name, Miss Dosson's visitor would have been quite adequately marked as "young commercial American." Let me add that among the accidents of his appearance was that of its sometimes striking other young commercial Americans as fine. He was twenty-seven years old and had a small square head, a light grey overcoat and in his right forefinger a curious natural crook which might have availed, under pressure, to identify him. But for the convenience of society he ought always to have worn something conspicuous—a green hat or a yellow necktie. His undertaking was to obtain material in Europe for an American "society-paper."

If it be objected to all this that when Francie Dosson at last came in she addressed him as if she easily placed him, the answer is that she had been notified by her father—and more punctually than was indicated by the manner of her response. "Well, the way you DO turn up," she said, smiling and holding out her left hand to him: in the other hand, or the hollow of her slim right arm, she had a lumpish parcel. Though she had made him wait she was clearly very glad to see him there; and she as evidently required and enjoyed a great deal of that sort of indulgence. Her sister's attitude would have told you so even if her own appearance had not. There was that in her manner to the young man —a perceptible but indefinable shade—which seemed to legitimate the oddity of his having asked in particular for her, asked as if he wished to see her to the exclusion of her father and sister: the note of a special pleasure which might have implied a special relation. And yet a spectator looking from Mr. George Flack to Miss Francie Dosson would have been much at a loss to guess what special relation could exist between them. The girl was exceedingly, extraordinarily pretty, all exempt from traceable likeness to her sister; and there was a brightness in her—a still and scattered radiance—which was quite distinct from what is called animation. Rather tall than short, fine slender erect, with an airy lightness of hand and foot, she yet gave no impression of quick movement, of abundant chatter, of excitable nerves and irrepressible life—no hint of arriving at her typical American grace in the most usual way. She was pretty without emphasis and as might almost have been said without point, and your fancy that a little stiffness would have improved her was at once qualified by the question of what her softness would have made of it. There was nothing in her, however, to confirm the implication that she had rushed about the deck of a Cunarder with a newspaper-man. She was as straight as a wand and as true as a gem; her neck was long and her grey eyes had colour; and from the ripple of her dark brown hair to the curve of her unaffirmative chin every line in her face was happy and pure. She had a weak pipe of a voice and inconceivabilities of ignorance.

Delia got up, and they came out of the little reading-room—this young lady remarking to her sister that she hoped she had brought down all the things. “Well, I had a fiendish hunt for them—we’ve got so many,” Francie replied with a strange want of articulation. “There were a few dozens of the pocket-handkerchiefs I couldn’t find; but I guess I’ve got most of them and most of the gloves.”

“Well, what are you carting them about for?” George Flack enquired, taking the parcel from her. “You had better let me handle them. Do you buy pocket-handkerchiefs by the hundred?”

“Well, it only makes fifty apiece,” Francie yieldingly smiled. “They ain’t really nice—we’re going to change them.”

“Oh I won’t be mixed up with that—you can’t work that game on these Frenchmen!” the young man stated.

“Oh with Francie they’ll take anything back,” Delia Dosson declared. “They just love her, all over.”

“Well, they’re like me then,” said Mr. Flack with friendly cheer. “I’LL take her back if she’ll come.”

“Well, I don’t think I’m ready quite yet,” the girl replied. “But I hope very much we shall cross with you again.”

“Talk about crossing—it’s on these boulevards we want a life-preserver!” Delia loudly commented. They had passed out of the hotel and the wide vista of the Rue de la Paix stretched up and down. There were many vehicles.

“Won’t this thing do? I’ll tie it to either of you,” George Flack said, holding out his bundle. “I suppose they won’t kill you if they love you,” he went on to the object of his preference.

“Well, you’ve got to know me first,” she answered, laughing and looking for a chance, while they waited to pass over.

“I didn’t know you when I was struck.” He applied his disengaged hand to her elbow and propelled her across the street. She took no notice of his observation, and Delia asked her, on the other side, whether their father had given her that money. She replied that he had given her loads—she felt as if he had made his will; which led George Flack to say that he wished the old gentleman was HIS father.

“Why you don’t mean to say you want to be our brother!” Francie prattled as they went down the Rue de la Paix.

“I should like to be Miss Delia’s, if you can make that out,” he laughed.

“Well then suppose you prove it by calling me a cab,” Miss Delia returned. “I presume you and Francie don’t take this for a promenade-deck.”

“Don’t she feel rich?” George Flack demanded of Francie. “But we do require a cart for our goods”; and he hailed a little yellow carriage, which presently drew up beside the pavement. The three got into it and, still emitting innocent pleasantries, proceeded on their way, while at the Hotel de l’Univers et de Cheltenham Mr. Dosson wandered down into the court again and took his place in his customary chair.

# II

The court was roofed with glass; the April air was mild; the cry of women selling violets came in from the street and, mingling with the rich hum of Paris, seemed to bring with it faintly the odour of the flowers. There were other odours in the place, warm succulent and Parisian, which ranged from fried fish to burnt sugar; and there were many things besides: little tables for the post-prandial coffee; piles of luggage inscribed (after the initials or frequently the name) R. P. Scudamore or D. Jackson Hodge, Philadelphia Pa., or St. Louis Mo.; rattles of unregarded bells, flittings of tray-bearing waiters, conversations with the second-floor windows of admonitory landladies, arrivals of young women with coffinlike bandboxes covered with black oil-cloth and depending from a strap, sallyings-forth of persons staying and arrivals just afterwards of other persons to see them; together with vague prostrations on benches of tired heads of American families. It was to this last element that Mr. Dosson himself in some degree contributed, but it must be added that he had not the extremely bereft and exhausted appearance of certain of his fellows. There was an air of ruminant resignation, of habitual accommodation in him; but you would have guessed that he was enjoying a holiday rather than aching for a truce, and he was not so enfeebled but that he was able to get up from time to time and stroll through the porte cochere to have a look at the street.

