The Tragic Muse

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Аннотация

The Tragic Muse Henry James – The Tragic Muse is a novel by Henry James, first published as a serial in The Atlantic Monthly in 1889-1890 and then as a book in 1890. This wide, cheerful panorama of English life follows the fortunes of two would-be artists: Nick Dormer, who throws over a political career in his efforts to become a painter, and Miriam Rooth, an actress striving for artistic and commercial success. A cast of supporting characters help and hinder their pursuits

Содержание

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Preface

I profess a certain vagueness of remembrance in respect to the origin and growth of The Tragic Muse, which appeared in the Atlantic Monthly again, beginning January 1889 and running on, inordinately, several months beyond its proper twelve. If it be ever of interest and profit to put one's finger on the productive germ of a work of art, and if in fact a lucid account of any such work involves that prime identification, I can but look on the present fiction as a poor fatherless and motherless, a sort of unregistered and unacknowledged birth. I fail to recover my precious first moment of consciousness of the idea to which it was to give form; to recognise in it—as I like to do in general—the effect of some particular sharp impression or concussion. I call such remembered glimmers always precious, because without them comes no clear vision of what one may have intended, and without that vision no straight measure of what one may have succeeded in doing. What I make out from furthest back is that I must have had from still further back, must in fact practically have always had, the happy thought of some dramatic picture of the "artist-life" and of the difficult terms on which it is at the best secured and enjoyed, the general question of its having to be not altogether easily paid for. To "do something about art"—art, that is, as a human complication and a social stumbling-block—must have been for me early a good deal of

a nursed intention, the conflict between art and "the world" striking me thus betimes as one of the half-dozen great primary motives. I remember even having taken for granted with this fond inveteracy that no one of these pregnant themes was likely to prove under the test more full of matter. This being the case, meanwhile, what would all experience have done but enrich one's conviction?—since if, on the one hand, I had gained a more and more intimate view of the nature of art and the conditions therewith imposed, so the world was a conception that clearly required, and that would for ever continue to take, any amount of filling-in. The happy and fruitful truth, at all events, was that there was opposition—why there should be was another matter—and that the opposition would beget an infinity of situations. What had doubtless occurred in fact, moreover, was that just this question of the essence and the reasons of the opposition had shown itself to demand the light of experience; so that to the growth of experience, truly, the treatment of the subject had yielded. It had waited for that advantage.

Yet I continue to see experience giving me its jog mainly in the form of an invitation from the gentle editor of the Atlantic, the late Thomas Bailey Aldrich, to contribute to his pages a serial that should run through the year. That friendly appeal becomes thus the most definite statement I can make of the "genesis" of the book; though from the moment of its reaching me everything else in the matter seems to live again. What lives not least, to be quite candid, is the fact that I was to see this production

make a virtual end, for the time, as by its sinister effect—though for reasons still obscure to me—of the pleasant old custom of the "running" of the novel. Not for many years was I to feel the practice, for my benefit, confidingly revive. The influence of The Tragic Muse was thus exactly other than what I had all earnestly (if of course privately enough) invoked for it, and I remember well the particular chill, at last, of the sense of my having launched it in a great grey void from which no echo or message whatever would come back. None, in the event, ever came, and as I now read the book over I find the circumstance make, in its name, for a special tenderness of charity; even for that finer consideration hanging in the parental breast about the maimed or slighted, the disfigured or defeated, the unlucky or unlikely child—with this hapless small mortal thought of further as somehow "compromising." I am thus able to take the thing as having quite wittingly and undisturbedly existed for itself alone, and to liken it to some aromatic bag of gathered herbs of which the string has never been loosed; or, better still, to some jar of potpourri, shaped and overfigured and polished, but of which the lid, never lifted, has provided for the intense accumulation of the fragrance within. The consistent, the sustained, preserved tone of The Tragic Muse, its constant and doubtless rather fine-drawn truth to its particular sought pitch and accent, are, critically speaking, its principal merit—the inner harmony that I perhaps presumptuously permit myself to compare to an unevaporated scent.

After which indeed I may well be summoned to say what I mean, in such a business, by an appreciable "tone" and how I can justify my claim to it—a demonstration that will await us later. Suffice it just here that I find the latent historic clue in my hand again with the easy recall of my prompt grasp of such a chance to make a story about art. There was my subject this time—all mature with having long waited, and with the blest dignity that my original perception of its value was quite lost in the mists of youth. I must long have carried in my head the notion of a young man who should amid difficulty—the difficulties being the story—have abandoned "public life" for the zealous pursuit of some supposedly minor craft; just as, evidently, there had hovered before me some possible picture (but all comic and ironic) of one of the most salient London "social" passions, the unappeasable curiosity for the things of the theatre; for every one of them, that is, except the drama itself, and for the "personality" of the performer (almost any performer quite sufficiently serving) in particular. This latter, verily, had struck me as an aspect appealing mainly to satiric treatment; the only adequate or effective treatment, I had again and again felt, for most of the distinctively social aspects of London: the general artlessly histrionised air of things caused so many examples to spring from behind any hedge. What came up, however, at once, for my own stretched canvas, was that it would have to be ample, give me really space to turn round, and that a single illustrative case might easily be meagre fare. The young man who should

"chuck" admired politics, and of course some other admired object with them, would be all very well; but he wouldn't be enough—therefore what should one say to some other young man who would chuck something and somebody else, admired in their way too?

There need never, at the worst, be any difficulty about the things advantageously chuckable for art; the question is all but of choosing them in the heap. Yet were I to represent a struggle —an interesting one, indispensably—with the passions of the theatre (as a profession, or at least as an absorption) I should have to place the theatre in another light than the satiric. This, however, would by good luck be perfectly possible too—without a sacrifice of truth; and I should doubtless even be able to make my theatric case as important as I might desire it. It seemed clear that I needed big cases—small ones would practically give my central idea away; and I make out now my still labouring under the illusion that the case of the sacrifice for art can ever be, with truth, with taste, with discretion involved, apparently and showily "big." I daresay it glimmered upon me even then that the very sharpest difficulty of the victim of the conflict I should seek to represent, and the very highest interest of his predicament, dwell deep in the fact that his repudiation of the great obvious, great moral or functional or useful character, shall just have to consent to resemble a surrender for absolutely nothing. Those characters are all large and expansive, seated and established and endowed; whereas the most charming truth about the preference

for art is that to parade abroad so thoroughly inward and so naturally embarrassed a matter is to falsify and vulgarise it; that as a preference attended with the honours of publicity it is indeed nowhere; that in fact, under the rule of its sincerity, its only honours are those of contradiction, concentration and a seemingly deplorable indifference to everything but itself. Nothing can well figure as less "big," in an honest thesis, than a marked instance of somebody's willingness to pass mainly for an ass. Of these things I must, I say, have been in strictness aware; what I perhaps failed of was to note that if a certain romantic glamour (even that of mere eccentricity or of a fine perversity) may be flung over the act of exchange of a "career" for the esthetic life in general, the prose and the modesty of the matter yet come in with any exhibition of the particular branch of esthetics selected. Then it is that the attitude of hero or heroine may look too much—for the romantic effect—like a low crouching over proved trifles. Art indeed has in our day taken on so many honours and emoluments that the recognition of its importance is more than a custom, has become on occasion almost a fury: the line is drawn—especially in the English world—only at the importance of heeding what it may mean.

The more I turn my pieces over, at any rate, the more I now see I must have found in them, and I remember how, once well in presence of my three typical examples, my fear of too ample a canvas quite dropped. The only question was that if I had marked my political case, from so far back, for "a story

by itself," and then marked my theatrical case for another, the joining together of these interests, originally seen as separate, might, all disgracefully, betray the seam, show for mechanical and superficial. A story was a story, a picture a picture, and I had a mortal horror of two stories, two pictures, in one. The reason of this was the clearest—my subject was immediately, under that disadvantage, so cheated of its indispensable centre as to become of no more use for expressing a main intention than a wheel without a hub is of use for moving a cart. It was a fact, apparently, that one had on occasion seen two pictures in one; were there not for instance certain sublime Tintorettos at Venice, a measureless Crucifixion in especial, which showed without loss of authority half-a-dozen actions separately taking place? Yes, that might be, but there had surely been nevertheless a mighty pictorial fusion, so that the virtue of composition had somehow thereby come all mysteriously to its own. Of course the affair would be simple enough if composition could be kept out of the question; yet by what art or process, what bars and bolts, what unmuzzled dogs and pointed guns, perform that feat? I had to know myself utterly inapt for any such valour and recognise that, to make it possible, sundry things should have begun for me much further back than I had felt them even in their dawn. A picture without composition slights its most precious chance for beauty, and is, moreover, not composed at all unless the painter knows how that principle of health and safety, working as an absolutely premeditated art, has prevailed. There may in its absence be life, incontestably, as

The Newcomes has life, as Les Trois Mousquetaires, as Tolstoi's Peace and War, have it; but what do such large, loose, baggy monsters, with their queer elements of the accidental and the arbitrary, artistically mean? We have heard it maintained, we well remember, that such things are "superior to art"; but we understand least of all what that may mean, and we look in vain for the artist, the divine explanatory genius, who will come to our aid and tell us. There is life and life, and as waste is only life sacrificed and thereby prevented from "counting," I delight in a deep-breathing economy and an organic form. My business was accordingly to "go in" for complete pictorial fusion, some such common interest between my two first notions as would, in spite of their birth under quite different stars, do them no violence at all.

I recall with this confirmed infatuation of retrospect that through the mild perceptions I here glance at there struck for The Tragic Muse the first hour of a season of no small subjective felicity; lighted mainly, I seem to see, by a wide west window that, high aloft, looked over near and far London sunsets, a half-grey, half-flushed expanse of London life. The production of the thing, which yet took a good many months, lives for me again all contemporaneously in that full projection, upon my very table, of the good fog-filtered Kensington mornings; which had a way indeed of seeing the sunset in and which at the very last are merged to memory in a different and a sharper pressure, that of an hotel bedroom in Paris during the autumn of 1889, with

the Exposition du Centenaire about to end—and my long story, through the usual difficulties, as well. The usual difficulties—and I fairly cherish the record as some adventurer in another line may hug the sense of his inveterate habit of just saving in time the neck he ever undiscourageably risks—were those bequeathed as a particular vice of the artistic spirit, against which vigilance had been destined from the first to exert itself in vain, and the effect of which was that again and again, perversely, incurably, the centre of my structure would insist on placing itself not, so to speak, in the middle. It mattered little that the reader with the idea or the suspicion of a structural centre is the rarest of friends and of critics—a bird, it would seem, as merely fabled as the phoenix: the terminational terror was none the less certain to break in and my work threaten to masquerade for me as an active figure condemned to the disgrace of legs too short, ever so much too short, for its body. I urge myself to the candid confession that in very few of my productions, to my eye, has the organic centre succeeded in getting into proper position.

Time after time, then, has the precious waistband or girdle, studded and buckled and placed for brave outward show, practically worked itself, and in spite of desperate remonstrance, or in other words essential counterplotting, to a point perilously near the knees—perilously I mean for the freedom of these parts. In several of my compositions this displacement has so succeeded, at the crisis, in defying and resisting me, has appeared so fraught with probable dishonour, that I still turn upon them,

in spite of the greater or less success of final dissimulation, a rueful and wondering eye. These productions have in fact, if I may be so bold about it, specious and spurious centres altogether, to make up for the failure of the true. As to which in my list they are, however, that is another business, not on any terms to be made known. Such at least would seem my resolution so far as I have thus proceeded. Of any attention ever arrested by the pages forming the object of this reference that rigour of discrimination has wholly and consistently failed, I gather, to constitute a part. In which fact there is perhaps after all a rough justice—since the infirmity I speak of, for example, has been always but the direct and immediate fruit of a positive excess of foresight, the overdone desire to provide for future need and lay up heavenly treasure against the demands of my climax. If the art of the drama, as a great French master of it has said, is above all the art of preparations, that is true only to a less extent of the art of the novel, and true exactly in the degree in which the art of the particular novel comes near that of the drama. The first half of a fiction insists ever on figuring to me as the stage or theatre for the second half, and I have in general given so much space to making the theatre propitious that my halves have too often proved strangely unequal. Thereby has arisen with grim regularity the question of artfully, of consummately masking the fault and conferring on the false quantity the brave appearance of the true.

But I am far from pretending that these desperations of

ingenuity have not—as through seeming most of the very essence of the problem—their exasperated charm; so far from it that my particular supreme predicament in the Paris hotel, after an undue primary leakage of time, no doubt, over at the great river-spanning museum of the Champ de Mars and the Trocadero, fairly takes on to me now the tender grace of a day that is dead. Re-reading the last chapters of The Tragic Muse I catch again the very odour of Paris, which comes up in the rich rumble of the Rue de la Paix—with which my room itself, for that matter, seems impregnated—and which hangs for reminiscence about the embarrassed effort to "finish," not ignobly, within my already exceeded limits; an effort prolonged each day to those late afternoon hours during which the tone of the terrible city seemed to deepen about one to an effect strangely composed at once of the auspicious and the fatal. The "plot" of Paris thickened at such hours beyond any other plot in the world, I think; but there one sat meanwhile with another, on one's hands, absolutely requiring precedence. Not the least imperative of one's conditions was thus that one should have really, should have finely and (given one's scale) concisely treated one's subject, in spite of there being so much of the confounded irreducible quantity still to treat. If I spoke just now, however, of the "exasperated" charm of supreme difficulty, that is because the challenge of economic representation so easily becomes, in any of the arts, intensely interesting to meet. To put all that is possible of one's idea into a form and compass that will contain and express it only by delicate

adjustments and an exquisite chemistry, so that there will at the end be neither a drop of one's liquor left nor a hair's breadth of the rim of one's glass to spare—every artist will remember how often that sort of necessity has carried with it its particular inspiration. Therein lies the secret of the appeal, to his mind, of the successfully foreshortened thing, where representation is arrived at, as I have already elsewhere had occasion to urge, not by the addition of items (a light that has for its attendant shadow a possible dryness) but by the art of figuring synthetically, a compactness into which the imagination may cut thick, as into the rich density of wedding-cake. The moral of all which indeed, I fear, is, perhaps too trivially, but that the "thick," the false, the dissembling second half of the work before me, associated throughout with the effort to weight my dramatic values as heavily as might be, since they had to be so few, presents that effort as at the very last a quite convulsive, yet in its way highly agreeable, spasm. Of such mild prodigies is the "history" of any specific creative effort composed!

But I have got too much out of the "old" Kensington light of twenty years ago—a lingering oblique ray of which, to-day surely quite extinct, played for a benediction over my canvas. From the moment I made out, at my high-perched west window, my lucky title, that is from the moment Miriam Rooth herself had given it me, so this young woman had given me with it her own position in the book, and so that in turn had given me my precious unity, to which no more than Miriam was either Nick Dormer

or Peter Sherringham to be sacrificed. Much of the interest of the matter was immediately, therefore, in working out the detail of that unity and—always entrancing range of questions—the order, the reason, the relation, of presented aspects. With three general aspects, that of Miriam's case, that of Nick's and that of Sherringham's, there was work in plenty cut out; since happy as it might be to say, "My several actions beautifully become one," the point of the affair would be in showing them beautifully become so—without which showing foul failure hovered and pounced. Well, the pleasure of handling an action (or, otherwise expressed, of a "story") is at the worst, for a storyteller, immense, and the interest of such a question as for example keeping Nick Dormer's story his and yet making it also and all effectively in a large part Peter Sherringham's, of keeping Sherringham's his and yet making it in its high degree his kinsman's too, and Miriam Rooth's into the bargain; just as Miriam Rooth's is by the same token quite operatively his and Nick's, and just as that of each of the young men, by an equal logic, is very contributively hers —the interest of such a question, I say, is ever so considerably the interest of the system on which the whole thing is done. I see to-day that it was but half a system to say, "Oh Miriam, a case herself, is the link between the two other cases"; that device was to ask for as much help as it gave and to require a good deal more application than it announced on the surface. The sense of a system saves the painter from the baseness of the arbitrary stroke, the touch without its reason, but as payment for that service the

process insists on being kept impeccably the right one.

These are intimate truths indeed, of which the charm mainly comes out but on experiment and in practice; yet I like to have it well before me here that, after all, The Tragic Muse makes it not easy to say which of the situations concerned in it predominates and rules. What has become in that imperfect order, accordingly, of the famous centre of one's subject? It is surely not in Nick's consciousness—since why, if it be, are we treated to such an intolerable dose of Sherringham's? It can't be in Sherringham's —we have for that altogether an excess of Nick's. How, on the other hand, can it be in Miriam's, given that we have no direct exhibition of hers whatever, that we get at it all inferentially and inductively, seeing it only through a more or less bewildered interpretation of it by others. The emphasis is all on an absolutely objective Miriam, and, this affirmed, how—with such an amount of exposed subjectivity all round her—can so dense a medium be a centre? Such questions as those go straight—thanks to which they are, I profess, delightful; going straight they are of the sort that makes answers possible. Miriam is central then to analysis, in spite of being objective; central in virtue of the fact that the whole thing has visibly, from the first, to get itself done in dramatic, or at least in scenic conditions—though scenic conditions which are as near an approach to the dramatic as the novel may permit itself and which have this in common with the latter, that they move in the light of alternation. This imposes a consistency other than that of the novel at its loosest, and, for one's subject, a

different view and a different placing of the centre. The charm of the scenic consistency, the consistency of the multiplication of aspects, that of making them amusingly various, had haunted the author of The Tragic Muse from far back, and he was in due course to yield to it all luxuriously, too luxuriously perhaps, in The Awkward Age, as will doubtless with the extension of these remarks be complacently shown.

To put himself at any rate as much as possible under the protection of it had been ever his practice (he had notably done so in The Princess Casamassima, so frankly panoramic and processional); and in what case could this protection have had more price than in the one before us? No character in a play (any play not a mere monologue) has, for the right expression of the thing, a usurping consciousness; the consciousness of others is exhibited exactly in the same way as that of the "hero"; the prodigious consciousness of Hamlet, the most capacious and most crowded, the moral presence the most asserted, in the whole range of fiction, only takes its turn with that of the other agents of the story, no matter how occasional these may be. It is left, in other words, to answer for itself equally with theirs: wherefore (by a parity of reasoning if not of example) Miriam's might without inconsequence be placed on the same footing; and all in spite of the fact that the "moral presence" of each of the men most importantly concerned with her—or with the second of whom she at least is importantly concerned—is independently answered for. The idea of the book being, as I

have said, a picture of some of the personal consequences of the art-appetite raised to intensity, swollen to voracity, the heavy emphasis falls where the symbol of some of the complications so begotten might be made (as I judged, heaven forgive me!) most "amusing": amusing I mean in the best very modern sense. I never "go behind" Miriam; only poor Sherringham goes, a great deal, and Nick Dormer goes a little, and the author, while they so waste wonderment, goes behind them: but none the less she is as thoroughly symbolic, as functional, for illustration of the idea, as either of them, while her image had seemed susceptible of a livelier and "prettier" concretion. I had desired for her, I remember, all manageable vividness—so ineluctable had it long appeared to "do the actress," to touch the theatre, to meet that connexion somehow or other, in any free plunge of the speculative fork into the contemporary social salad.

The late R. L. Stevenson was to write to me, I recall—and precisely on the occasion of The Tragic Muse—that he was at a loss to conceive how one could find an interest in anything so vulgar or pretend to gather fruit in so scrubby an orchard; but the view of a creature of the stage, the view of the "histrionic temperament," as suggestive much less, verily, in respect to the poor stage per se than in respect to "art" at large, affected me in spite of that as justly tenable. An objection of a more pointed order was forced upon me by an acute friend later on and in another connexion: the challenge of one's right, in any pretended show of social realities, to attach to the image of a "public

character," a supposed particular celebrity, a range of interest, of intrinsic distinction, greater than any such display of importance on the part of eminent members of the class as we see them about us. There was a nice point if one would—yet only nice enough, after all, to be easily amusing. We shall deal with it later on, however, in a more urgent connexion. What would have worried me much more had it dawned earlier is the light lately thrown by that admirable writer M. Anatole France on the question of any animated view of the histrionic temperament—a light that may well dazzle to distress any ingenuous worker in the same field. In those parts of his brief but inimitable Histoire Comique on which he is most to be congratulated—for there are some that prompt to reserves—he has "done the actress," as well as the actor, done above all the mountebank, the mummer and the cabotin, and mixed them up with the queer theatric air, in a manner that practically warns all other hands off the material for ever. At the same time I think I saw Miriam, and without a sacrifice of truth, that is of the particular glow of verisimilitude I wished her most to benefit by, in a complexity of relations finer than any that appear possible for the gentry of M. Anatole France.

Her relation to Nick Dormer, for instance, was intended as a superior interest—that of being (while perfectly sincere, sincere for her, and therefore perfectly consonant with her impulse perpetually to perform and with her success in performing) the result of a touched imagination, a touched pride for "art," as well as of the charm cast on other sensibilities still. Dormer's

relation to herself is a different matter, of which more presently; but the sympathy she, poor young woman, very generously and intelligently offers him where most people have so stinted it, is disclosed largely at the cost of her egotism and her personal pretensions, even though in fact determined by her sense of their together, Nick and she, postponing the "world" to their conception of other and finer decencies. Nick can't on the whole see—for I have represented him as in his day quite sufficiently troubled and anxious—why he should condemn to ugly feebleness his most prized faculty (most prized, at least, by himself) even in order to keep his seat in Parliament, to inherit Mr. Carteret's blessing and money, to gratify his mother and carry out the mission of his father, to marry Julia Dallow in fine, a beautiful imperative woman with a great many thousands a year. It all comes back in the last analysis to the individual vision of decency, the critical as well as the passionate judgement of it under sharp stress; and Nick's vision and judgement, all on the esthetic ground, have beautifully coincided, to Miriam's imagination, with a now fully marked, an inspired and impenitent, choice of her own: so that, other considerations powerfully aiding indeed, she is ready to see their interest all splendidly as one. She is in the uplifted state to which sacrifices and submissions loom large, but loom so just because they must write sympathy, write passion, large. Her measure of what she would be capable of for him—capable, that is, of not asking of him—will depend on what he shall ask of her, but

she has no fear of not being able to satisfy him, even to the point of "chucking" for him, if need be, that artistic identity of her own which she has begun to build up. It will all be to the glory, therefore, of their common infatuation with "art": she will doubtless be no less willing to serve his than she was eager to serve her own, purged now of the too great shrillness.

This puts her quite on a different level from that of the vivid monsters of M. France, whose artistic identity is the last thing they wish to chuck—their only dismissal is of all material and social over-draping. Nick Dormer in point of fact asks of Miriam nothing but that she shall remain "awfully interesting to paint"; but that is his relation, which, as I say, is quite a matter by itself. He at any rate, luckily for both of them it may be, doesn't put her to the test: he is so busy with his own case, busy with testing himself and feeling his reality. He has seen himself as giving up precious things for an object, and that object has somehow not been the young woman in question, nor anything very nearly like her. She, on the other hand, has asked everything of Peter Sherringham, who has asked everything of her; and it is in so doing that she has really most testified for art and invited him to testify. With his professed interest in the theatre—one of those deep subjections that, in men of "taste," the Comédie Française used in old days to conspire for and some such odd and affecting examples of which were to be noted—he yet offers her his hand and an introduction to the very best society if she will leave the stage. The power—and her having the sense of the power

—to "shine" in the world is his highest measure of her, the test applied by him to her beautiful human value; just as the manner in which she turns on him is the application of her own standard and touchstone. She is perfectly sure of her own; for—if there were nothing else, and there is much—she has tasted blood, so to speak, in the form of her so prompt and auspicious success with the public, leaving all probations behind (the whole of which, as the book gives it, is too rapid and sudden, though inevitably so: processes, periods, intervals, stages, degrees, connexions, may be easily enough and barely enough named, may be unconvincingly stated, in fiction, to the deep discredit of the writer, but it remains the very deuce to represent them, especially represent them under strong compression and in brief and subordinate terms; and this even though the novelist who doesn't represent, and represent "all the time," is lost, exactly as much lost as the painter who, at his work and given his intention, doesn't paint "all the time").

Turn upon her friend at any rate Miriam does; and one of my main points is missed if it fails to appear that she does so with absolute sincerity and with the cold passion of the high critic who knows, on sight of them together, the more or less dazzling false from the comparatively grey-coloured true. Sherringham's whole profession has been that he rejoices in her as she is, and that the theatre, the organised theatre, will be, as Matthew Arnold was in those very days pronouncing it, irresistible; and it is the promptness with which he sheds his pretended faith as soon as it feels in the air the breath of reality, as soon as it asks of him a

proof or a sacrifice, it is this that excites her doubtless sufficiently arrogant scorn. Where is the virtue of his high interest if it has verily never been an interest to speak of and if all it has suddenly to suggest is that, in face of a serious call, it shall be unblushingly relinquished? If he and she together, and her great field and future, and the whole cause they had armed and declared for, have not been serious things they have been base make-believes and trivialities—which is what in fact the homage of society to art always turns out so soon as art presumes not to be vulgar and futile. It is immensely the fashion and immensely edifying to listen to, this homage, while it confines its attention to vanities and frauds; but it knows only terror, feels only horror, the moment that, instead of making all the concessions, art proceeds to ask for a few. Miriam is nothing if not strenuous, and evidently nothing if not "cheeky," where Sherringham is concerned at least: these, in the all-egotistical exhibition to which she is condemned, are the very elements of her figure and the very colours of her portrait. But she is mild and inconsequent for Nick Dormer (who demands of her so little); as if gravely and pityingly embracing the truth that his sacrifice, on the right side, is probably to have very little of her sort of recompense. I must have had it well before me that she was all aware of the small strain a great sacrifice to Nick would cost her—by reason of the strong effect on her of his own superior logic, in which the very intensity of concentration was so to find its account.

If the man, however, who holds her personally dear yet holds

her extremely personal message to the world cheap, so the man capable of a consistency and, as she regards the matter, of an honesty so much higher than Sherringham's, virtually cares, "really" cares, no straw for his fellow-struggler. If Nick Dormer attracts and all-indifferently holds her it is because, like herself and unlike Peter, he puts "art" first; but the most he thus does for her in the event is to let her see how she may enjoy, in intimacy, the rigour it has taught him and which he cultivates at her expense. This is the situation in which we leave her, though there would be more still to be said about the difference for her of the two relations—that to each of the men—could I fondly suppose as much of the interest of the book "left over" for the reader as for myself. Sherringham, for instance, offers Miriam marriage, ever so "handsomely"; but if nothing might lead me on further than the question of what it would have been open to us—us novelists, especially in the old days—to show, "serially," a young man in Nick Dormer's quite different position as offering or a young woman in Miriam's as taking, so for that very reason such an excursion is forbidden me. The trade of the stage-player, and above all of the actress, must have so many detestable sides for the person exercising it that we scarce imagine a full surrender to it without a full surrender, not less, to every immediate compensation, to every freedom and the largest ease within reach: which presentment of the possible case for Miriam would yet have been condemned—and on grounds both various and interesting to trace—to remain very imperfect.

I feel, moreover, that I might still, with space, abound in remarks about Nick's character and Nick's crisis suggested to my present more reflective vision. It strikes me, alas, that he is not quite so interesting as he was fondly intended to be, and this in spite of the multiplication, within the picture, of his pains and penalties; so that while I turn this slight anomaly over I come upon a reason that affects me as singularly charming and touching and at which indeed I have already glanced. Any presentation of the artist in triumph must be flat in proportion as it really sticks to its subject—it can only smuggle in relief and variety. For, to put the matter in an image, all we then—in his triumph—see of the charm-compeller is the back he turns to us as he bends over his work. "His" triumph, decently, is but the triumph of what he produces, and that is another affair. His romance is the romance he himself projects; he eats the cake of the very rarest privilege, the most luscious baked in the oven of the gods—therefore he mayn't "have" it, in the form of the privilege of the hero, at the same time. The privilege of the hero—that is, of the martyr or of the interesting and appealing and comparatively floundering person—places him in quite a different category, belongs to him only as to the artist deluded, diverted, frustrated or vanquished; when the "amateur" in him gains, for our admiration or compassion or whatever, all that the expert has to do without. Therefore I strove in vain, I feel, to embroil and adorn this young man on whom a hundred ingenious touches are thus lavished: he has insisted in the event on looking

as simple and flat as some mere brass check or engraved number, the symbol and guarantee of a stored treasure. The better part of him is locked too much away from us, and the part we see has to pass for—well, what it passes for, so lamentedly, among his friends and relatives. No, accordingly, Nick Dormer isn't "the best thing in the book," as I judge I imagined he would be, and it contains nothing better, I make out, than that preserved and achieved unity and quality of tone, a value in itself, which I referred to at the beginning of these remarks. What I mean by this is that the interest created, and the expression of that interest, are things kept, as to kind, genuine and true to themselves. The appeal, the fidelity to the prime motive, is, with no little art, strained clear (even as silver is polished) in a degree answering—at least by intention—to the air of beauty. There is an awkwardness again in having thus belatedly to point such features out; but in that wrought appearance of animation and harmony, that effect of free movement and yet of recurrent and insistent reference, The Tragic Muse has struck me again as conscious of a bright advantage.

HENRY JAMES.

Part 1

Chapter
1

The people of France have made it no secret that those

of England, as a general thing, are to their perception an inexpressive and speechless race, perpendicular and unsociable, unaddicted to enriching any bareness of contact with verbal or other embroidery. This view might have derived encouragement, a few years ago, in Paris, from the manner in which four persons sat together in silence, one fine day about noon, in the garden, as it is called, of the Palais de l'Industrie—the central court of the great glazed bazaar where, among plants and parterres, gravelled walks and thin fountains, are ranged the figures and groups, the monuments and busts, which form in the annual exhibition of the Salon the department of statuary. The spirit of observation is naturally high at the Salon, quickened by a thousand artful or artless appeals, but it need have put forth no great intensity to take in the characters I mention. As a solicitation of the eye on definite grounds these visitors too constituted a successful plastic fact; and even the most superficial observer would have marked them as products of an insular neighbourhood, representatives of that tweed-and-waterproof class with which, on the recurrent occasions when the English turn out for a holiday—Christmas and Easter, Whitsuntide and the autumn—Paris besprinkles itself at a night's notice. They had about them the indefinable professional look of the British traveller abroad; the air of preparation for exposure, material and moral, which is so oddly combined with the serene revelation of security and of persistence, and which excites, according to individual susceptibility, the ire or the admiration

of foreign communities. They were the more unmistakable as they presented mainly the happier aspects of the energetic race to which they had the honour to belong. The fresh diffused light of the Salon made them clear and important; they were finished creations, in their way, and, ranged there motionless on their green bench, were almost as much on exhibition as if they had been hung on the line.

Three ladies and a young man, they were obviously a family —a mother, two daughters and a son; a circumstance which had the effect at once of making each member of the group doubly typical and of helping to account for their fine taciturnity. They were not, with each other, on terms of ceremony, and also were probably fatigued with their course among the pictures, the rooms on the upper floor. Their attitude, on the part of visitors who had superior features even if they might appear to some passers-by to have neglected a fine opportunity for completing these features with an expression, was after all a kind of tribute to the state of exhaustion, of bewilderment, to which the genius of France is still capable of reducing the proud.