He gazed up and down for five minutes with his hands in his pockets, and then came back; that appeared to content him; he asked for little and had no restlessness that these small excursions wouldn't assuage. He looked at the heaped-up luggage, at the tinkling bells, at the young women from the lingere, at the repudiated visitors, at everything but the other American parents. Something in his breast told him that he knew all about these. It's not upon each other that the animals in the same cage, in a zoological collection, most turn their eyes. There was a silent sociability in him and a superficial fineness of grain that helped to account for his daughter Francie's various delicacies. He was fair and spare and had no figure; you would have seen in a moment that the question of how he should hold himself had never in his life occurred to him. He never held himself at all; providence held him rather —and very loosely—by an invisible string at the end of which he seemed gently to dangle and waver. His face was so smooth that his thin light whiskers, which grew only far back, scarcely seemed native to his cheeks: they might have been attached there for some harmless purpose of comedy or disguise. He looked for the most part as if he were thinking over, without exactly understanding it, something rather droll that had just occurred; if his eyes wandered his attention rested, just as it hurried, quite as little. His feet were remarkably small, and his clothes, in which light colours predominated, were visibly the work of a French tailor: he was an American who still held the tradition that it is in Paris a man dresses himself best. His hat would have looked odd in Bond Street or the Fifth Avenue, and his necktie was loose and flowing.

Mr. Dosson, it may further be noted, was a person of the simplest composition, a character as cipherable as a sum of two figures. He had a native financial faculty of the finest order, a gift as direct as a beautiful tenor voice, which had enabled him, without the aid of particular strength of will or keenness of ambition, to build up a large fortune while he was still of middle age. He had a genius for happy speculation, the quick unerring instinct of a "good thing"; and as he sat there idle amused contented, on the edge of the Parisian street, he might very well have passed for some rare performer who had sung his song or played his trick and had nothing to do till the next call. And he had grown rich not because he was ravenous or hard, but simply because he had an ear, not to term it a nose. He could make out the tune in the discord of the market-place; he could smell success far up the wind. The second factor in his little addition was that he was an unassuming father. He had no tastes, no acquirements, no curiosities, and his daughters represented all society for him. He thought much more and much oftener of these young ladies than of his bank-shares and railway-stock; they crowned much more his sense of accumulated property. He never compared them with other girls;

he only compared his present self with what he would have been without them. His view of them was perfectly simple. Delia had a greater direct knowledge of life and Francie a wider acquaintance with literature and art. Mr. Dosson had not perhaps a full perception of his younger daughter's beauty: he would scarcely have pretended to judge of that, more than he would of a valuable picture or vase, but he believed she was cultivated up to the eyes. He had a recollection of tremendous school-bills and, in later days, during their travels, of the way she was always leaving books behind her. Moreover wasn't her French so good that he couldn't understand it?

The two girls, at any rate, formed the breeze in his sail and the only directing determinant force he knew; when anything happened—and he was under the impression that things DID happen—they were there for it to have happened TO. Without them in short, as he felt, he would have been the tail without the kite. The wind rose and fell of course; there were lulls and there were gales; there were intervals during which he simply floated in quiet waters—cast anchor and waited. This appeared to be one of them now; but he could be patient, knowing that he should soon again inhale the brine and feel the dip of his prow. When his daughters were out for any time the occasion affected him as a "weather-breeder"—the wind would be then, as a kind of consequence, GOING to rise; but their now being out with a remarkably bright young man only sweetened the temporary calm. That belonged to their superior life, and Mr. Dosson never doubted that George M. Flack was remarkably bright. He represented the newspaper, and the newspaper for this man of genial assumptions represented—well, all other representations whatever. To know Delia and Francie thus attended by an editor or a correspondent was really to see them dancing in the central glow. This is doubtless why Mr. Dosson had slightly more than usual his air of recovering slowly from a pleasant surprise. The vision to which I allude hung before him, at a convenient distance, and melted into other bright confused aspects: reminiscences of Mr. Flack in other relations—on the ship, on the deck, at the hotel at Liverpool, and in the cars. Whitney Dosson was a loyal father, but he would have thought himself simple had he not had two or three strong convictions: one of which was that the children should never go out with a gentleman they hadn't seen before. The sense of their having, and his having, seen Mr. Flack before was comfortable to him now: it made mere placidity of his personally foregoing the young man's society in favour of Delia and Francie. He had not hitherto been perfectly satisfied that the streets and shops, the general immensity of Paris, were just the safest place for young ladies alone. But the company of a helpful gentleman ensured safety—a gentleman who would be helpful by the fact of his knowing so much and having it all right there. If a big newspaper told you everything there was in the world every morning, that was what a big newspaper-man would have to know, and Mr. Dosson had never supposed there was anything left to know when such voices as Mr. Flack's and that of his organ had daily been heard. In the absence of such happy chances—and in one way or another they kept occurring—his girls might have seemed lonely, which was not the way he struck himself. They were his company but he scarcely theirs; it was as if they belonged to him more than he to them.