"En v'là des abrutis!" more than one of their fellow-gazers might have been heard to exclaim; and certain it is that there was something depressed and discouraged in this interesting group, who sat looking vaguely before them, not noticing the life of the place, somewhat as if each had a private anxiety. It might have been finely guessed, however, that though on many questions they were closely united this present anxiety was not the same for

each. If they looked grave, moreover, this was doubtless partly the result of their all being dressed in such mourning as told of a recent bereavement. The eldest of the three ladies had indeed a face of a fine austere mould which would have been moved to gaiety only by some force more insidious than any she was likely to recognise in Paris. Cold, still, and considerably worn, it was neither stupid nor hard—it was firm, narrow and sharp. This competent matron, acquainted evidently with grief but not weakened by it, had a high forehead to which the quality of the skin gave a singular polish—it glittered even when seen at a distance; a nose which achieved a high free curve; and a tendency to throw back her head and carry it well above her, as if to disengage it from the possible entanglements of the rest of her person. If you had seen her walk you would have felt her to tread the earth after a fashion suggesting that in a world where she had long since discovered that one couldn't have one's own way one could never tell what annoying aggression might take place, so that it was well, from hour to hour, to save what one could. Lady Agnes saved her head, her white triangular forehead, over which her close-crinkled flaxen hair, reproduced in different shades in her children, made a looped silken canopy like the marquee at a garden-party. Her daughters were as tall as herself—that was visible even as they sat there—and one of them, the younger evidently, altogether pretty; a straight, slender, grey-eyed English girl of the sort who show "good" figures and fresh complexions. The sister, who was not pretty, was also straight and slender and

grey-eyed. But the grey in this case was not so pure, nor were the straightness and the slenderness so maidenly. The brother of these young ladies had taken off his hat as if he felt the air of the summer day heavy in the great pavilion. He was a lean, strong, clear-faced youth, with a formed nose and thick light-brown hair which lay continuously and profusely back from his forehead, so that to smooth it from the brow to the neck but a single movement of the hand was required. I cannot describe him better than by saying that he was the sort of young Englishman who looks particularly well in strange lands and whose general aspect—his inches, his limbs, his friendly eyes, the modulation of his voice, the cleanness of his flesh-tints and the fashion of his garments—excites on the part of those who encounter him in far countries on the ground of a common speech a delightful sympathy of race. This sympathy may sometimes be qualified by the seen limits of his apprehension, but it almost revels as such horizons recede. We shall see quickly enough how accurate a measure it might have taken of Nicholas Dormer. There was food for suspicion perhaps in the wandering blankness that sat at moments in his eyes, as if he had no attention at all, not the least in the world, at his command; but it is no more than just to add without delay that this discouraging symptom was known among those who liked him by the indulgent name of dreaminess. By his mother and sisters, for instance, his dreaminess was constantly noted. He is the more welcome to the benefit of such an interpretation as there is always held to be something engaging in the combination

of the muscular and the musing, the mildness of strength.

After some time, an interval during which these good people might have appeared to have come, individually, to the Palais de l'Industrie much less to see the works of art than to think over their domestic affairs, the young man, rousing himself from his reverie, addressed one of the girls.

"I say, Biddy, why should we sit moping here all day? Come and take a turn about with me."

His younger sister, while he got up, leaned forward a little, looking round her, but she gave for the moment no further sign of complying with his invitation.

"Where shall we find you, then, if Peter comes?" asked the other Miss Dormer, making no movement at all.

"I daresay Peter won't come. He'll leave us here to cool our heels."

"Oh Nick dear!" Biddy exclaimed in a small sweet voice of protest. It was plainly her theory that Peter would come, and even a little her fond fear that she might miss him should she quit that spot.

"We shall come back in a quarter of an hour. Really I must look at these things," Nick declared, turning his face to a marble group which stood near them on the right—a man with the skin of a beast round his loins, tussling with a naked woman in some primitive effort of courtship or capture.

Lady Agnes followed the direction of her son's eyes and then observed: "Everything seems very dreadful. I should think Biddy

had better sit still. Hasn't she seen enough horrors up above?"

"I daresay that if Peter comes Julia'll be with him," the elder girl remarked irrelevantly.

"Well then he can take Julia about. That will be more proper," said Lady Agnes.

"Mother dear, she doesn't care a rap about art. It's a fearful bore looking at fine things with Julia," Nick returned.

"Won't you go with him, Grace?"—and Biddy appealed to her sister.

"I think she has awfully good taste!" Grace exclaimed, not answering this inquiry.

"Don't say nasty things about her!" Lady Agnes broke out solemnly to her son after resting her eyes on him a moment with an air of reluctant reprobation.

"I say nothing but what she'd say herself," the young man urged. "About some things she has very good taste, but about this kind of thing she has no taste at all."

"That's better, I think," said Lady Agnes, turning her eyes again to the "kind of thing" her son appeared to designate.

"She's awfully clever—awfully!" Grace went on with decision.

"Awfully, awfully!" her brother repeated, standing in front of her and smiling down at her.

"You are nasty, Nick. You know you are," said the young lady, but more in sorrow than in anger.

Biddy got up at this, as if the accusatory tone prompted her to place herself generously at his side. "Mightn't you go and order

lunch—in that place, you know?" she asked of her mother. "Then we'd come back when it was ready."

"My dear child, I can't order lunch," Lady Agnes replied with a cold impatience which seemed to intimate that she had problems far more important than those of victualling to contend with.

"Then perhaps Peter will if he comes. I'm sure he's up in everything of that sort."

"Oh hang Peter!" Nick exclaimed. "Leave him out of account, and do order lunch, mother; but not cold beef and pickles."

"I must say—about him—you're not nice," Biddy ventured to remark to her brother, hesitating and even blushing a little.

"You make up for it, my dear," the young man answered, giving her chin—a very charming, rotund, little chin—a friendly whisk with his forefinger.

"I can't imagine what you've got against him," her ladyship said gravely.

"Dear mother, it's disappointed fondness," Nick argued. "They won't answer one's notes; they won't let one know where they are nor what to expect. 'Hell has no fury like a woman scorned'; nor like a man either."

"Peter has such a tremendous lot to do—it's a very busy time at the embassy; there are sure to be reasons," Biddy explained with her pretty eyes.

"Reasons enough, no doubt!" said Lady Agnes—who accompanied these words with an ambiguous sigh, however, as

if in Paris even the best reasons would naturally be bad ones.

"Doesn't Julia write to you, doesn't she answer you the very day?" Grace asked, looking at Nick as if she were the bold one.

He waited, returning her glance with a certain severity. "What do you know about my correspondence? No doubt I ask too much," he went on; "I'm so attached to them. Dear old Peter, dear old Julia!"

"She's younger than you, my dear!" cried the elder girl, still resolute.

"Yes, nineteen days."

"I'm glad you know her birthday."

"She knows yours; she always gives you something," Lady Agnes reminded her son.

"Her taste is good then, isn't it, Nick?" Grace Dormer continued.

"She makes charming presents; but, dear mother, it isn't her taste. It's her husband's."

"How her husband's?"

"The beautiful objects of which she disposes so freely are the things he collected for years laboriously, devotedly, poor man!"

"She disposes of them to you, but not to others," said Lady Agnes. "But that's all right," she added, as if this might have been taken for a complaint of the limitations of Julia's bounty. "She has to select among so many, and that's a proof of taste," her ladyship pursued.

"You can't say she doesn't choose lovely ones," Grace

remarked to her brother in a tone of some triumph.

"My dear, they're all lovely. George Dallow's judgement was so sure, he was incapable of making a mistake," Nicholas Dormer returned.

"I don't see how you can talk of him, he was dreadful," said Lady Agnes.

"My dear, if he was good enough for Julia to marry he's good enough for us to talk of."

"She did him a very great honour."

"I daresay, but he was not unworthy of it. No such enlightened collection of beautiful objects has been made in England in our time."

"You think too much of beautiful objects!" Lady Agnes sighed.

"I thought you were just now lamenting that I think too little."

"It's very nice—his having left Julia so well off," Biddy interposed soothingly, as if she foresaw a tangle.

"He treated her en grand seigneur, absolutely," Nick went on.

"He used to look greasy, all the same"—Grace bore on it with a dull weight. "His name ought to have been Tallow."

"You're not saying what Julia would like, if that's what you are trying to say," her brother observed.

"Don't be vulgar, Grace," said Lady Agnes.

"I know Peter Sherringham's birthday!" Biddy broke out innocently, as a pacific diversion. She had passed her hand into Nick's arm, to signify her readiness to go with him, while she

scanned the remoter reaches of the garden as if it had occurred to her that to direct their steps in some such sense might after all be the shorter way to get at Peter.

"He's too much older than you, my dear," Grace answered without encouragement.

"That's why I've noticed it—he's thirty-four. Do you call that too old? I don't care for slobbering infants!" Biddy cried.

"Don't be vulgar," Lady Agnes enjoined again.

"Come, Bid, we'll go and be vulgar together; for that's what we are, I'm afraid," her brother said to her. "We'll go and look at all these low works of art."

"Do you really think it's necessary to the child's development?" Lady Agnes demanded as the pair turned away. And then while her son, struck as by a challenge, paused, lingering a moment with his little sister on his arm: "What we've been through this morning in this place, and what you've paraded before our eyes—the murders, the tortures, all kinds of disease and indecency!"

Nick looked at his mother as if this sudden protest surprised him, but as if also there were lurking explanations of it which he quickly guessed. Her resentment had the effect not so much of animating her cold face as of making it colder, less expressive, though visibly prouder. "Ah dear mother, don't do the British matron!" he replied good-humouredly.

"British matron's soon said! I don't know what they're coming to."

"How odd that you should have been struck only with the disagreeable things when, for myself, I've felt it to be most interesting, the most suggestive morning I've passed for ever so many months!"

"Oh Nick, Nick!" Lady Agnes cried with a strange depth of feeling.

"I like them better in London—they're much less unpleasant," said Grace Dormer.

"They're things you can look at," her ladyship went on. "We certainly make the better show."

"The subject doesn't matter, it's the treatment, the treatment!" Biddy protested in a voice like the tinkle of a silver bell.

"Poor little Bid!"—her brother broke into a laugh.

"How can I learn to model, mamma dear, if I don't look at things and if I don't study them?" the girl continued.

This question passed unheeded, and Nicholas Dormer said to his mother, more seriously, but with a certain kind explicitness, as if he could make a particular allowance: "This place is an immense stimulus to me; it refreshes me, excites me—it's such an exhibition of artistic life. It's full of ideas, full of refinements; it gives one such an impression of artistic experience. They try everything, they feel everything. While you were looking at the murders, apparently, I observed an immense deal of curious and interesting work. There are too many of them, poor devils; so many who must make their way, who must attract attention. Some of them can only taper fort, stand on their heads, turn

somersaults or commit deeds of violence, to make people notice them. After that, no doubt, a good many will be quieter. But I don't know; to-day I'm in an appreciative mood—I feel indulgent even to them: they give me an impression of intelligence, of eager observation. All art is one—remember that, Biddy dear," the young man continued, smiling down from his height. "It's the same great many-headed effort, and any ground that's gained by an individual, any spark that's struck in any province, is of use and of suggestion to all the others. We're all in the same boat."

"'We,' do you say, my dear? Are you really setting up for an artist?" Lady Agnes asked.

Nick just hesitated. "I was speaking for Biddy."

"But you are one, Nick—you are!" the girl cried.

Lady Agnes looked for an instant as if she were going to say once more "Don't be vulgar!" But she suppressed these words, had she intended them, and uttered sounds, few in number and not completely articulate, to the effect that she hated talking about art. While her son spoke she had watched him as if failing to follow; yet something in the tone of her exclamation hinted that she had understood him but too well.

"We're all in the same boat," Biddy repeated with cheerful zeal.

"Not me, if you please!" Lady Agnes replied. "It's horrid messy work, your modelling."

"Ah but look at the results!" said the girl eagerly—glancing about at the monuments in the garden as if in regard even to

them she were, through that unity of art her brother had just proclaimed, in some degree an effective cause.

"There's a great deal being done here—a real vitality," Nicholas Dormer went on to his mother in the same reasonable informing way. "Some of these fellows go very far."

"They do indeed!" said Lady Agnes.

"I'm fond of young schools—like this movement in sculpture," Nick insisted with his slightly provoking serenity.

"They're old enough to know better!"

"Mayn't I look, mamma? It is necessary to my development," Biddy declared.

"You may do as you like," said Lady Agnes with dignity.

"She ought to see good work, you know," the young man went on.

"I leave it to your sense of responsibility." This statement was somewhat majestic, and for a moment evidently it tempted Nick, almost provoked him, or at any rate suggested to him an occasion for some pronouncement he had had on his mind. Apparently, however, he judged the time on the whole not quite right, and his sister Grace interposed with the inquiry—

"Please, mamma, are we never going to lunch?"

"Ah mother, mother!" the young man murmured in a troubled way, looking down at her with a deep fold in his forehead.

For Lady Agnes also, as she returned his look, it seemed an occasion; but with this difference that she had no hesitation in taking advantage of it. She was encouraged by his slight

embarrassment, for ordinarily Nick was not embarrassed. "You used to have so much sense of responsibility," she pursued; "but sometimes I don't know what has become of it—it seems all, all gone!"

"Ah mother, mother!" he exclaimed again—as if there were so many things to say that it was impossible to choose. But now he stepped closer, bent over her and in spite of the publicity of their situation gave her a quick expressive kiss. The foreign observer whom I took for granted in beginning to sketch this scene would have had to admit that the rigid English family had after all a capacity for emotion. Grace Dormer indeed looked round her to see if at this moment they were noticed. She judged with satisfaction that they had escaped.

Chapter 2

Nick Dormer walked away with Biddy, but he had not gone far before he stopped in front of a clever bust, where his mother, in the distance, saw him playing in the air with his hand, carrying out by this gesture, which presumably was applausive, some critical remark he had made to his sister. Lady Agnes raised her glass to her eyes by the long handle to which rather a clanking chain was attached, perceiving that the bust represented an ugly old man with a bald head; at which her ladyship indefinitely sighed, though it was not apparent in what way such an object could be detrimental to her daughter. Nick passed on and quickly paused again; this time, his mother discerned, before the marble

image of a strange grimacing woman. Presently she lost sight of him; he wandered behind things, looking at them all round.

"I ought to get plenty of ideas for my modelling, oughtn't I, Nick?" his sister put to him after a moment.

"Ah my poor child, what shall I say?"

"Don't you think I've any capacity for ideas?" the girl continued ruefully.

"Lots of them, no doubt. But the capacity for applying them, for putting them into practice—how much of that have you?"

"How can I tell till I try?"

"What do you mean by trying, Biddy dear?"

"Why you know—you've seen me."

"Do you call that trying?" her brother amusedly demanded.

"Ah Nick!" she said with sensibility. But then with more spirit: "And please what do you call it?"

"Well, this for instance is a good case." And her companion pointed to another bust—a head of a young man in terra-cotta, at which they had just arrived; a modern young man to whom, with his thick neck, his little cap and his wide ring of dense curls, the artist had given the air of some sturdy Florentine of the time of Lorenzo.

Biddy looked at the image a moment. "Ah that's not trying; that's succeeding."

"Not altogether; it's only trying seriously."

"Well, why shouldn't I be serious?"

"Mother wouldn't like it. She has inherited the fine old

superstition that art's pardonable only so long as it's bad—so long as it's done at odd hours, for a little distraction, like a game of tennis or of whist. The only thing that can justify it, the effort to carry it as far as one can (which you can't do without time and singleness of purpose), she regards as just the dangerous, the criminal element. It's the oddest hind-part-before view, the drollest immorality."

"She doesn't want one to be professional," Biddy returned as if she could do justice to every system.

"Better leave it alone then. There are always duffers enough."

"I don't want to be a duffer," Biddy said. "But I thought you encouraged me."

"So I did, my poor child. It was only to encourage myself."

"With your own work—your painting?"

"With my futile, my ill-starred endeavours. Union is strength—so that we might present a wider front, a larger surface of resistance."

Biddy for a while said nothing and they continued their tour of observation. She noticed how he passed over some things quickly, his first glance sufficing to show him if they were worth another, and then recognised in a moment the figures that made some appeal. His tone puzzled but his certainty of eye impressed her, and she felt what a difference there was yet between them—how much longer in every case she would have taken to discriminate. She was aware of how little she could judge of the value of a thing till she had looked at it ten minutes;

indeed modest little Biddy was compelled privately to add "And often not even then." She was mystified, as I say—Nick was often mystifying, it was his only fault—but one thing was definite: her brother had high ability. It was the consciousness of this that made her bring out at last: "I don't so much care whether or no I please mamma, if I please you."

"Oh don't lean on me. I'm a wretched broken reed—I'm no use really!" he promptly admonished her.

"Do you mean you're a duffer?" Biddy asked in alarm.

"Frightful, frightful!"

"So that you intend to give up your work—to let it alone, as you advise me?"

"It has never been my work, all that business, Biddy. If it had it would be different. I should stick to it."

"And you won't stick to it?" the girl said, standing before him open-eyed.

Her brother looked into her eyes a moment, and she had a compunction; she feared she was indiscreet and was worrying him. "Your questions are much simpler than the elements out of which my answer should come."

"A great talent—what's simpler than that?"

"One excellent thing, dear Biddy: no talent at all!"

"Well, yours is so real you can't help it."

"We shall see, we shall see," said Nick Dormer. "Let us go look at that big group."

"We shall see if your talent's real?" Biddy went on as she

accompanied him.

"No; we shall see if, as you say, I can't help it. What nonsense Paris makes one talk!" the young man added as they stopped in front of the composition. This was true perhaps, but not in a sense he could find himself tempted to deplore. The present was far from his first visit to the French capital: he had often quitted England and usually made a point of "putting in," as he called it, a few days there on the outward journey to the Continent or on the return; but at present the feelings, for the most part agreeable, attendant upon a change of air and of scene had been more punctual and more acute than for a long time before, and stronger the sense of novelty, refreshment, amusement, of the hundred appeals from that quarter of thought to which on the whole his attention was apt most frequently, though not most confessedly, to stray. He was fonder of Paris than most of his countrymen, though not so fond perhaps as some other captivated aliens: the place had always had the virtue of quickening in him sensibly the life of reflexion and observation. It was a good while since his impressions had been so favourable to the city by the Seine; a good while at all events since they had ministered so to excitement, to exhilaration, to ambition, even to a restlessness that was not prevented from being agreeable by the excess of agitation in it. Nick could have given the reason of this unwonted glow, but his preference was very much to keep it to himself. Certainly to persons not deeply knowing, or at any rate not deeply curious, in relation to the young man's history the

explanation might have seemed to beg the question, consisting as it did of the simple formula that he had at last come to a crisis. Why a crisis—what was it and why had he not come to it before? The reader shall learn these things in time if he cares enough for them.

Our young man had not in any recent year failed to see the Salon, which the general voice this season pronounced not particularly good. None the less it was the present exhibition that, for some cause connected with his "crisis," made him think fast, produced that effect he had spoken of to his mother as a sense of artistic life. The precinct of the marbles and bronzes spoke to him especially to-day; the glazed garden, not florally rich, with its new productions alternating with perfunctory plants and its queer, damp smell, partly the odour of plastic clay, of the studios of sculptors, put forth the voice of old associations, of other visits, of companionships now ended—an insinuating eloquence which was at the same time somehow identical with the general sharp contagion of Paris. There was youth in the air, and a multitudinous newness, for ever reviving, and the diffusion of a hundred talents, ingenuities, experiments. The summer clouds made shadows on the roof of the great building; the white images, hard in their crudity, spotted the place with provocations; the rattle of plates at the restaurant sounded sociable in the distance, and our young man congratulated himself more than ever that he had not missed his chance. He felt how it would help him to settle something. At the moment he made this reflexion his

eye fell upon a person who appeared—just in the first glimpse—to carry out the idea of help. He uttered a lively ejaculation, which, however, in its want of finish, Biddy failed to understand; so pertinent, so relevant and congruous, was the other party to this encounter.

The girl's attention followed her brother's, resting with it on a young man who faced them without seeing them, engaged as he was in imparting to two companions his ideas about one of the works exposed to view. What Biddy remarked was that this young man was fair and fat and of the middle stature; he had a round face and a short beard and on his crown a mere reminiscence of hair, as the fact that he carried his hat in his hand permitted to be observed. Bridget Dormer, who was quick, placed him immediately as a gentleman, but as a gentleman unlike any other gentleman she had ever seen. She would have taken him for very foreign but that the words proceeding from his mouth reached her ear and imposed themselves as a rare variety of English. It was not that a foreigner might not have spoken smoothly enough, nor yet that the speech of this young man was not smooth. It had in truth a conspicuous and aggressive perfection, and Biddy was sure no mere learner would have ventured to play such tricks with the tongue. He seemed to draw rich effects and wandering airs from it—to modulate and manipulate it as he would have done a musical instrument. Her view of the gentleman's companions was less operative, save for her soon making the reflexion that they were people whom in any

country, from China to Peru, you would immediately have taken for natives. One of them was an old lady with a shawl; that was the most salient way in which she presented herself. The shawl was an ancient much-used fabric of embroidered cashmere, such as many ladies wore forty years ago in their walks abroad and such as no lady wears to-day. It had fallen half off the back of the wearer, but at the moment Biddy permitted herself to consider her she gave it a violent jerk and brought it up to her shoulders again, where she continued to arrange and settle it, with a good deal of jauntiness and elegance, while she listened to the talk of the gentleman. Biddy guessed that this little transaction took place very frequently, and was not unaware of its giving the old lady a droll, factitious, faded appearance, as if she were singularly out of step with the age. The other person was very much younger—she might have been a daughter—and had a pale face, a low forehead, and thick dark hair. What she chiefly had, however, Biddy rapidly discovered, was a pair of largely-gazing eyes. Our young friend was helped to the discovery by the accident of their resting at this moment for a time—it struck Biddy as very long—on her own. Both these ladies were clad in light, thin, scant gowns, giving an impression of flowered figures and odd transparencies, and in low shoes which showed a great deal of stocking and were ornamented with large rosettes. Biddy's slightly agitated perception travelled directly to their shoes: they suggested to her vaguely that the wearers were dancers—connected possibly with the old-fashioned exhibition

of the shawl-dance. By the time she had taken in so much as this the mellifluous young man had perceived and addressed himself to her brother. He came on with an offered hand. Nick greeted him and said it was a happy chance—he was uncommonly glad to see him.

"I never come across you—I don't know why," Nick added while the two, smiling, looked each other up and down like men reunited after a long interval.

"Oh it seems to me there's reason enough: our paths in life are so different." Nick's friend had a great deal of manner, as was evinced by his fashion of saluting Biddy without knowing her.

"Different, yes, but not so different as that. Don't we both live in London, after all, and in the nineteenth century?"

"Ah my dear Dormer, excuse me: I don't live in the nineteenth century. Jamais de la vie!" the gentleman declared.

"Nor in London either?"

"Yes—when I'm not at Samarcand! But surely we've diverged since the old days. I adore what you burn, you burn what I adore." While the stranger spoke he looked cheerfully, hospitably, at Biddy; not because it was she, she easily guessed, but because it was in his nature to desire a second auditor—a kind of sympathetic gallery. Her life was somehow filled with shy people, and she immediately knew she had never encountered any one who seemed so to know his part and recognise his cues.

"How do you know what I adore?" Nicholas Dormer asked.

"I know well enough what you used to."

"That's more than I do myself. There were so many things."

"Yes, there are many things—many, many: that's what makes life so amusing."

"Do you find it amusing?"

"My dear fellow, c'est à se tordre. Don't you think so? Ah it was high time I should meet you—I see. I've an idea you need me."

"Upon my word I think I do!" Nick said in a tone which struck his sister and made her wonder still more why, if the gentleman was so important as that, he didn't introduce him.

"There are many gods and this is one of their temples," the mysterious personage went on. "It's a house of strange idols—isn't it?—and of some strange and unnatural sacrifices."

To Biddy as much as to her brother this remark might have been offered; but the girl's eyes turned back to the ladies who for the moment had lost their companion. She felt irresponsive and feared she should pass with this easy cosmopolite for a stiff, scared, English girl, which was not the type she aimed at; but wasn't even ocular commerce overbold so long as she hadn't a sign from Nick? The elder of the strange women had turned her back and was looking at some bronze figure, losing her shawl again as she did so; but the other stood where their escort had quitted her, giving all her attention to his sudden sociability with others. Her arms hung at her sides, her head was bent, her face lowered, so that she had an odd appearance of raising her eyes from under her brows; and in this attitude she was

striking, though her air was so unconciliatory as almost to seem dangerous. Did it express resentment at having been abandoned for another girl? Biddy, who began to be frightened—there was a moment when the neglected creature resembled a tigress about to spring—was tempted to cry out that she had no wish whatever to appropriate the gentleman. Then she made the discovery that the young lady too had a manner, almost as much as her clever guide, and the rapid induction that it perhaps meant no more than his. She only looked at Biddy from beneath her eyebrows, which were wonderfully arched, but there was ever so much of a manner in the way she did it. Biddy had a momentary sense of being a figure in a ballet, a dramatic ballet—a subordinate motionless figure, to be dashed at to music or strangely capered up to. It would be a very dramatic ballet indeed if this young person were the heroine. She had magnificent hair, the girl reflected; and at the same moment heard Nick say to his interlocutor: "You're not in London—one can't meet you there?"

"I rove, drift, float," was the answer; "my feelings direct me—if such a life as mine may be said to have a direction. Where there's anything to feel I try to be there!" the young man continued with his confiding laugh.

"I should like to get hold of you," Nick returned.

"Well, in that case there would be no doubt the intellectual adventure. Those are the currents—any sort of personal relation—that govern my career."

"I don't want to lose you this time," Nick continued in a tone

that excited Biddy's surprise. A moment before, when his friend had said that he tried to be where there was anything to feel, she had wondered how he could endure him.

"Don't lose me, don't lose me!" cried the stranger after a fashion which affected the girl as the highest expression of irresponsibility she had ever seen. "After all why should you? Let us remain together unless I interfere"—and he looked, smiling and interrogative, at Biddy, who still remained blank, only noting again that Nick forbore to make them acquainted. This was an anomaly, since he prized the gentleman so. Still, there could be no anomaly of Nick's that wouldn't impose itself on his younger sister.

"Certainly, I keep you," he said, "unless on my side I deprive those ladies—!"

"Charming women, but it's not an indissoluble union. We meet, we communicate, we part! They're going—I'm seeing them to the door. I shall come back." With this Nick's friend rejoined his companions, who moved away with him, the strange fine eyes of the girl lingering on Biddy's brother as well as on Biddy herself as they receded.

"Who is he—who are they?" Biddy instantly asked.

"He's a gentleman," Nick made answer—insufficiently, she thought, and even with a shade of hesitation. He spoke as if she might have supposed he was not one, and if he was really one why didn't he introduce him? But Biddy wouldn't for the world have put this question, and he now moved to the nearest bench

and dropped upon it as to await the other's return. No sooner, however, had his sister seated herself than he said: "See here, my dear, do you think you had better stay?"

"Do you want me to go back to mother?" the girl asked with a lengthening visage.

"Well, what do you think?" He asked it indeed gaily enough.

"Is your conversation to be about—about private affairs?"

"No, I can't say that. But I doubt if mother would think it the sort of thing that's 'necessary to your development.'"

This assertion appeared to inspire her with the eagerness with which she again broke out: "But who are they—who are they?"

"I know nothing of the ladies. I never saw them before. The man's a fellow I knew very well at Oxford. He was thought immense fun there. We've diverged, as he says, and I had almost lost sight of him, but not so much as he thinks, because I've read him—read him with interest. He has written a very clever book."

"What kind of a book?"

"A sort of novel."

"What sort of novel?"

"Well, I don't know—with a lot of good writing." Biddy listened to this so receptively that she thought it perverse her brother should add: "I daresay Peter will have come if you return to mother."

"I don't care if he has. Peter's nothing to me. But I'll go if you wish it."

Nick smiled upon her again and then said: "It doesn't signify.

We'll all go."

"All?" she echoed.

"He won't hurt us. On the contrary he'll do us good."

This was possible, the girl reflected in silence, but none the less the idea struck her as courageous, of their taking the odd young man back to breakfast with them and with the others, especially if Peter should be there. If Peter was nothing to her it was singular she should have attached such importance to this contingency. The odd young man reappeared, and now that she saw him without his queer female appendages he seemed personally less weird. He struck her moreover, as generally a good deal accounted for by the literary character, especially if it were responsible for a lot of good writing. As he took his place on the bench Nick said to him, indicating her, "My sister Bridget," and then mentioned his name, "Mr. Gabriel Nash."

"You enjoy Paris—you're happy here?" Mr. Nash inquired, leaning over his friend to speak to the girl.

Though his words belonged to the situation it struck her that his tone didn't, and this made her answer him more dryly than she usually spoke. "Oh yes, it's very nice."

"And French art interests you? You find things here that please?"

"Oh yes, I like some of them."

Mr. Nash considered her kindly. "I hoped you'd say you like the Academy better."

"She would if she didn't think you expected it," said Nicholas

Dormer.

"Oh Nick!" Biddy protested.

"Miss Dormer's herself an English picture," their visitor pronounced in the tone of a man whose urbanity was a general solvent.

"That's a compliment if you don't like them!" Biddy exclaimed.

"Ah some of them, some of them; there's a certain sort of thing!" Mr. Nash continued. "We must feel everything, everything that we can. We're here for that."

"You do like English art then?" Nick demanded with a slight accent of surprise.

Mr. Nash indulged his wonder. "My dear Dormer, do you remember the old complaint I used to make of you? You had formulas that were like walking in one's hat. One may see something in a case and one may not."

"Upon my word," said Nick, "I don't know any one who was fonder of a generalisation than you. You turned them off as the man at the street-corner distributes hand-bills."

"They were my wild oats. I've sown them all."

"We shall see that!"

"Oh there's nothing of them now: a tame, scanty, homely growth. My only good generalisations are my actions."

"We shall see them then."

"Ah pardon me. You can't see them with the naked eye. Moreover, mine are principally negative. People's actions, I

know, are for the most part the things they do—but mine are all the things I don't do. There are so many of those, so many, but they don't produce any effect. And then all the rest are shades—extremely fine shades."

"Shades of behaviour?" Nick inquired with an interest which surprised his sister, Mr. Nash's discourse striking her mainly as the twaddle of the under-world.

"Shades of impression, of appreciation," said the young man with his explanatory smile. "All my behaviour consists of my feelings."

"Well, don't you show your feelings? You used to!"

"Wasn't it mainly those of disgust?" Nash asked. "Those operate no longer. I've closed that window."

"Do you mean you like everything?"

"Dear me, no! But I look only at what I do like."

"Do you mean that you've lost the noble faculty of disgust?"

"I haven't the least idea. I never try it. My dear fellow," said Gabriel Nash, "we've only one life that we know anything about: fancy taking it up with disagreeable impressions! When then shall we go in for the agreeable?"

"What do you mean by the agreeable?" Nick demanded.

"Oh the happy moments of our consciousness—the multiplication of those moments. We must save as many as possible from the dark gulf."

Nick had excited surprise on the part of his sister, but it was now Biddy's turn to make him open his eyes a little. She raised

her sweet voice in appeal to the stranger.

"Don't you think there are any wrongs in the world—any abuses and sufferings?"

"Oh so many, so many! That's why one must choose."

"Choose to stop them, to reform them—isn't that the choice?" Biddy asked. "That's Nick's," she added, blushing and looking at this personage.

"Ah our divergence—yes!" Mr. Nash sighed. "There are all kinds of machinery for that—very complicated and ingenious. Your formulas, my dear Dormer, your formulas!"

"Hang 'em, I haven't got any!" Nick now bravely declared.

"To me personally the simplest ways are those that appeal most," Mr. Nash went on. "We pay too much attention to the ugly; we notice it, we magnify it. The great thing is to leave it alone and encourage the beautiful."

"You must be very sure you get hold of the beautiful," said Nick.

"Ah precisely, and that's just the importance of the faculty of appreciation. We must train our special sense. It's capable of extraordinary extension. Life's none too long for that."

"But what's the good of the extraordinary extension if there is no affirmation of it, if it all goes to the negative, as you say? Where are the fine consequences?" Dormer asked.

"In one's own spirit. One is one's self a fine consequence. That's the most important one we have to do with. I am a fine consequence," said Gabriel Nash.