They were out a long time, but he felt no anxiety, as he reflected that Mr. Flack's very profession would somehow make everything turn out to their profit. The bright French afternoon waned without bringing them back, yet Mr. Dosson still revolved about the court till he might have been taken for a valet de place hoping to pick up custom. The landlady smiled at him sometimes as she passed and re-passed, and even ventured to remark disinterestedly that it was a pity to waste such a lovely day indoors—not to take a turn and see what was going on in Paris. But Mr. Dosson had no sense of waste: that came to him much more when he was confronted with historical monuments or beauties of nature or art, which affected him as the talk of people naming others, naming friends of theirs, whom he had never heard of: then he was aware of a degree of waste for the others, as if somebody lost something—but never when he lounged in that simplifying yet so comprehensive way in the court. It wanted but a quarter of an hour to dinner—THAT historic fact was not beyond his measure—when Delia and Francie at last met his view, still accompanied by Mr. Flack and sauntering in, at a little distance from each other, with a jaded air which was not in the least a tribute to his possible solicitude. They

dropped into chairs and joked with each other, mingling sociability and languor, on the subject of what they had seen and done—a question into which he felt as yet the delicacy of enquiring. But they had evidently done a good deal and had a good time: an impression sufficient to rescue Mr. Dosson personally from the consciousness of failure. “Won’t you just step in and take dinner with us?” he asked of the young man with a friendliness to which everything appeared to minister.

“Well, that’s a handsome offer,” George Flack replied while Delia put it on record that they had each eaten about thirty cakes.

“Well, I wondered what you were doing so long. But never mind your cakes. It’s twenty minutes past six, and the table d’hote’s on time.”

“You don’t mean to say you dine at the table d’hote!” Mr. Flack cried.

“Why, don’t you like that?”—and Francie’s candour of appeal to their comrade’s taste was celestial.

“Well, it isn’t what you must build on when you come to Paris. Too many flowerpots and chickens’ legs.”

“Well, would you like one of these restaurants?” asked Mr. Dosson. “*I* don’t care—if you show us a good one.”

“Oh I’ll show you a good one—don’t you worry.” Mr. Flack’s tone was ever that of keeping the poor gentleman mildly but firmly in his place.

“Well, you’ve got to order the dinner then,” said Francie.

“Well, you’ll see how I could do it!” He towered over her in the pride of this feat.

“He has got an interest in some place,” Delia declared. “He has taken us to ever so many stores where he gets his commission.”

“Well, I’d pay you to take them round,” said Mr. Dosson; and with much agreeable trifling of this kind it was agreed that they should sally forth for the evening meal under Mr. Flack’s guidance.

If he had easily convinced them on this occasion that that was a more original proceeding than worrying those old bones, as he called it, at the hotel, he convinced them of other things besides in the course of the following month and by the aid of profuse attentions. What he mainly made clear to them was that it was really most kind of a young man who had so many big things on his mind to find sympathy for questions, for issues, he used to call them, that could occupy the telegraph and the press so little as theirs. He came every day to set them in the right path, pointing out its charms to them in a way that made them feel how much they had been in the wrong. It made them feel indeed that they didn’t know anything about anything, even about such a matter as ordering shoes—an art in which they had vaguely supposed themselves rather strong. He had in fact great knowledge, which was wonderfully various, and he knew as many people as they knew few. He had appointments—very often with celebrities—for every hour of the day, and memoranda, sometimes in shorthand, on tablets with elastic straps, with which he dazzled the simple folk at the Hotel de l’Univers et de Cheltenham, whose social life, of narrow range, consisted mainly in reading the lists of Americans who “registered” at the bankers’ and at Galignani’s. Delia Dosson in particular had a trick of poring solemnly over these records which exasperated Mr. Flack, who skimmed them and found what he wanted in the flash of an eye: she kept the others waiting while she satisfied herself that Mr. and Mrs. D. S. Rosenheim and Miss Cora Rosenheim and Master Samuel Rosenheim had “left for Brussels.”

Mr. Flack was wonderful on all occasions in finding what he wanted—which, as we know, was what he believed the public wanted—and Delia was the only one of the party with whom he was sometimes a little sharp. He had embraced from the first the idea that she was his enemy, and he alluded to it with almost tiresome frequency, though always in a humorous fearless strain. Even more than by her fashion of hanging over the registers she provoked him by appearing to find their little party not sufficient to itself, by wishing, as he expressed it, to work in new stuff. He might have been easy, however, for he had sufficient chance to observe how it was always the fate of the Dossons to miss their friends. They were continually looking out for reunions and combinations that never came

off, hearing that people had been in Paris only after they had gone away, or feeling convinced that they were there but not to be found through their not having registered, or wondering whether they should overtake them if they should go to Dresden, and then making up their minds to start for Dresden only to learn at the eleventh hour, through some accident, that the hunted game had "left for" Biarritz even as the Rosenheims for Brussels. "We know plenty of people if we could only come across them," Delia had more than once observed: she scanned the Continent with a wondering baffled gaze and talked of the unsatisfactory way in which friends at home would "write out" that other friends were "somewhere in Europe." She expressed the wish that such correspondents as that might be in a place that was not at all vague. Two or three times people had called at the hotel when they were out and had left cards for them without an address and superscribed with some mocking dash of the pencil —"So sorry to miss you!" or "Off to-morrow!" The girl sat looking at these cards, handling them and turning them over for a quarter of an hour at a time; she produced them days afterwards, brooding upon them afresh as if they were a mystic clue. George Flack generally knew where they were, the people who were "somewhere in Europe." Such knowledge came to him by a kind of intuition, by the voices of the air, by indefinable and unteachable processes. But he held his peace on purpose; he didn't want any outsiders; he thought their little party just right. Mr. Dosson's place in the scheme of Providence was to "go" with Delia while he himself "went" with Francie, and nothing would have induced George Flack to disfigure that equation. The young man was professionally so occupied with other people's affairs that it should doubtless be mentioned to his praise that he still managed to have affairs—or at least an affair—of his own. That affair was Francie Dosson, and he was pleased to perceive how little SHE cared what had become of Mr. and Mrs. Rosenheim and Master Samuel and Miss Cora. He counted all the things she didn't care about—her soft inadvertent eyes helped him to do that; and they footed up so, as he would have said, that they gave him the rich sense of a free field. If she had so few interests there was the greater possibility that a young man of bold conceptions and cheerful manners might become one. She had usually the air of waiting for something, with a pretty listlessness or an amused resignation, while tender shy indefinite little fancies hummed in her brain. Thus she would perhaps recognise in him the reward of patience. George Flack was aware that he exposed his friends to considerable fatigue: he brought them back pale and taciturn from suburban excursions and from wanderings often rather aimless and casual among the boulevards and avenues of the town. He regarded them at such times with complacency however, for these were hours of diminished resistance: he had an idea that he should be able eventually to circumvent Delia if he only could catch her some day sufficiently, that is physically, prostrate. He liked to make them all feel helpless and dependent, and this was not difficult with people who were so modest and artless, so unconscious of the boundless power of wealth. Sentiment, in our young man, was not a scruple nor a source of weakness; but he thought it really touching, the little these good people knew of what they could do with their money. They had in their hands a weapon of infinite range and yet were incapable of firing a shot for themselves. They had a sort of social humility; it appeared never to have occurred to them that, added to their loveliness, their money gave them a value. This used to strike George Flack on certain occasions when he came back to find them in the places where he had dropped them while he rushed off to give a turn to one of his screws. They never played him false, never wearied of waiting; always sat patient and submissive, usually at a cafe to which he had introduced them or in a row of chairs on the boulevard, on the level expanse of the Tuileries or in the Champs Elysees.