Biddy rose from the bench at this and stepped away a little as to look at a piece of statuary. But she had not gone far before, pausing and turning, she bent her eyes on the speaker with a heightened colour, an air of desperation and the question, after a moment: "Are you then an æsthete?"

"Ah there's one of the formulas! That's walking in one's hat! I've no profession, my dear young lady. I've no état civil. These things are a part of the complicated ingenious machinery. As I say, I keep to the simplest way. I find that gives one enough to do. Merely to be is such a métier; to live such an art; to feel such a career!"

Bridget Dormer turned her back and examined her statue, and her brother said to his old friend: "And to write?"

"To write? Oh I shall never do it again!"

"You've done it almost well enough to be inconsistent. That book of yours is anything but negative; it's complicated and ingenious."

"My dear fellow, I'm extremely ashamed of that book," said Gabriel Nash.

"Ah call yourself a bloated Buddhist and have done with it!" his companion exclaimed.

"Have done with it? I haven't the least desire to have done with it. And why should one call one's self anything? One only deprives other people of their dearest occupation. Let me add that you don't begin to have an insight into the art of life till it ceases to be of the smallest consequence to you what you may

be called. That's rudimentary."

"But if you go in for shades you must also go in for names. You must distinguish," Nick objected. "The observer's nothing without his categories, his types and varieties."

"Ah trust him to distinguish!" said Gabriel Nash sweetly. "That's for his own convenience; he has, privately, a terminology to meet it. That's one's style. But from the moment it's for the convenience of others the signs have to be grosser, the shades begin to go. That's a deplorable hour! Literature, you see, is for the convenience of others. It requires the most abject concessions. It plays such mischief with one's style that really I've had to give it up."

"And politics?" Nick asked.

"Well, what about them?" was Mr. Nash's reply with a special cadence as he watched his friend's sister, who was still examining her statue. Biddy was divided between irritation and curiosity. She had interposed space, but she had not gone beyond ear-shot. Nick's question made her curiosity throb as a rejoinder to his friend's words.

"That, no doubt you'll say, is still far more for the convenience of others—is still worse for one's style."

Biddy turned round in time to hear Mr. Nash answer: "It has simply nothing in life to do with shades! I can't say worse for it than that."

Biddy stepped nearer at this and drew still further on her courage. "Won't mamma be waiting? Oughtn't we to go to

luncheon?"

Both the young men looked up at her and Mr. Nash broke out: "You ought to protest! You ought to save him!"

"To save him?" Biddy echoed.

"He had a style, upon my word he had! But I've seen it go. I've read his speeches."

"You were capable of that?" Nick laughed.

"For you, yes. But it was like listening to a nightingale in a brass band."

"I think they were beautiful," Biddy declared.

Her brother got up at this tribute, and Mr. Nash, rising too, said with his bright colloquial air: "But, Miss Dormer, he had eyes. He was made to see—to see all over, to see everything. There are so few like that."

"I think he still sees," Biddy returned, wondering a little why Nick didn't defend himself.

"He sees his 'side,' his dreadful 'side,' dear young lady. Poor man, fancy your having a 'side'—you, you—and spending your days and your nights looking at it! I'd as soon pass my life looking at an advertisement on a hoarding."

"You don't see me some day a great statesman?" said Nick.

"My dear fellow, it's exactly what I've a terror of."

"Mercy! don't you admire them?" Biddy cried.

"It's a trade like another and a method of making one's way which society certainly condones. But when one can be something better—!"

"Why what in the world is better?" Biddy asked.

The young man gasped and Nick, replying for him, said: "Gabriel Nash is better! You must come and lunch with us. I must keep you—I must!" he added.

"We shall save him yet," Mr. Nash kept on easily to Biddy while they went and the girl wondered still more what her mother would make of him.

Chapter

3

After her companions left her Lady Agnes rested for five minutes in silence with her elder daughter, at the end of which time she observed: "I suppose one must have food at any rate," and, getting up, quitted the place where they had been sitting. "And where are we to go? I hate eating out of doors," she went on.

"Dear me, when one comes to Paris—!" Grace returned in a tone apparently implying that in so rash an adventure one must be prepared for compromises and concessions. The two ladies wandered to where they saw a large sign of "Buffet" suspended in the air, entering a precinct reserved for little white-clothed tables, straw-covered chairs and long-aproned waiters. One of these functionaries approached them with eagerness and with a "Mesdames sont seules?" receiving in return from her ladyship the slightly snappish announcement "Non; nous sommes beaucoup!" He introduced them to a table larger than most of the others, and under his protection they took their places at it

and began rather languidly and vaguely to consider the question of the repast. The waiter had placed a carte in Lady Agnes's hands and she studied it, through her eye-glass, with a failure of interest, while he enumerated with professional fluency the resources of the establishment and Grace watched the people at the other tables. She was hungry and had already broken a morsel from a long glazed roll.

"Not cold beef and pickles, you know," she observed to her mother. Lady Agnes gave no heed to this profane remark, but dropped her eye-glass and laid down the greasy document. "What does it signify? I daresay it's all nasty," Grace continued; and she added inconsequently: "If Peter comes he's sure to be particular."

"Let him first be particular to come!" her ladyship exclaimed, turning a cold eye upon the waiter.

"Poulet chasseur, filets mignons sauce bearnaise," the man suggested.

"You'll give us what I tell you," said Lady Agnes; and she mentioned with distinctness and authority the dishes of which she desired that the meal should be composed. He interjected three or four more suggestions, but as they produced absolutely no impression on her he became silent and submissive, doing justice apparently to her ideas. For Lady Agnes had ideas, and, though it had suited her humour ten minutes before to profess herself helpless in such a case, the manner in which she imposed them on the waiter as original, practical, and economical, showed the high executive woman, the mother of children, the daughter of earls,

the consort of an official, the dispenser of hospitality, looking back upon a lifetime of luncheons. She carried many cares, and the feeding of multitudes—she was honourably conscious of having fed them decently, as she had always done everything—had ever been one of them. "Everything's absurdly dear," she remarked to her daughter as the waiter went away. To this remark Grace made no answer. She had been used for a long time back to hearing that everything was very dear; it was what one always expected. So she found the case herself, but she was silent and inventive about it, and nothing further passed, in the way of conversation with her mother, while they waited for the latter's orders to be executed, till Lady Agnes reflected audibly: "He makes me unhappy, the way he talks about Julia."

"Sometimes I think he does it to torment one. One can't mention her!" Grace responded.

"It's better not to mention her, but to leave it alone."

"Yet he never mentions her of himself."

"In some cases that's supposed to show that people like people—though of course something more's required to prove it," Lady Agnes continued to meditate. "Sometimes I think he's thinking of her, then at others I can't fancy what he's thinking of."

"It would be awfully suitable," said Grace, biting her roll.

Her companion had a pause, as if looking for some higher ground to put it upon. Then she appeared to find this loftier level in the observation: "Of course he must like her—he has known her always."

"Nothing can be plainer than that she likes him," Grace opined.

"Poor Julia!" Lady Agnes almost wailed; and her tone suggested that she knew more about that than she was ready to state.

"It isn't as if she wasn't clever and well read," her daughter went on. "If there were nothing else there would be a reason in her being so interested in politics, in everything that he is."

"Ah what Nick is—that's what I sometimes wonder!"

Grace eyed her parent in some despair: "Why, mother, isn't he going to be like papa?" She waited for an answer that didn't come; after which she pursued: "I thought you thought him so like him already."

"Well, I don't," said Lady Agnes quietly.

"Who is then? Certainly Percy isn't."

Lady Agnes was silent a space. "There's no one like your father."

"Dear papa!" Grace handsomely concurred. Then with a rapid transition: "It would be so jolly for all of us—she'd be so nice to us."

"She's that already—in her way," said Lady Agnes conscientiously, having followed the return, quick as it was. "Much good does it do her!" And she reproduced the note of her bitterness of a moment before.

"It does her some good that one should look out for her. I do, and I think she knows it," Grace declared. "One can at any rate

keep other women off."

"Don't meddle—you're very clumsy," was her mother's not particularly sympathetic rejoinder. "There are other women who are beautiful, and there are others who are clever and rich."

"Yes, but not all in one: that's what's so nice in Julia. Her fortune would be thrown in; he wouldn't appear to have married her for it."

"If he does he won't," said Lady Agnes a trifle obscurely.

"Yes, that's what's so charming. And he could do anything then, couldn't he?"

"Well, your father had no fortune to speak of."

"Yes, but didn't Uncle Percy help him?"

"His wife helped him," said Lady Agnes.

"Dear mamma!"—the girl was prompt. "There's one thing," she added: "that Mr. Carteret will always help Nick."

"What do you mean by 'always'?"

"Why whether he marries Julia or not."

"Things aren't so easy," Lady Agnes judged. "It will all depend on Nick's behaviour. He can stop it to-morrow."

Grace Dormer stared; she evidently thought Mr. Carteret's beneficence a part of the scheme of nature. "How could he stop it?"

"By not being serious. It isn't so hard to prevent people giving you money."

"Serious?" Grace repeated. "Does he want him to be a prig like Lord Egbert?"

"Yes—that's exactly what he wants. And what he'll do for him he'll do for him only if he marries Julia."

"Has he told you?" Grace inquired. And then, before her mother could answer, "I'm delighted at that!" she cried.

"He hasn't told me, but that's the way things happen." Lady Agnes was less optimistic than her daughter, and such optimism as she cultivated was a thin tissue with the sense of things as they are showing through. "If Nick becomes rich Charles Carteret will make him more so. If he doesn't he won't give him a shilling."

"Oh mamma!" Grace demurred.

"It's all very well to say that in public life money isn't as necessary as it used to be," her ladyship went on broodingly. "Those who say so don't know anything about it. It's always intensely necessary."

Her daughter, visibly affected by the gloom of her manner, felt impelled to evoke as a corrective a more cheerful idea. "I daresay; but there's the fact—isn't there?—that poor papa had so little."

"Yes, and there's the fact that it killed him!"

These words came out with a strange, quick, little flare of passion. They startled Grace Dormer, who jumped in her place and gasped, "Oh mother!" The next instant, however, she added in a different voice, "Oh Peter!" for, with an air of eagerness, a gentleman was walking up to them.

"How d'ye do, Cousin Agnes? How d'ye do, little Grace?" Peter Sherringham laughed and shook hands with them, and

three minutes later was settled in his chair at their table, on which the first elements of the meal had been placed. Explanations, on one side and the other, were demanded and produced; from which it appeared that the two parties had been in some degree at cross-purposes. The day before Lady Agnes and her companions travelled to Paris Sherringham had gone to London for forty-eight hours on private business of the ambassador's, arriving, on his return by the night-train, only early that morning. There had accordingly been a delay in his receiving Nick Dormer's two notes. If Nick had come to the embassy in person—he might have done him the honour to call—he would have learned that the second secretary was absent. Lady Agnes was not altogether successful in assigning a motive to her son's neglect of this courteous form; she could but say: "I expected him, I wanted him to go; and indeed, not hearing from you, he would have gone immediately—an hour or two hence, on leaving this place. But we're here so quietly—not to go out, not to seem to appeal to the ambassador. Nick put it so—'Oh mother, we'll keep out of it; a friendly note will do.' I don't know definitely what he wanted to keep out of, unless anything like gaiety. The embassy isn't gay, I know. But I'm sure his note was friendly, wasn't it? I daresay you'll see for yourself. He's different directly he gets abroad; he doesn't seem to care." Lady Agnes paused a moment, not carrying out this particular elucidation; then she resumed: "He said you'd have seen Julia and that you'd understand everything from her. And when I asked how she'd know he said, 'Oh she

knows everything!'"

"He never said a word to me about Julia," Peter Sherringham returned. Lady Agnes and her daughter exchanged a glance at this: the latter had already asked three times where Julia was, and her ladyship dropped that they had been hoping she would be able to come with Peter. The young man set forth that she was at the moment at an hotel in the Rue de la Paix, but had only been there since that morning; he had seen her before proceeding to the Champs Elysées. She had come up to Paris by an early train — she had been staying at Versailles, of all places in the world. She had been a week in Paris on her return from Cannes—her stay there had been of nearly a month: fancy!—and then had gone out to Versailles to see Mrs. Billinghurst. Perhaps they'd remember her, poor Dallow's sister. She was staying there to teach her daughters French—she had a dozen or two!—and Julia had spent three days with her. She was to return to England about the twenty-fifth. It would make seven weeks she must have been away from town—a rare thing for her; she usually stuck to it so in summer.

"Three days with Mrs. Billinghurst—how very good-natured of her!" Lady Agnes commented.

"Oh they're very nice to her," Sherringham said.

"Well, I hope so!" Grace Dormer exhaled. "Why didn't you make her come here?"

"I proposed it, but she wouldn't." Another eye-beam, at this, passed between the two ladies and Peter went on: "She said you

must come and see her at the Hôtel de Hollande."

"Of course we'll do that," Lady Agnes declared. "Nick went to ask about her at the Westminster."

"She gave that up; they wouldn't give her the rooms she wanted, her usual set."

"She's delightfully particular!" Grace said complacently. Then she added: "She does like pictures, doesn't she?"

Peter Sherringham stared. "Oh I daresay. But that's not what she has in her head this morning. She has some news from London—she's immensely excited."

"What has she in her head?" Lady Agnes asked.

"What's her news from London?" Grace added.

"She wants Nick to stand."

"Nick to stand?" both ladies cried.

"She undertakes to bring him in for Harsh. Mr. Pinks is dead—the fellow, you know, who got the seat at the general election. He dropped down in London—disease of the heart or something of that sort. Julia has her telegram, but I see it was in last night's papers."

"Imagine—Nick never mentioned it!" said Lady Agnes.

"Don't you know, mother?—abroad he only reads foreign papers."

"Oh I know. I've no patience with him," her ladyship continued. "Dear Julia!"

"It's a nasty little place, and Pinks had a tight squeeze—107 or something of that sort; but if it returned a Liberal a year ago

very likely it will do so again. Julia at any rate believes it can be made to—if the man's Nick—and is ready to take the order to put him in."

"I'm sure if she can do it she will," Grace pronounced.

"Dear, dear Julia! And Nick can do something for himself," said the mother of this candidate.

"I've no doubt he can do anything," Peter Sherringham returned good-naturedly. Then, "Do you mean in expenses?" he inquired.

"Ah I'm afraid he can't do much in expenses, poor dear boy! And it's dreadful how little we can look to Percy."

"Well, I daresay you may look to Julia. I think that's her idea."

"Delightful Julia!" Lady Agnes broke out. "If poor Sir Nicholas could have known! Of course he must go straight home," she added.

"He won't like that," said Grace.

"Then he'll have to go without liking it."

"It will rather spoil your little excursion, if you've only just come," Peter suggested; "to say nothing of the great Biddy's, if she's enjoying Paris."

"We may stay perhaps—with Julia to protect us," said Lady Agnes.

"Ah she won't stay; she'll go over for her man."

"Her man——?"

"The fellow who stands, whoever he is—especially if he's Nick." These last words caused the eyes of Peter Sherringham's

companions to meet again, and he went on: "She'll go straight down to Harsh."

"Wonderful Julia!" Lady Agnes panted. "Of course Nick must go straight there too."

"Well, I suppose he must see first if they'll have him."

"If they'll have him? Why how can he tell till he tries?"

"I mean the people at headquarters, the fellows who arrange it."

Lady Agnes coloured a little. "My dear Peter, do you suppose there will be the least doubt of their 'having' the son of his father?"

"Of course it's a great name, Cousin Agnes—a very great name."

"One of the greatest, simply," Lady Agnes smiled.

"It's the best name in the world!" said Grace more emphatically.

"All the same it didn't prevent his losing his seat."

"By half-a-dozen votes: it was too odious!" her ladyship cried.

"I remember—I remember. And in such a case as that why didn't they immediately put him in somewhere else?"

"How one sees you live abroad, dear Peter! There happens to have been the most extraordinary lack of openings—I never saw anything like it—for a year. They've had their hand on him, keeping him all ready. I daresay they've telegraphed him."

"And he hasn't told you?"