He introduced them to many cafes, in different parts of Paris, being careful to choose those which in his view young ladies might frequent with propriety, and there were two or three in the neighbourhood of their hotel where they became frequent and familiar figures. As the late spring days grew warmer and brighter they mainly camped out on the "terrace," amid the array of small tables at the door of the establishment, where Mr. Flack, on the return, could descry them from afar at their post and in the very same postures to which he had appointed them. They complained of no satiety in watching the many-coloured movement of the Parisian streets; and if some of the

features in the panorama were base they were only so in a version that the social culture of our friends was incapable of supplying. George Flack considered that he was rendering a positive service to Mr. Dosson: wouldn't the old gentleman have sat all day in the court anyway? and wasn't the boulevard better than the court? It was his theory too that he nattered and caressed Miss Francie's father, for there was no one to whom he had furnished more copious details about the affairs, the projects and prospects, of the Reverberator. He had left no doubt in the old gentleman's mind as to the race he himself intended to run, and Mr. Dosson used to say to him every day, the first thing, "Well, where have you got to now?"—quite as if he took a real interest. George Flack reported his interviews, that is his reportings, to which Delia and Francie gave attention only in case they knew something of the persons on whom the young emissary of the Reverberator had conferred this distinction; whereas Mr. Dosson listened, with his tolerant interposition of "Is that so?" and "Well, that's good," just as submissively when he heard of the celebrity in question for the first time.

In conversation with his daughters Mr. Flack was frequently the theme, though introduced much more by the young ladies than by himself, and especially by Delia, who announced at an early period that she knew what he wanted and that it wasn't in the least what SHE wanted. She amplified this statement very soon—at least as regards her interpretation of Mr. Flack's designs: a certain mystery still hung about her own, which, as she intimated, had much more to recommend them. Delia's vision of the danger as well as the advantage of being a pretty girl was closely connected, as was natural, with the idea of an "engagement": this idea was in a manner complete in itself—her imagination failed in the oddest way to carry it into the next stage. She wanted her sister to be engaged but wanted her not at all to be married, and had clearly never made up her mind as to how Francie was to enjoy both the peril and the shelter. It was a secret source of humiliation to her that there had as yet to her knowledge been no one with whom her sister had exchanged vows; if her conviction on this subject could have expressed itself intelligibly it would have given you a glimpse of a droll state of mind—a dim theory that a bright girl ought to be able to try successive aspirants. Delia's conception of what such a trial might consist of was strangely innocent: it was made up of calls and walks and buggy-drives, and above all of being, in the light of these exhibitions, the theme of tongues and subject to the great imputation. It had never in life occurred to her withal that a succession of lovers, or just even a repetition of experiments, may have anything to say to a young lady's delicacy. She felt herself a born old maid and never dreamed of a lover of her own—he would have been dreadfully in her way; but she dreamed of love as something in its nature essentially refined. All the same she discriminated; it did lead to something after all, and she desired that for Francie it shouldn't lead to a union with Mr. Flack. She looked at such a union under the influence of that other view which she kept as yet to herself but was prepared to produce so soon as the right occasion should come up; giving her sister to understand that she would never speak to her again should this young man be allowed to suppose —! Which was where she always paused, plunging again into impressive reticence.

"To suppose what?" Francie would ask as if she were totally unacquainted—which indeed she really was—with the suppositions of young men.

"Well, you'll see—when he begins to say things you won't like!" This sounded ominous on Delia's part, yet her anxiety was really but thin: otherwise she would have risen against the custom adopted by Mr. Flack of perpetually coming round. She would have given her attention—though it struggled in general unsuccessfully with all this side of their life—to some prompt means of getting away from Paris. She expressed to her father what in her view the correspondent of the Reverberator was "after"; but without, it must be added, gaining from him the sense of it as a connexion in which he could be greatly worked up. This indeed was not of importance, thanks to her inner faith that Francie would never really do anything—that is would never really like anything—her nearest relatives didn't like. Her sister's docility was a great comfort to Delia, the more that she herself, taking it always for granted, was the first to profit by it. She liked and disliked certain things much more than her junior did either; and Francie cultivated the convenience of her reasons, having so few of her own. They

served—Delia's reasons—for Mr. Dosson as well, so that Francie was not guilty of any particular irreverence in regarding her sister rather than her father as the controller of her fate. A fate was rather an unwieldy and terrible treasure, which it relieved her that some kind person should undertake to administer. Delia had somehow got hold of hers first—before even her father, and ever so much before Mr. Flack; and it lay with Delia to make any change. She couldn't have accepted any gentleman as a party to an engagement—which was somehow as far as her imagination went—without reference to Delia, any more than she could have done up her hair without a glass. The only action taken by Mr. Dosson on his elder daughter's admonitions was to convert the general issue, as Mr. Flack would have called it, to a theme for daily pleasantry. He was fond, in his intercourse with his children, of some small usual joke, some humorous refrain; and what could have been more in the line of true domestic sport than a little gentle but unintermitted raillery on Francie's conquest? Mr. Flack's attributive intentions became a theme of indulgent parental chaff, and the girl was neither dazzled nor annoyed by the freedom of all this tribute. "Well, he HAS told us about half we know," she used to reply with an air of the judicious that the undetected observer I am perpetually moved to invoke would have found indescribably quaint.

Among the items of knowledge for which they were indebted to him floated the fact that this was the very best time in the young lady's life to have her portrait painted and the best place in the world to have it done well; also that he knew a "lovely artist," a young American of extraordinary talent, who would be delighted to undertake the job. He led his trio to this gentleman's studio, where they saw several pictures that opened to them the strange gates of mystification. Francie protested that she didn't want to be done in THAT style, and Delia declared that she would as soon have her sister shown up in a magic lantern. They had had the fortune not to find Mr. Waterlow at home, so that they were free to express themselves and the pictures were shown them by his servant. They looked at them as they looked at bonnets and confections when they went to expensive shops; as if it were a question, among so many specimens, of the style and colour they would choose. Mr. Waterlow's productions took their place for the most part in the category of those creations known to ladies as frights, and our friends retired with the lowest opinion of the young American master. George Flack told them however that they couldn't get out of it, inasmuch as he had already written home to the Reverberator that Francie was to sit. They accepted this somehow as a kind of supernatural sign that she would have to, for they believed everything they ever heard quoted from a newspaper. Moreover Mr. Flack explained to them that it would be idiotic to miss such an opportunity to get something at once precious and cheap; for it was well known that impressionism was going to be the art of the future, and Charles Waterlow was a rising impressionist. It was a new system altogether and the latest improvement in art. They didn't want to go back, they wanted to go forward, and he would give them an article that would fetch five times the money in about five years—which somehow, as he put it, seemed a very short time, though it would have seemed immense for anything else. They were not in search of a bargain, but they allowed themselves to be inoculated with any reason they thought would be characteristic of informed people; and he even convinced them after a little that when once they had got used to impressionism they would never look at anything else. Mr. Waterlow was the man, among the young, and he had no interest in praising him, because he was not a personal friend: his reputation was advancing with strides, and any one with any sense would want to secure something before the rush.

# III

The young ladies consented to return to the Avenue des Villiers; and this time they found the celebrity of the future. He was smoking cigarettes with a friend while coffee was served to the two gentlemen—it was just after luncheon—on a vast divan covered with scrappy oriental rugs and cushions; it looked, Francie thought, as if the artist had set up a carpet-shop in a corner. He struck her as very pleasant; and it may be mentioned without circumlocution that the young lady ushered in by the vulgar American reporter, whom he didn't like and who had already come too often to his studio to pick up "glimpses" (the painter wondered how in the world he had picked HER up), this charming candidate for portraiture rose on the spot before Charles Waterlow as a precious model. She made, it may further be declared, quite the same impression on the gentleman who was with him and who never took his eyes off her while her own rested afresh on several finished and unfinished canvases. This gentleman asked of his friend at the end of five minutes the favour of an introduction to her; in consequence of which Francie learned that his name—she thought it singular—was Gaston Probert. Mr. Probert was a kind-eyed smiling youth who fingered the points of his moustache; he was represented by Mr. Waterlow as an American, but he pronounced the American language—so at least it seemed to Francie—as if it had been French.

After she had quitted the studio with Delia and Mr. Flack—her father on this occasion not being of the party—the two young men, falling back on their divan, broke into expressions of aesthetic rapture, gave it to each other that the girl had qualities—oh but qualities and a charm of line! They remained there an hour, studying these rare properties through the smoke of their cigarettes. You would have gathered from their conversation—though as regards much of it only perhaps with the aid of a grammar and dictionary—that the young lady had been endowed with plastic treasures, that is with physical graces, of the highest order, of which she was evidently quite unconscious. Before this, however, Mr. Waterlow had come to an understanding with his visitors—it had been settled that Miss Francina should sit for him at his first hour of leisure. Unfortunately that hour hovered before him as still rather distant—he was unable to make a definite appointment. He had sitters on his hands, he had at least three portraits to finish before going to Spain. He adverted with bitterness to the journey to Spain—a little excursion laid out precisely with his friend Probert for the last weeks of the spring, the first of the southern summer, the time of the long days and the real light. Gaston Probert re-echoed his regrets, for though he had no business with Miss Francina, whose name he yet liked, he also wanted to see her again. They half-agreed to give up Spain—they had after all been there before—so that Waterlow might take the girl in hand without delay, the moment he had knocked off his present work. This amendment broke down indeed, for other considerations came up and the artist resigned himself to the arrangement on which the young women had quitted him: he thought it so characteristic of their nationality that they should settle a matter of that sort for themselves. This was simply that they should come back in the autumn, when he should be comparatively free: then there would be a margin and they might all take their time. At present, before long—by the time he should be ready—the question of the pretty one's leaving Paris for the summer would be sure to rise, and that would be a tiresome interruption. The pretty one clearly liked Paris, she had no plans for the autumn and only wanted a reason to come back about the twentieth of September. Mr. Waterlow remarked humorously that she evidently bossed the shop. Meanwhile, before starting for Spain, he would see her as often as possible—his eye would take possession of her.