Lady Agnes faltered. "He's so very odd when he's abroad!"

"At home too he lets things go," Grace interposed. "He does so little—takes no trouble." Her mother suffered this statement to pass unchallenged, and she pursued philosophically: "I suppose it's because he knows he's so clever."

"So he is, dear old man. But what does he do, what has he been doing, in a positive way?"

"He has been painting."

"Ah not seriously!" Lady Agnes protested.

"That's the worst way," said Peter Sherringham. "Good things?"

Neither of the ladies made a direct response to this, but Lady Agnes said: "He has spoken repeatedly. They're always calling on him."

"He speaks magnificently," Grace attested.

"That's another of the things I lose, living in far countries. And he's doing the Salon now with the great Biddy?"

"Just the things in this part. I can't think what keeps them so long," Lady Agnes groaned. "Did you ever see such a dreadful place?"

Sherringham stared. "Aren't the things good? I had an idea ——!"

"Good?" cried Lady Agnes. "They're too odious, too wicked."

"Ah," laughed Peter, "that's what people fall into if they live abroad. The French oughtn't to live abroad!"

"Here they come," Grace announced at this point; "but they've got a strange man with them."

"That's a bore when we want to talk!" Lady Agnes sighed.

Peter got up in the spirit of welcome and stood a moment watching the others approach. "There will be no difficulty in talking, to judge by the gentleman," he dropped; and while he remains so conspicuous our eyes may briefly rest on him. He was middling high and was visibly a representative of the nervous rather than of the phlegmatic branch of his race. He had an oval face, fine firm features, and a complexion that tended to the brown. Brown were his eyes, and women thought them soft; dark brown his hair, in which the same critics sometimes regretted the absence of a little undulation. It was perhaps to conceal this plainness that he wore it very short. His teeth were white, his moustache was pointed, and so was the small beard that adorned the extremity of his chin. His face expressed intelligence and was very much alive; it had the further distinction that it often struck superficial observers with a certain foreignness of cast. The deeper sort, however, usually felt it latently English enough. There was an idea that, having taken up the diplomatic career and gone to live in strange lands, he cultivated the mask of an alien, an Italian or a Spaniard; of an alien in time even—one of the wonderful ubiquitous diplomatic agents of the sixteenth century. In fact, none the less, it would have been impossible to be more modern than Peter Sherringham—more of one's class and one's country. But this didn't prevent several stray persons—Bridget Dormer for instance—from admiring the hue of his cheek for its olive richness and his moustache and beard for their resemblance

to those of Charles I. At the same time—she rather jumbled her comparisons—she thought he recalled a Titian.

Chapter 4

Peter's meeting with Nick was of the friendliest on both sides, involving a great many "dear fellows" and "old boys," and his salutation to the younger of the Miss Dormers consisted of the frankest "Delighted to see you, my dear Bid!" There was no kissing, but there was cousinship in the air, of a conscious, living kind, as Gabriel Nash doubtless quickly noted, hovering for a moment outside the group. Biddy said nothing to Peter Sherringham, but there was no flatness in a silence which heaved, as it were, with the fairest physiognomic portents. Nick introduced Gabriel Nash to his mother and to the other two as "a delightful old friend" whom he had just come across, and Sherringham acknowledged the act by saying to Mr. Nash, but as if rather less for his sake than for that of the presenter: "I've seen you very often before."

"Ah repetition—recurrence: we haven't yet, in the study of how to live, abolished that clumsiness, have we?" Mr. Nash genially inquired. "It's a poverty in the supernumeraries of our stage that we don't pass once for all, but come round and cross again like a procession or an army at the theatre. It's a sordid economy that ought to have been managed better. The right thing would be just one appearance, and the procession, regardless of expense, for ever and for ever different." The company was

occupied in placing itself at table, so that the only disengaged attention for the moment was Grace's, to whom, as her eyes rested on him, the young man addressed these last words with a smile. "Alas, it's a very shabby idea, isn't it? The world isn't got up regardless of expense!"

Grace looked quickly away from him and said to her brother: "Nick, Mr. Pinks is dead."

"Mr. Pinks?" asked Gabriel Nash, appearing to wonder where he should sit.

"The member for Harsh; and Julia wants you to stand," the girl went on.

"Mr. Pinks, the member for Harsh? What names to be sure!" Gabriel mused cheerfully, still unseated.

"Julia wants me? I'm much obliged to her!" Nick absently said. "Nash, please sit by my mother, with Peter on her other side."

"My dear, it isn't Julia"—Lady Agnes spoke earnestly. "Every one wants you. Haven't you heard from your people? Didn't you know the seat was vacant?"

Nick was looking round the table to see what was on it. "Upon my word I don't remember. What else have you ordered, mother?"

"There's some boeuf braisé, my dear, and afterwards some galantine. Here's a dish of eggs with asparagus-tips."

"I advise you to go in for it, Nick," said Peter Sherringham, to whom the preparation in question was presented.

"Into the eggs with asparagus-tips? Donnez m'en s'il vous plaît. My dear fellow, how can I stand? how can I sit? Where's the money to come from?"

"The money? Why from Jul——!" Grace began, but immediately caught her mother's eye.

"Poor Julia, how you do work her!" Nick exclaimed. "Nash, I recommend you the asparagus-tips. Mother, he's my best friend —do look after him."

"I've an impression I've breakfasted—I'm not sure," Nash smiled.

"With those beautiful ladies? Try again—you'll find out."

"The money can be managed; the expenses are very small and the seat's certain," Lady Agnes pursued, not apparently heeding her son's injunction in respect to Nash.

"Rather—if Julia goes down!" her elder daughter exclaimed.

"Perhaps Julia won't go down!" Nick answered humorously.

Biddy was seated next to Mr. Nash, so that she could take occasion to ask, "Who are the beautiful ladies?" as if she failed to recognise her brother's allusion. In reality this was an innocent trick: she was more curious than she could have given a suitable reason for about the odd women from whom her neighbour had lately separated.

"Deluded, misguided, infatuated persons!" Mr. Nash replied, understanding that she had asked for a description. "Strange eccentric, almost romantic, types. Predestined victims, simple-minded sacrificial lambs!"

This was copious, yet it was vague, so that Biddy could only respond: "Oh all that?" But meanwhile Peter Sherringham said to Nick: "Julia's here, you know. You must go and see her."

Nick looked at him an instant rather hard, as if to say: "You too?" But Peter's eyes appeared to answer, "No, no, not I"; upon which his cousin rejoined: "Of course I'll go and see her. I'll go immediately. Please to thank her for thinking of me."

"Thinking of you? There are plenty to think of you!" Lady Agnes said. "There are sure to be telegrams at home. We must go back—we must go back!"

"We must go back to England?" Nick Dormer asked; and as his mother made no answer he continued: "Do you mean I must go to Harsh?"

Her ladyship evaded this question, inquiring of Mr. Nash if he would have a morsel of fish; but her gain was small, for this gentleman, struck again by the unhappy name of the bereaved constituency, only broke out: "Ah what a place to represent! How can you—how can you?"

"It's an excellent place," said Lady Agnes coldly. "I imagine you've never been there. It's a very good place indeed. It belongs very largely to my cousin, Mrs. Dallow."

Gabriel partook of the fish, listening with interest. "But I thought we had no more pocket-boroughs."

"It's pockets we rather lack, so many of us. There are plenty of Harshes," Nick Dormer observed.

"I don't know what you mean," Lady Agnes said to Nash with

considerable majesty.

Peter Sherringham also addressed him with an "Oh it's all right; they come down on you like a shot!" and the young man continued ingenuously:

"Do you mean to say you've to pay money to get into that awful place—that it's not you who are paid?"

"Into that awful place?" Lady Agnes repeated blankly.

"Into the House of Commons. That you don't get a high salary?"

"My dear Nash, you're delightful: don't leave me—don't leave me!" Nick cried; while his mother looked at him with an eye that demanded: "Who in the world's this extraordinary person?"

"What then did you think pocket-boroughs were?" Peter Sherringham asked.

Mr. Nash's facial radiance rested on him. "Why, boroughs that filled your pocket. To do that sort of thing without a bribe—c'est trop fort!"

"He lives at Samarcand," Nick Dormer explained to his mother, who flushed perceptibly. "What do you advise me? I'll do whatever you say," he went on to his old acquaintance.

"My dear, my dear——!" Lady Agnes pleaded.

"See Julia first, with all respect to Mr. Nash. She's of excellent counsel," said Peter Sherringham.

Mr. Nash smiled across the table at his host. "The lady first—the lady first! I've not a word to suggest as against any idea of hers."

"We mustn't sit here too long, there'll be so much to do," said Lady Agnes anxiously, perceiving a certain slowness in the service of the boeuf braisé.

Biddy had been up to this moment mainly occupied in looking, covertly and in snatches, at Peter Sherringham; as was perfectly lawful in a young lady with a handsome cousin whom she had not seen for more than a year. But her sweet voice now took license to throw in the words: "We know what Mr. Nash thinks of politics: he told us just now he thinks them dreadful."

"No, not dreadful—only inferior," the personage impugned protested. "Everything's relative."

"Inferior to what?" Lady Agnes demanded.

Mr. Nash appeared to consider a moment. "To anything else that may be in question."

"Nothing else is in question!" said her ladyship in a tone that would have been triumphant if it had not been so dry.

"Ah then!" And her neighbour shook his head sadly. He turned after this to Biddy. "The ladies whom I was with just now and in whom you were so good as to express an interest?" Biddy gave a sign of assent and he went on: "They're persons theatrical. The younger one's trying to go upon the stage."

"And are you assisting her?" Biddy inquired, pleased she had guessed so nearly right.

"Not in the least—I'm rather choking her off. I consider it the lowest of the arts."

"Lower than politics?" asked Peter Sherringham, who was

listening to this.

"Dear no, I won't say that. I think the Théâtre Français a greater institution than the House of Commons."

"I agree with you there!" laughed Sherringham; "all the more that I don't consider the dramatic art a low one. It seems to me on the contrary to include all the others."

"Yes—that's a view. I think it's the view of my friends."

"Of your friends?"

"Two ladies—old acquaintances—whom I met in Paris a week ago and whom I've just been spending an hour with in this place."

"You should have seen them; they struck me very much," Biddy said to her cousin.

"I should like to see them if they really have anything to say to the theatre."

"It can easily be managed. Do you believe in the theatre?" asked Gabriel Nash.

"Passionately," Sherringham confessed. "Don't you?"

Before Nash had had time to answer Biddy had interposed with a sigh. "How I wish I could go—but in Paris I can't!"

"I'll take you, Biddy—I vow I'll take you."

"But the plays, Peter," the girl objected. "Mamma says they're worse than the pictures."

"Oh, we'll arrange that: they shall do one at the Français on purpose for a delightful little yearning English girl."

"Can you make them?"

"I can make them do anything I choose."

"Ah then it's the theatre that believes in you," said Mr. Nash.

"It would be ungrateful if it didn't after all I've done for it!" Sherringham gaily opined.

Lady Agnes had withdrawn herself from between him and her other guest and, to signify that she at least had finished eating, had gone to sit by her son, whom she held, with some importunity, in conversation. But hearing the theatre talked of she threw across an impersonal challenge to the paradoxical young man. "Pray should you think it better for a gentleman to be an actor?"

"Better than being a politician? Ah, comedian for comedian, isn't the actor more honest?"

Lady Agnes turned to her son and brought forth with spirit: "Think of your great father, Nicholas!"

"He was an honest man," said Nicholas. "That's perhaps why he couldn't stand it."

Peter Sherringham judged the colloquy to have taken an uncomfortable twist, though not wholly, as it seemed to him, by the act of Nick's queer comrade. To draw it back to safer ground he said to this personage: "May I ask if the ladies you just spoke of are English—Mrs. and Miss Rooth: isn't that the rather odd name?"

"The very same. Only the daughter, according to her kind, desires to be known by some nom de guerre before she has even been able to enlist."

"And what does she call herself?" Bridget Dormer asked.

"Maud Vavasour, or Edith Temple, or Gladys Vane—some rubbish of that sort."

"What then is her own name?"

"Miriam—Miriam Rooth. It would do very well and would give her the benefit of the prepossessing fact that—to the best of my belief at least—she's more than half a Jewess."

"It is as good as Rachel Felix," Sherringham said.

"The name's as good, but not the talent. The girl's splendidly stupid."

"And more than half a Jewess? Don't you believe it!" Sherringham laughed.

"Don't believe she's a Jewess?" Biddy asked, still more interested in Miriam Rooth.

"No, no—that she's stupid, really. If she is she'll be the first."

"Ah you may judge for yourself," Nash rejoined, "if you'll come to-morrow afternoon to Madame Carré, Rue de Constantinople, à l'entresol."

"Madame Carré? Why, I've already a note from her—I found it this morning on my return to Paris—asking me to look in at five o'clock and listen to a jeune Anglaise."

"That's my arrangement—I obtained the favour. The ladies want an opinion, and dear old Carré has consented to see them and to give one. Maud Vavasour will recite, and the venerable artist will pass judgement."

Sherringham remembered he had his note in his pocket and

took it out to look it over. "She wishes to make her a little audience—she says she'll do better with that—and she asks me because I'm English. I shall make a point of going."

"And bring Dormer if you can: the audience will be better. Will you come, Dormer?" Mr. Nash continued, appealing to his friend—"will you come with me to hear an English amateur recite and an old French actress pitch into her?"

Nick looked round from his talk with his mother and Grace. "I'll go anywhere with you so that, as I've told you, I mayn't lose sight of you—may keep hold of you."

"Poor Mr. Nash, why is he so useful?" Lady Agnes took a cold freedom to inquire.

"He steadies me, mother."

"Oh I wish you'd take me, Peter," Biddy broke out wistfully to her cousin.

"To spend an hour with an old French actress? Do you want to go upon the stage?" the young man asked.

"No, but I want to see something—to know something."

"Madame Carré's wonderful in her way, but she's hardly company for a little English girl."

"I'm not little, I'm only too big; and she goes, the person you speak of."

"For a professional purpose and with her good mother," smiled Mr. Nash. "I think Lady Agnes would hardly venture ——!"

"Oh I've seen her good mother!" said Biddy as if she had her

impression of what the worth of that protection might be.

"Yes, but you haven't heard her. It's then that you measure her."

Biddy was wistful still. "Is it the famous Honorine Carré, the great celebrity?"

"Honorine in person: the incomparable, the perfect!" said Peter Sherringham. "The first artist of our time, taking her altogether. She and I are old pals; she has been so good as to come and 'say' things—which she does sometimes still dans le monde as no one else can— in my rooms."

"Make her come then. We can go there!"

"One of these days!"

"And the young lady—Miriam, Maud, Gladys—make her come too."

Sherringham looked at Nash and the latter was bland. "Oh you'll have no difficulty. She'll jump at it!"

"Very good. I'll give a little artistic tea—with Julia too of course. And you must come, Mr. Nash." This gentleman promised with an inclination, and Peter continued: "But if, as you say, you're not for helping the young lady, how came you to arrange this interview with the great model?"

"Precisely to stop her short. The great model will find her very bad. Her judgements, as you probably know, are Rhadamanthine."

"Unfortunate creature!" said Biddy. "I think you're cruel."

"Never mind—I'll look after them," Sherringham laughed.

"And how can Madame Carré judge if the girl recites English?"

"She's so intelligent that she could judge if she recited Chinese," Peter declared.

"That's true, but the jeune Anglaise recites also in French," said Gabriel Nash.

"Then she isn't stupid."

"And in Italian, and in several more tongues, for aught I know."

Sherringham was visibly interested. "Very good—we'll put her through them all."

"She must be most clever," Biddy went on yearningly.

"She has spent her life on the Continent; she has wandered about with her mother; she has picked up things."

"And is she a lady?" Biddy asked.

"Oh tremendous! The great ones of the earth on the mother's side. On the father's, on the other hand, I imagine, only a Jew stockbroker in the City."

"Then they're rich—or ought to be," Sherringham suggested.