His companion envied his eye, even expressed jealousy of his eye. It was perhaps as a step towards establishing his right to jealousy that Mr. Probert left a card upon the Miss Dossons at the Hotel de l'Univers et de Cheltenham, having first ascertained that such a proceeding would not, by the young American sisters, be regarded as an unwarrantable liberty. Gaston Probert was an American who had never been in America and was obliged to take counsel on such an emergency as that. He

knew that in Paris young men didn't call at hotels on blameless maids, but he also knew that blameless maids, unattended by a parent, didn't visit young men in studios; and he had no guide, no light he could trust—none save the wisdom of his friend Waterlow, which was for the most part communicated to him in a derisive and misleading form. Waterlow, who was after all himself an ornament of the French, and the very French, school, jeered at the other's want of native instinct, at the way he never knew by which end to take hold of a compatriot. Poor Probert was obliged to confess to his terrible paucity of practice, and that in the great medley of aliens and brothers—and even more of sisters—he couldn't tell which was which. He would have had a country and countrymen, to say nothing of countrywomen, if he could; but that matter had never been properly settled for him, and it's one there's ever a great difficulty in a gentleman's settling for himself. Born in Paris, he had been brought up altogether on French lines, in a family that French society had irrecoverably absorbed. His father, a Carolinian and a Catholic, was a Gallomaniac of the old American type. His three sisters had married Frenchmen, and one of them lived in Brittany while the others were ostensibly seated in Touraine. His only brother had fallen, during the Terrible Year, in defence of their adopted country. Yet Gaston, though he had had an old Legitimist marquis for godfather, was not legally one of its children; his mother had, on her death-bed, extorted from him the promise that he wouldn't take service in its armies; she considered, after the death of her elder son—Gaston, in 1870, had been a boy of ten—that the family had sacrificed enough on the altar of sympathy.

The young man therefore, between two stools, had no clear sitting-place: he wanted to be as American as he could and yet not less French than he was; he was afraid to give up the little that he was and find that what he might be was less—he shrank from a flying leap which might drop him in the middle of the sea. At the same time he thought himself sure that the only way to know how it feels to be an American is to try it, and he had had many a purpose of making the pious pilgrimage. His family however had been so completely Gallicised that the affairs of each member of it were the affairs of all the rest, and his father, his sisters and his brothers-in-law had not yet begun sufficiently to regard this scheme as their own for him to feel it substantially his. It was a family in which there was no individual but only a collective property. Meanwhile he tried, as I say, by affronting minor perils, and especially by going a good deal to see Charles Waterlow in the Avenue de Villiers, whom he believed to be his dearest friend, formed for his affection by Monsieur Carolus. He had an idea that in this manner he kept himself in touch with his countrymen; and he had never pitched his endeavour so high as in leaving that card on the Misses Dosson. He was in search of freshness, but he needn't have gone far: he would have had but to turn his lantern on his own young breast to find a considerable store of it. Like many of his dawdling coaevals he gave much attention to art, lived as much as possible in that more select world where it is a positive duty not to bustle. To make up for his want of talent he espoused the talent of others—that is of several—and was as sensitive and conscientious about them as he might have been about himself. He defended certain of Waterlow's purples and greens as he would have defended his own honour, and there was a genius or two, not yet fully acclaimed by the vulgar, in regard to whom he had convictions that belonged almost to the undiscussable part of life. He had not, for himself, any very high sense of performance, but what kept it down particularly was his untractable hand, the fact that, such as they were, Waterlow's purples and greens, for instance, were far beyond him. If he hadn't failed there other failures wouldn't have mattered, not even that of not having a country; and it was on the occasion of his friend's agreement to paint that strange lovely girl, whom he liked so much and whose companions he didn't like, that he felt supremely without a vocation. Freshness was in HER at least, if he had only been organised for catching it. He prayed earnestly, in relation to such a triumph, for a providential re-enforcement of Waterlow's sense of that source of charm. If Waterlow had a fault it was that his freshnesses were sometimes too crude.

He avenged himself for the artist's profanation of his first attempt to approach Miss Francie by indulging at the end of another week in a second. He went about six o'clock, when he supposed she would have returned from her day's wanderings, and his prudence was rewarded by the sight of the

young lady sitting in the court of the hotel with her father and sister. Mr. Dosson was new to Gaston Probert, but the young man might have been a naturalist visiting a rank country with a net of such narrow meshes as to let no creature of the air escape. The little party was as usual expecting Mr. Flack at any moment, and they had collected downstairs, so that he might pick them up easily. They had, on the first floor, an expensive parlour, decorated in white and gold, with sofas of crimson damask; but there was something lonely in that grandeur and the place had become mainly a receptacle for their tall trunks, with a half-emptied paper of chocolates or marrons glaces on every table. After young Probert's first call his name was often on the lips of the simple trio, and Mr. Dosson grew still more jocose, making nothing of a secret of his perception that Francie hit the bull's-eye "every time." Mr. Waterlow had returned their visit, but that was rather a matter of course, since it was they who had gone after him. They had not gone after the other one; it was he who had come after them. When he entered the hotel, as they sat there, this pursuit and its probable motive became startlingly vivid.

Delia had taken the matter much more seriously than her father; she said there was ever so much she wanted to find out. She mused upon these mysteries visibly, but with no great advance, and she appealed for assistance to George Flack, with a candour which he appreciated and returned. If he really knew anything he ought to know at least who Mr. Probert was; and she spoke as if it would be in the natural course that as soon as he should find out he would put it for them somehow into his paper. Mr. Flack promised to "nose round"; he said the best plan would be that the results should "come back" to her in the Reverberator; it might have been gathered from him that "the people over there"—in other words the mass of their compatriots—wouldn't be unpersuadable that they wanted about a column on Mr. Probert. His researches were to prove none the less fruitless, for in spite of the vivid fact the girl was able to give him as a starting-point, the fact that their new acquaintance had spent his whole life in Paris, the young journalist couldn't scare up a single person who had even heard of him. He had questioned up and down and all over the place, from the Rue Scribe to the far end of Chaillot, and he knew people who knew others who knew every member of the American colony; that select settled body, which haunted poor Delia's imagination, glittered and re-echoed there in a hundred tormenting roundabout glimpses. That was where she wanted to "get" Francie, as she said to herself; she wanted to get her right in there. She believed the members of this society to constitute a little kingdom of the blest; and she used to drive through the Avenue Gabriel, the Rue de Marignan and the wide vistas which radiate from the Arch of Triumph and are always changing their names, on purpose to send up wistful glances to the windows—she had learned that all this was the happy quarter—of the enviable but unapproachable colonists. She saw these privileged mortals, as she supposed, in almost every victoria that made a languid lady with a pretty head dash past her, and she had no idea how little honour this theory sometimes did her expatriated countrywomen. Her plan was already made to be on the field again the next winter and take it up seriously, this question of getting Francie in.

When Mr. Flack remarked that young Probert's net couldn't be either the rose or anything near it, since they had shed no petal, at any general shake, on the path of the oldest inhabitant, Delia had a flash of inspiration, an intellectual flight that she herself didn't measure at the time. She asked if that didn't perhaps prove on the contrary quite the opposite—that they were just THE cream and beyond all others. Wasn't there a kind of inner, very FAR in, circle, and wouldn't they be somewhere about the centre of that? George Flack almost quivered at this weird hit as from one of the blind, for he guessed on the spot that Delia Dosson had, as he would have said, got there.

"Why, do you mean one of those families that have worked down so far you can't find where they went in?"—that was the phrase in which he recognised the truth of the girl's grope. Delia's fixed eyes assented, and after a moment of cogitation George Flack broke out: "That's the kind of family we want to handle!"

"Well, perhaps they won't want to be handled," Delia had returned with a still wilder and more remarkable play of inspiration. "You had better find out," she had added.

The chance to find out might have seemed to present itself after Mr. Probert had walked in that confiding way into the hotel; for his arrival had been followed a quarter of an hour later by that of the representative of the Reverberator. Gaston had liked the way they treated him—though demonstrative it was not artificial. Mr. Dosson had said they had been hoping he would come round again, and Delia had remarked that she supposed he had had quite a journey—Paris was so big; and had urged his acceptance of a glass of wine or a cup of tea. Mentioning that that wasn't the place where they usually received—she liked to hear herself talk of "receiving"—she led the party up to her white-and-gold saloon, where they should be so much more private: she liked also to hear herself talk of privacy. They sat on the red silk chairs and she hoped Mr. Probert would at least taste a sugared chestnut or a chocolate; and when he declined, pleading the imminence of the dinner-hour, she sighed: "Well, I suppose you're so used to them—to the best—living so long over here." The allusion to the dinner-hour led Mr. Dosson to the frank hope that he would go round and dine with them without ceremony; they were expecting a friend—he generally settled it for them—who was coming to take them round.

"And then we're going to the circus," Francie said, speaking for the first time.

If she had not spoken before she had done something still more to the purpose; she had removed any shade of doubt that might have lingered in the young man's spirit as to her charm of line. He was aware that the education of Paris, acting upon a natural aptitude, had opened him much—rendered him perhaps even morbidly sensitive—to impressions of this order; the society of artists, the talk of studios, the attentive study of beautiful works, the sight of a thousand forms of curious research and experiment, had produced in his mind a new sense, the exercise of which was a conscious enjoyment and the supreme gratification of which, on several occasions, had given him as many indelible memories. He had once said to his friend Waterlow: "I don't know whether it's a confession of a very poor life, but the most important things that have happened to me in this world have been simply half a dozen visual impressions—things that happened through my eyes."

"Ah malheureux, you're lost!" the painter had exclaimed in answer to this, and without even taking the trouble to explain his ominous speech. Gaston Probert however had not been frightened by it, and he continued to be thankful for the sensitive plate that nature had lodged in his brain and that culture had brought to so high a polish. The experience of the eye was doubtless not everything, but it was so much gained, so much saved, in a world in which other treasures were apt to slip through one's fingers; and above all it had the merit that so many things gave it and that nothing could take it away. He had noted in a moment how straight Francie Dosson gave it; and now, seeing her a second time, he felt her promote it in a degree which made acquaintance with her one of those "important" facts of which he had spoken to Charles Waterlow. It was in the case of such an accident as this that he felt the value of his Parisian education. It made him revel in his modern sense.