"Ought to be—ah there's the bitterness! The stockbroker had too short a go—he was carried off in his flower. However, he left his wife a certain property, which she appears to have muddled away, not having the safeguard of being herself a Hebrew. This is what she has lived on till to-day—this and another resource. Her husband, as she has often told me, had the artistic temperament: that's common, as you know, among ces messieurs. He made

the most of his little opportunities and collected various pictures, tapestries, enamels, porcelains, and similar gewgaws. He parted with them also, I gather, at a profit; in short he carried on a neat little business as a brocanteur. It was nipped in the bud, but Mrs. Rooth was left with a certain number of these articles in her hands; indeed they must have formed her only capital. She was not a woman of business; she turned them, no doubt, to indifferent account; but she sold them piece by piece, and they kept her going while her daughter grew up. It was to this precarious traffic, conducted with extraordinary mystery and delicacy, that, five years ago, in Florence, I was indebted for my acquaintance with her. In those days I used to collect—heaven help me!—I used to pick up rubbish which I could ill afford. It was a little phase—we have our little phases, haven't we?" Mr. Nash asked with childlike trust—"and I've come out on the other side. Mrs. Rooth had an old green pot and I heard of her old green pot. To hear of it was to long for it, so that I went to see it under cover of night. I bought it and a couple of years ago I overturned and smashed it. It was the last of the little phase. It was not, however, as you've seen, the last of Mrs. Rooth. I met her afterwards in London, and I found her a year or two ago in Venice. She appears to be a great wanderer. She had other old pots, of other colours, red, yellow, black, or blue—she could produce them of any complexion you liked. I don't know whether she carried them about with her or whether she had little secret stores in the principal cities of Europe. To-day at any rate they

seem all gone. On the other hand she has her daughter, who has grown up and who's a precious vase of another kind—less fragile I hope than the rest. May she not be overturned and smashed!"

Peter Sherringham and Biddy Dormer listened with attention to this history, and the girl testified to the interest with which she had followed it by saying when Mr. Nash had ceased speaking: "A Jewish stockbroker, a dealer in curiosities: what an odd person to marry—for a person who was well born! I daresay he was a German."

"His name must have been simply Roth, and the poor lady, to smarten it up, has put in another o," Sherringham ingeniously suggested.

"You're both very clever," said Gabriel, "and Rudolf Roth, as I happen to know, was indeed the designation of Maud Vavasour's papa. But so far as the question of derogation goes one might as well drown as starve—for what connexion is not a misalliance when one happens to have the unaccommodating, the crushing honour of being a Neville-Nugent of Castle Nugent? That's the high lineage of Maud's mamma. I seem to have heard it mentioned that Rudolf Roth was very versatile and, like most of his species, not unacquainted with the practice of music. He had been employed to teach the harmonium to Miss Neville-Nugent and she had profited by his lessons. If his daughter's like him—and she's not like her mother—he was darkly and dangerously handsome. So I venture rapidly to reconstruct the situation."

A silence, for the moment, had fallen on Lady Agnes and her

other two children, so that Mr. Nash, with his universal urbanity, practically addressed these last remarks to them as well as to his other auditors. Lady Agnes looked as if she wondered whom he was talking about, and having caught the name of a noble residence she inquired: "Castle Nugent—where in the world's that?"

"It's a domain of immeasurable extent and almost inconceivable splendour, but I fear not to be found in any prosaic earthly geography!" Lady Agnes rested her eyes on the tablecloth as if she weren't sure a liberty had not been taken with her, or at least with her "order," and while Mr. Nash continued to abound in descriptive suppositions—"It must be on the banks of the Manzanares or the Guadalquivir"—Peter Sherringham, whose imagination had seemingly been kindled by the sketch of Miriam Rooth, took up the argument and reminded him that he had a short time before assigned a low place to the dramatic art and had not yet answered the question as to whether he believed in the theatre. Which gave the speaker a further chance. "I don't know that I understand your question; there are different ways of taking it. Do I think it's important? Is that what you mean? Important certainly to managers and stage-carpenters who want to make money, to ladies and gentlemen who want to produce themselves in public by limelight, and to other ladies and gentlemen who are bored and stupid and don't know what to do with their evening. It's a commercial and social convenience which may be infinitely worked. But important artistically, intellectually? How can it be

—so poor, so limited a form?"

"Upon my honour it strikes me as rich and various! Do you think it's a poor and limited form, Nick?" Sherringham added, appealing to his kinsman.

"I think whatever Nash thinks. I've no opinion to-day but his."

This answer of the hope of the Dormers drew the eyes of his mother and sisters to him and caused his friend to exclaim that he wasn't used to such responsibilities—so few people had ever tested his presence of mind by agreeing with him. "Oh I used to be of your way of feeling," Nash went on to Sherringham. "I understand you perfectly. It's a phase like another. I've been through it—j'ai été comme ça."

"And you went then very often to the Théâtre Français, and it was there I saw you. I place you now."

"I'm afraid I noticed none of the other spectators," Nash explained. "I had no attention but for the great Carré—she was still on the stage. Judge of my infatuation, and how I can allow for yours, when I tell you that I sought her acquaintance, that I couldn't rest till I had told her how I hung upon her lips."

"That's just what I told her," Sherringham returned.

"She was very kind to me. She said: 'Vous me rendez des forces.'"

"That's just what she said to me!"

"And we've remained very good friends."

"So have we!" laughed Sherringham. "And such perfect art as hers—do you mean to say you don't consider that important,

such a rare dramatic intelligence?"

"I'm afraid you read the feuilletons. You catch their phrases"—Nash spoke with pity. "Dramatic intelligence is never rare; nothing's more common."

"Then why have we so many shocking actors?"

"Have we? I thought they were mostly good; succeeding more easily and more completely in that business than in anything else. What could they do—those people generally—if they didn't do that poor thing? And reflect that the poor thing enables them to succeed! Of course, always, there are numbers of people on the stage who are no actors at all, for it's even easier to our poor humanity to be ineffectively stupid and vulgar than to bring down the house."

"It's not easy, by what I can see, to produce, completely, any artistic effect," Sherringham declared; "and those the actor produces are among the most momentous we know. You'll not persuade me that to watch such an actress as Madame Carré wasn't an education of the taste, an enlargement of one's knowledge."

"She did what she could, poor woman, but in what belittling, coarsening conditions! She had to interpret a character in a play, and a character in a play—not to say the whole piece: I speak more particularly of modern pieces—is such a wretchedly small peg to hang anything on! The dramatist shows us so little, is so hampered by his audience, is restricted to so poor an analysis."

"I know the complaint. It's all the fashion now. The raffinés

despise the theatre," said Peter Sherringham in the manner of a man abreast with the culture of his age and not to be captured by a surprise. "Connu, connu!"

"It will be known better yet, won't it? when the essentially brutal nature of the modern audience is still more perceived, when it has been properly analysed: the omnium gatherum of the population of a big commercial city at the hour of the day when their taste is at its lowest, flocking out of hideous hotels and restaurants, gorged with food, stultified with buying and selling and with all the other sordid preoccupations of the age, squeezed together in a sweltering mass, disappointed in their seats, timing the author, timing the actor, wishing to get their money back on the spot—all before eleven o'clock. Fancy putting the exquisite before such a tribunal as that! There's not even a question of it. The dramatist wouldn't if he could, and in nine cases out of ten he couldn't if he would. He has to make the basest concessions. One of his principal canons is that he must enable his spectators to catch the suburban trains, which stop at 11.30. What would you think of any other artist—the painter or the novelist—whose governing forces should be the dinner and the suburban trains? The old dramatists didn't defer to them—not so much at least—and that's why they're less and less actable. If they're touched—the large loose men—it's only to be mutilated and trivialised. Besides, they had a simpler civilisation to represent—societies in which the life of man was in action, in passion, in immediate and violent expression. Those things could be put upon the playhouse

boards with comparatively little sacrifice of their completeness and their truth. To-day we're so infinitely more reflective and complicated and diffuse that it makes all the difference. What can you do with a character, with an idea, with a feeling, between dinner and the suburban trains? You can give a gross, rough sketch of them, but how little you touch them, how bald you leave them! What crudity compared with what the novelist does!"

"Do you write novels, Mr. Nash?" Peter candidly asked.

"No, but I read them when they're extraordinarily good, and I don't go to plays. I read Balzac for instance—I encounter the admirable portrait of Valérie Marneffe in La Cousine Bette."

"And you contrast it with the poverty of Emile Augier's Séraphine in Les Lionnes Pauvres? I was awaiting you there. That's the cheval de bataille of you fellows."

"What an extraordinary discussion! What dreadful authors!" Lady Agnes murmured to her son. But he was listening so attentively to the other young men that he made no response, and Peter Sherringham went on:

"I've seen Madame Carré in things of the modern repertory, which she has made as vivid to me, caused to abide as ineffaceably in my memory, as Valérie Marneffe. She's the Balzac, as one may say, of actresses."

"The miniaturist, as it were, of whitewashers!" Nash offered as a substitute.

It might have been guessed that Sherringham resented his damned freedom, yet could but emulate his easy form. "You'd be

magnanimous if you thought the young lady you've introduced to our old friend would be important."

Mr. Nash lightly weighed it. "She might be much more so than she ever will be."

Lady Agnes, however, got up to terminate the scene and even to signify that enough had been said about people and questions she had never so much as heard of. Every one else rose, the waiter brought Nicholas the receipt of the bill, and Sherringham went on, to his interlocutor: "Perhaps she'll be more so than you think."

"Perhaps—if you take an interest in her!"

"A mystic voice seems to exhort me to do so, to whisper that though I've never seen her I shall find something in her." On which Peter appealed. "What do you say, Biddy—shall I take an interest in her?"

The girl faltered, coloured a little, felt a certain embarrassment in being publicly treated as an oracle. "If she's not nice I don't advise it."

"And if she is nice?"

"You advise it still less!" her brother exclaimed, laughing and putting his arm round her.

Lady Agnes looked sombre—she might have been saying to herself: "Heaven help us, what chance has a girl of mine with a man who's so agog about actresses?" She was disconcerted and distressed; a multitude of incongruous things, all the morning, had been forced upon her attention—displeasing pictures and still more displeasing theories about them, vague portents of

perversity on Nick's part and a strange eagerness on Peter's, learned apparently in Paris, to discuss, with a person who had a tone she never had been exposed to, topics irrelevant and uninteresting, almost disgusting, the practical effect of which was to make light of her presence. "Let us leave this—let us leave this!" she grimly said. The party moved together toward the door of departure, and her ruffled spirit was not soothed by hearing her son remark to his terrible friend: "You know you don't escape me; I stick to you!"

At this Lady Agnes broke out and interposed. "Pardon my reminding you that you're going to call on Julia."

"Well, can't Nash also come to call on Julia? That's just what I want—that she should see him."

Peter Sherringham came humanely to his kinswoman's assistance. "A better way perhaps will be for them to meet under my auspices at my 'dramatic tea.' This will enable me to return one favour for another. If Mr. Nash is so good as to introduce me to this aspirant for honours we estimate so differently, I'll introduce him to my sister, a much more positive quantity."

"It's easy to see who'll have the best of it!" Grace Dormer declared; while Nash stood there serenely, impartially, in a graceful detached way which seemed characteristic of him, assenting to any decision that relieved him of the grossness of choice and generally confident that things would turn out well for him. He was cheerfully helpless and sociably indifferent; ready to preside with a smile even at a discussion of his own admissibility.

"Nick will bring you. I've a little corner at the embassy," Sherringham continued.

"You're very kind. You must bring him then to-morrow—Rue de Constantinople."

"At five o'clock—don't be afraid."

"Oh dear!" Biddy wailed as they went on again and Lady Agnes, seizing his arm, marched off more quickly with her son. When they came out into the Champs Elysées Nick Dormer, looking round, saw his friend had disappeared. Biddy had attached herself to Peter, and Grace couldn't have encouraged Mr. Nash.

Chapter 5

Lady Agnes's idea had been that her son should go straight from the Palais de l'Industrie to the Hôtel de Hollande, with or without his mother and his sisters as his humour should seem to recommend. Much as she desired to see their valued Julia, and as she knew her daughters desired it, she was quite ready to put off their visit if this sacrifice should contribute to a speedy confrontation for Nick. She was anxious he should talk with Mrs. Dallow, and anxious he should be anxious himself; but it presently appeared that he was conscious of no pressure of eagerness. His view was that she and the girls should go to their cousin without delay and should, if they liked, spend the rest of the day in her society. He would go later; he would go in the evening. There were lots of things he wanted to do meanwhile.

This question was discussed with some intensity, though not at length, while the little party stood on the edge of the Place de la Concorde, to which they had proceeded on foot; and Lady Agnes noticed that the "lots of things" to which he proposed to give precedence over an urgent duty, a conference with a person who held out full hands to him, were implied somehow in the friendly glance with which he covered the great square, the opposite bank of the Seine, the steep blue roofs of the quay, the bright immensity of Paris. What in the world could be more important than making sure of his seat?—so quickly did the good lady's imagination travel. And now that idea appealed to him less than a ramble in search of old books and prints—since she was sure this was what he had in his head. Julia would be flattered should she know it, but of course she mustn't know it. Lady Agnes was already thinking of the least injurious account she could give of the young man's want of precipitation. She would have liked to represent him as tremendously occupied, in his room at their own hotel, in getting off political letters to every one it should concern, and particularly in drawing up his address to the electors of Harsh. Fortunately she was a woman of innumerable discretions, and a part of the worn look that sat in her face came from her having schooled herself for years, in commerce with her husband and her sons, not to insist unduly. She would have liked to insist, nature had formed her to insist, and the self-control had told in more ways than one. Even now it was powerless to prevent her suggesting that before doing anything else Nick should at least

repair to the inn and see if there weren't some telegrams.

He freely consented to do as much as this, and, having called a cab that she might go her way with the girls, kissed her again as he had done at the exhibition. This was an attention that could never displease her, but somehow when he kissed her she was really the more worried: she had come to recognise it as a sign that he was slipping away from her, and she wished she might frankly take it as his clutch at her to save him. She drove off with a vague sense that at any rate she and the girls might do something toward keeping the place warm for him. She had been a little vexed that Peter had not administered more of a push toward the Hôtel de Hollande, clear as it had become to her now that there was a foreignness in Peter which was not to be counted on and which made him speak of English affairs and even of English domestic politics as local and even "funny." They were very grandly local, and if one recalled, in public life, an occasional droll incident wasn't that, liberally viewed, just the warm human comfort of them? As she left the two young men standing together in the middle of the Place de la Concorde, the grand composition of which Nick, as she looked back, appeared to have paused to admire—as if he hadn't seen it a thousand times!—she wished she might have thought of Peter's influence with her son as exerted a little more in favour of localism. She had a fear he wouldn't abbreviate the boy's ill-timed flânerie. However, he had been very nice: he had invited them all to dine with him that evening at a convenient café, promising to bring Julia and

one of his colleagues. So much as this he had been willing to do to make sure Nick and his sister should meet. His want of localism, moreover, was not so great as that if it should turn out that there was anything beneath his manner toward Biddy—! The upshot of this reflexion might have been represented by the circumstance of her ladyship's remarking after a minute to her younger daughter, who sat opposite her in the voiture de place, that it would do no harm if she should get a new hat and that the search might be instituted that afternoon.

"A French hat, mamma?" said Grace. "Oh do wait till she gets home!"

"I think they're really prettier here, you know," Biddy opined; and Lady Agnes said simply: "I daresay they're cheaper." What was in her mind in fact was: "I daresay Peter thinks them becoming." It will be seen she had plenty of inward occupation, the sum of which was not lessened by her learning when she reached the top of the Rue de la Paix that Mrs. Dallow had gone out half an hour before and had left no message. She was more disconcerted by this incident than she could have explained or than she thought was right, as she had taken for granted Julia would be in a manner waiting for them. How could she be sure Nick wasn't coming? When people were in Paris a few days they didn't mope in the house, but she might have waited a little longer or have left an explanation. Was she then not so much in earnest about Nick's standing? Didn't she recognise the importance of being there to see him about it? Lady Agnes wondered if her

behaviour were a sign of her being already tired of the way this young gentleman treated her. Perhaps she had gone out because an instinct told her that the great propriety of their meeting early would make no difference with him—told her he wouldn't after all come. His mother's heart sank as she glanced at this possibility that their precious friend was already tired, she having on her side an intuition that there were still harder things in store. She had disliked having to tell Mrs. Dallow that Nick wouldn't see her till the evening, but now she disliked still more her not being there to hear it. She even resented a little her kinswoman's not having reasoned that she and the girls would come in any event, and not thought them worth staying in for. It came up indeed that she would perhaps have gone to their hotel, which was a good way up the Rue de Rivoli, near the Palais Royal—on which the cabman was directed to drive to that establishment.