It was therefore not directly the prospect of the circus that induced him to accept Mr. Dosson's invitation; nor was it even the charm exerted by the girl's appearing, in the few words she uttered, to appeal to him for herself. It was his feeling that on the edge of the glittering ring her type would attach him to her, to her only, and that if he knew it was rare she herself didn't. He liked to be intensely conscious, but liked others not to be. It seemed to him at this moment, after he had told Mr. Dosson he should be delighted to spend the evening with them, that he was indeed trying hard to measure how it would feel to recover the national tie; he had jumped on the ship, he was pitching away to the west. He had led his sister, Mme. de Brecourt, to expect that he would dine with her—she was having a little party; so that if she could see the people to whom, without a scruple, with a quick sense of refreshment and freedom, he now sacrificed her! He knew who was coming to his sister's in the Place Beauvau: Mme. d'Outreville and M. de Grospre, old M. Courageau, Mme. de Drives, Lord and Lady Trantum, Mile de Saintonge; but he was fascinated by the idea of the contrast between what he preferred and what he gave up. His life had long been wanting—painfully wanting—in the element of contrast, and here was a chance to bring it in. He saw it come in powerfully with Mr. Flack, after Miss Dosson had proposed they should walk off without their initiator. Her father didn't

favour this suggestion; he said "We want a double good dinner to-day and Mr. Flack has got to order it." Upon this Delia had asked the visitor if HE couldn't order—a Frenchman like him; and Francie had interrupted, before he could answer the question, "Well, ARE you a Frenchman? That's just the point, ain't it?" Gaston Probert replied that he had no wish but to be a citizen of HER country, and the elder sister asked him if he knew many Americans in Paris. He was obliged to confess he knew almost none, but hastened to add he was eager to go on now he had taken such a charming start.

"Oh we ain't anything—if you mean that," Delia said. "If you go on you'll go on beyond us."

"We ain't anything here, my dear, but we're a good deal at home," Mr. Dosson jocosely interjected.

"I think we're very nice anywhere!" Francie exclaimed; upon which Gaston Probert declared that they were as delightful as possible. It was in these amenities that George Flack found them engaged; but there was none the less a certain eagerness in his greeting of the other guest, as if he had it in mind to ask him how soon he could give him half an hour. I hasten to add that with the turn the occasion presently took the correspondent of the Reverberator dropped the conception of making the young man "talk" for the benefit of the subscribers to that journal. They all went out together, and the impulse to pick up something, usually so irresistible in George Flack's mind, suffered an odd check. He found himself wanting to handle his fellow visitor in a sense other than the professional. Mr. Probert talked very little to Francie, but though Mr. Flack didn't know that on a first occasion he would have thought this aggressive, even rather brutal, he knew it was for Francie, and Francie alone, that the fifth member of the party was there. He said to himself suddenly and in perfect sincerity that it was a mean class anyway, the people for whom their own country wasn't good enough. He didn't go so far, however, when they were seated at the admirable establishment of M. Durand in the Place de la Madeleine, as to order a bad dinner to spite his competitor; nor did he, to spoil this gentleman's amusement, take uncomfortable seats at the pretty circus in the Champs Elysees to which, at half-past eight o'clock, the company was conveyed—it was a drive of but five minutes—in a couple of cabs. The occasion therefore was superficially smooth, and he could see that the sense of being disagreeable to an American newspaper-man was not needed to make his nondescript rival enjoy it. That gentleman did indeed hate his crude accent and vulgar laugh and above all the lamblike submission to him of their friends. Mr. Flack was acute enough for an important observation: he cherished it and promised himself to bring it to the notice of his clinging charges. Their imperturbable guest professed a great desire to be of service to the young ladies—to do what would help them to be happy in Paris; but he gave no hint of the intention that would contribute most to such a result, the bringing them in contact with the other members, especially with the female members, of his family. George Flack knew nothing about the matter, but he required for purposes of argument that Mr. Probert's family should have female members, and it was lucky for him that his assumption was just. He grasped in advance the effect with which he should impress it on Francie and Delia—but notably on Delia, who would then herself impress it on Francie—that it would be time for their French friend to talk when he had brought his mother round. BUT HE NEVER WOULD—they might bet their pile on that! He never did, in the strange sequel—having, poor young man, no mother to bring. Moreover he was quite mum—as Delia phrased it to herself—about Mme. de Brecourt and Mme. de Cliche: such, Miss Dosson learned from Charles Waterlow, were the names of his two sisters who had houses in Paris—gleaning at the same time the information that one of these ladies was a marquise and the other a comtesse. She was less exasperated by their non-appearance than Mr. Flack had hoped, and it didn't prevent an excursion to dine at Saint-Germain a week after the evening spent at the circus, which included both the new admirers. It also as a matter of course included Mr. Flack, for though the party had been proposed in the first instance by Charles Waterlow, who wished to multiply opportunities for studying his future sitter, Mr. Dosson had characteristically constituted himself host and administrator, with the young journalist as his deputy. He liked to invite people and to pay for them, and disliked to be invited and paid for. He was never inwardly content on any occasion unless a great deal of money was

spent, and he could be sure enough of the large amount only when he himself spent it. He was too simple for conceit or for pride of purse, but always felt any arrangements shabby and sneaking as to which the expense hadn't been referred to him. He never named what he paid for anything. Also Delia had made him understand that if they should go to Saint-Germain as guests of the artist and his friend Mr. Flack wouldn't be of the company: she was sure those gentlemen wouldn't rope HIM in. In fact she was too sure, for, though enjoying him not at all, Charles Waterlow would on this occasion have made a point of expressing by an act of courtesy his sense of obligation to a man who had brought him such a subject. Delia's hint however was all-sufficient for her father; he would have thought it a gross breach of friendly loyalty to take part in a festival not graced by Mr. Flack's presence. His idea of loyalty was that he should scarcely smoke a cigar unless his friend was there to take another, and he felt rather mean if he went round alone to get shaved. As regards Saint-Germain he took over the project while George Flack telegraphed for a table on the terrace at the Pavilion Henri Quatre. Mr. Dosson had by this time learned to trust the European manager of the Reverberator to spend his money almost as he himself would.

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.