As he jogged along she took in some degree the measure of what that might mean, Julia's seeking a little to avoid them. Was she growing to dislike them? Did she think they kept too sharp an eye on her, so that the idea of their standing in a still closer relation wouldn't be enticing? Her conduct up to this time had not worn such an appearance, unless perhaps a little, just a very little, in the matter of her ways with poor Grace. Lady Agnes knew she wasn't particularly fond of poor Grace, and could even sufficiently guess the reason—the manner in which Grace betrayed most how they wanted to make sure of her. She remembered how long the girl had stayed the last

time she had been at Harsh—going for an acceptable week and dragging out her visit to a month. She took a private heroic vow that Grace shouldn't go near the place again for a year; not, that is, unless Nick and Julia were married within the time. If that were to happen she shouldn't care. She recognised that it wasn't absolutely everything Julia should be in love with Nick; it was also better she should dislike his mother and sisters after a probable pursuit of him than before. Lady Agnes did justice to the natural rule in virtue of which it usually comes to pass that a woman doesn't get on with her husband's female belongings, and was even willing to be sacrificed to it in her disciplined degree. But she desired not to be sacrificed for nothing: if she was to be objected to as a mother-in-law she wished to be the mother-in-law first.

At the hotel in the Rue de Rivoli she had the disappointment of finding that Mrs. Dallow had not called, and also that no telegrams had come. She went in with the girls for half an hour and then straggled out with them again. She was undetermined and dissatisfied and the afternoon was rather a problem; of the kind, moreover, that she disliked most and was least accustomed to: not a choice between different things to do—her life had been full of that—but a want of anything to do at all. Nick had said to her before they separated: "You can knock about with the girls, you know; everything's amusing here." That was easily said while he sauntered and gossiped with Peter Sherringham and perhaps went to see more pictures like those in the Salon. He was

usually, on such occasions, very good-natured about spending his time with them; but this episode had taken altogether a perverse, profane form. She had no desire whatever to knock about and was far from finding everything in Paris amusing. She had no aptitude for aimlessness, and moreover thought it vulgar. If she had found Julia's card at the hotel—the sign of a hope of catching them just as they came back from the Salon—she would have made a second attempt to see her before the evening; but now certainly they would leave her alone. Lady Agnes wandered joylessly with the girls in the Palais Royal and the Rue de Richelieu, and emerged upon the Boulevard, where they continued their frugal prowl, as Biddy rather irritatingly called it. They went into five shops to buy a hat for Biddy, and her ladyship's presumptions of cheapness were woefully belied.

"Who in the world's your comic friend?" Peter Sherringham was meanwhile asking of his kinsman as they walked together.

"Ah there's something else you lost by going to Cambridge—you lost Gabriel Nash!"

"He sounds like an Elizabethan dramatist," Sherringham said. "But I haven't lost him, since it appears now I shan't be able to have you without him."

"Oh, as for that, wait a little. I'm going to try him again, but I don't know how he wears. What I mean is that you've probably lost his freshness, which was the great thing. I rather fear he's becoming conventional, or at any rate serious."

"Bless me, do you call that serious?"

"He used to be so gay. He had a real genius for playing with ideas. He was a wonderful talker."

"It seems to me he does very well now," said Peter Sherringham.

"Oh this is nothing. He had great flights of old, very great flights; one saw him rise and rise and turn somersaults in the blue —one wondered how far he could go. He's very intelligent, and I should think it might be interesting to find out what it is that prevents the whole man from being as good as his parts. I mean in case he isn't so good."

"I see you more than suspect that. Mayn't it be simply that he's too great an ass?"

"That would be the whole—I shall see in time—but it certainly isn't one of the parts. It may be the effect, but it isn't the cause, and it's for the cause I claim an interest. Do you think him an ass for what he said about the theatre—his pronouncing it a coarse art?"

"To differ from you about him that reason would do," said Sherringham. "The only bad one would be one that shouldn't preserve our difference. You needn't tell me you agree with him, for frankly I don't care."

"Then your passion still burns?" Nick Dormer asked.

"My passion—?"

"I don't mean for any individual exponent of the equivocal art: mark the guilty conscience, mark the rising blush, mark the confusion of mind! I mean the old sign one knew you best by;

your permanent stall at the Français, your inveterate attendance at premières, the way you 'follow' the young talents and the old."

"Yes, it's still my little hobby, my little folly if you like," Sherringham said. "I don't find I get tired of it. What will you have? Strong predilections are rather a blessing; they're simplifying. I'm fond of representation—the representation of life: I like it better, I think, than the real thing. You like it too, you'd be ready in other conditions to go in for it, in your way—so you've no right to cast the stone. You like it best done by one vehicle and I by another; and our preference on either side has a deep root in us. There's a fascination to me in the way the actor does it, when his talent—ah he must have that!—has been highly trained. Ah it must be that! The things he can do in this effort at representation, with the dramatist to back him, seem to me innumerable—he can carry it to a point!—and I take great pleasure in observing them, in recognising and comparing them. It's an amusement like another—I don't pretend to call it by any exalted name, but in this vale of friction it will serve. One can lose one's self in it, and it has the recommendation—in common, I suppose, with the study of the other arts—that the further you go in it the more you find. So I go rather far, if you will. But is it the principal sign one knows me by?" Peter abruptly asked.

"Don't be ashamed of it," Nick returned—"else it will be ashamed of you. I ought to discriminate. You're distinguished among my friends and relations by your character of rising young diplomatist; but you know I always want the final touch to the

picture, the last fruit of analysis. Therefore I make out that you're conspicuous among rising young diplomatists for the infatuation you describe in such pretty terms."

"You evidently believe it will prevent my ever rising very high. But pastime for pastime is it any idler than yours?"

"Than mine?"

"Why you've half-a-dozen while I only allow myself the luxury of one. For the theatre's my sole vice, really. Is this more wanton, say, than to devote weeks to the consideration of the particular way in which your friend Mr. Nash may be most intensely a twaddler and a bore? That's not my ideal of choice recreation, but I'd undertake to satisfy you about him sooner. You're a young statesman—who happens to be an en disponibilité for the moment—but you spend not a little of your time in besmearing canvas with bright-coloured pigments. The idea of representation fascinates you, but in your case it's representation in oils—or do you practise water-colours and pastel too? You even go much further than I, for I study my art of predilection only in the works of others. I don't aspire to leave works of my own. You're a painter, possibly a great one; but I'm not an actor." Nick Dormer declared he would certainly become one—he was so well on the way to it; and Sherringham, without heeding this charge, went on: "Let me add that, considering you are a painter, your portrait of the complicated Nash is lamentably dim."

"He's not at all complicated; he's only too simple to give an

account of. Most people have a lot of attributes and appendages that dress them up and superscribe them, and what I like Gabriel for is that he hasn't any at all. It makes him, it keeps him, so refreshingly cool."

"By Jove, you match him there! Isn't it an appendage and an attribute to escape kicking? How does he manage that?" Sherringham asked.

"I haven't the least idea—I don't know that he doesn't rouse the kicking impulse. Besides, he can kick back and I don't think any one has ever seen him duck or dodge. His means, his profession, his belongings have never anything to do with the question. He doesn't shade off into other people; he's as neat as an outline cut out of paper with scissors. I like him, therefore, because in dealing with him you know what you've got hold of. With most men you don't: to pick the flower you must break off the whole dusty, thorny, worldly branch; you find you're taking up in your grasp all sorts of other people and things, dangling accidents and conditions. Poor Nash has none of those encumbrances: he's the solitary-fragrant blossom."

"My dear fellow, you'd be better for a little of the same pruning!" Sherringham retorted; and the young men continued their walk and their gossip, jerking each other this way and that, punching each other here and there, with an amicable roughness consequent on their having, been boys together. Intimacy had reigned of old between the little Sherringhams and the little Dormers, united in the country by ease of neighbouring and by

the fact that there was first cousinship, not neglected, among the parents, Lady Agnes standing in this plastic relation to Lady Windrush, the mother of Peter and Julia as well as of other daughters and of a maturer youth who was to inherit, and who since then had inherited, the ancient barony. Many things had altered later on, but not the good reasons for not explaining. One of our young men had gone to Eton and the other to Harrow—the scattered school on the hill was the tradition of the Dormers—and the divergence had rather taken its course in university years. Bricket, however, had remained accessible to Windrush, and Windrush to Bricket, to which estate Percival Dormer had now succeeded, terminating the interchange a trifle rudely by letting out that pleasant white house in the midlands —its expropriated inhabitants, Lady Agnes and her daughters, adored it—to an American reputed rich, who in the first flush of his sense of contrasts considered that for twelve hundred a year he got it at a bargain. Bricket had come to the late Sir Nicholas from his elder brother, dying wifeless and childless. The new baronet, so different from his father—though recalling at some points the uncle after whom he had been named—that Nick had to make it up by cultivating conformity, roamed about the world, taking shots which excited the enthusiasm of society, when society heard of them, at the few legitimate creatures of the chase the British rifle had up to that time spared. Lady Agnes meanwhile settled with her girls in a gabled, latticed house in a mentionable quarter, though it still required a little explaining,

of the temperate zone of London. It was not into her lap, poor woman, that the revenues of Bricket were poured. There was no dower-house attached to that moderate property, and the allowance with which the estate was charged on her ladyship's behalf was not an incitement to grandeur.

Nick had a room under his mother's roof, which he mainly used to dress for dinner when dining in Calcutta Gardens, and he had "kept on" his chambers in the Temple; for to a young man in public life an independent address was indispensable. Moreover, he was suspected of having a studio in an out-of-the-way district, the indistinguishable parts of South Kensington, incongruous as such a retreat might seem in the case of a member of Parliament. It was an absurd place to see his constituents unless he wanted to paint their portraits, a kind of "representation" with which they would scarce have been satisfied; and in fact the only question of portraiture had been when the wives and daughters of several of them expressed a wish for the picture of their handsome young member. Nick had not offered to paint it himself, and the studio was taken for granted rather than much looked into by the ladies in Calcutta Gardens. Too express a disposition to regard whims of this sort as extravagance pure and simple was known by them to be open to correction; for they were not oblivious that Mr. Carteret had humours which weighed against them in the shape of convenient cheques nestling between the inside pages of legible letters of advice. Mr. Carteret was Nick's providence, just as Nick was looked to, in a general way, to be

that of his mother and sisters, especially since it had become so plain that Percy, who was not subtly selfish, would operate, mainly with a "six-bore," quite out of that sphere. It was not for studios certainly that Mr. Carteret sent cheques; but they were an expression of general confidence in Nick, and a little expansion was natural to a young man enjoying such a luxury as that. It was sufficiently felt in Calcutta Gardens that he could be looked to not to betray such confidence; for Mr. Carteret's behaviour could have no name at all unless one were prepared to call it encouraging. He had never promised anything, but he was one of the delightful persons with whom the redemption precedes or dispenses with the vow. He had been an early and lifelong friend of the late right honourable gentleman, a political follower, a devoted admirer, a stanch supporter in difficult hours. He had never married, espousing nothing more reproductive than Sir Nicholas's views—he used to write letters to the Times in favour of them—and had, so far as was known, neither chick nor child; nothing but an amiable little family of eccentricities, the flower of which was his odd taste for living in a small, steep, clean country town, all green gardens and red walls with a girdle of hedge-rows, all clustered about an immense brown old abbey. When Lady Agnes's imagination rested upon the future of her second son she liked to remember that Mr. Carteret had nothing to "keep up": the inference seemed so direct that he would keep up Nick.

The most important event in the life of this young man had

been incomparably his success, under his father's eyes, more than two years before, in the sharp contest for Crockhurst—a victory which his consecrated name, his extreme youth, his ardour in the fray, the marked personal sympathy of the party, and the attention excited by the fresh cleverness of his speeches, tinted with young idealism and yet sticking sufficiently to the question—the burning question which has since burned out—had made quite splendid. There had been leaders in the newspapers about it, half in compliment to her husband, who was known to be failing so prematurely—he was almost as young to die, and to die famous, for Lady Agnes regarded it as famous, as his son had been to stand—tributes the boy's mother religiously preserved, cut out and tied together with a ribbon, in the innermost drawer of a favourite cabinet. But it had been a barren, or almost a barren triumph, for in the order of importance in Nick's history another incident had run it, as the phrase is, very close: nothing less than the quick dissolution of the Parliament in which he was so manifestly destined to give symptoms of a future. He had not recovered his seat at the general election, for the second contest was even sharper than the first and the Tories had put forward a loud, vulgar, rattling, bullying, money-spending man. It was to a certain extent a comfort that poor Sir Nicholas, who had been witness of the bright hour, should have passed away before the darkness. He died with all his hopes on his second son's head, unconscious of near disappointment, handing on the torch and the tradition, after a long, supreme interview with Nick at which

Lady Agnes had not been present, but which she knew to have been a thorough paternal dedication, an august communication of ideas on the highest national questions (she had reason to believe he had touched on those of external as well as of domestic and of colonial policy) leaving on the boy's nature and manner from that moment the most unmistakable traces. If his tendency to reverie increased it was because he had so much to think over in what his pale father had said to him in the hushed dim chamber, laying on him the great mission that death had cut short, breathing into him with unforgettable solemnity the very accents—Sir Nicholas's voice had been wonderful for richness—that he was to sound again. It was work cut out for a lifetime, and that "co-ordinating power in relation to detail" which was one of the great characteristics of the lamented statesman's high distinction—the most analytic of the weekly papers was always talking about it—had enabled him to rescue the prospect from any shade of vagueness or of ambiguity.

Five years before Nick Dormer went up to be questioned by the electors of Crockhurst Peter Sherringham had appeared before a board of examiners who let him off much less easily, though there were also some flattering prejudices in his favour; such influences being a part of the copious, light, unembarrassing baggage with which each of the young men began life. Peter passed, however, passed high, and had his reward in prompt assignment to small, subordinate, diplomatic duties in Germany. Since then he had had his professional adventures, which need

not arrest us, inasmuch as they had all paled in the light of his appointment, nearly three years previous to the moment of our making his acquaintance, to a secretaryship of embassy in Paris. He had done well and had gone fast and for the present could draw his breath at ease. It pleased him better to remain in Paris as a subordinate than to go to Honduras as a principal, and Nick Dormer had not put a false colour on the matter in speaking of his stall at the Théâtre Français as a sedative to his ambition. Nick's inferiority in age to his cousin sat on him more lightly than when they had been in their teens; and indeed no one can very well be much older than a young man who has figured for a year, however imperceptibly, in the House of Commons. Separation and diversity had made them reciprocally strange enough to give a price to what they shared; they were friends without being particular friends; that further degree could always hang before them as a suitable but not oppressive contingency, and they were both conscious that it was in their interest to keep certain differences to "chaff" each other about —so possible was it that they might have quarrelled if they had had everything in common. Peter, as being wide-minded, was a little irritated to find his cousin always so intensely British, while Nick Dormer made him the object of the same compassionate criticism, recognised in him a rare knack with foreign tongues, but reflected, and even with extravagance declared, that it was a pity to have gone so far from home only to remain so homely. Moreover, Nick had his ideas about the diplomatic mind, finding

in it, for his own sympathy, always the wrong turn. Dry, narrow, barren, poor he pronounced it in familiar conversation with the clever secretary; wanting in imagination, in generosity, in the finest perceptions and the highest courage. This served as well as anything else to keep the peace between them; it was a necessity of their friendly intercourse that they should scuffle a little, and it scarcely mattered what they scuffled about. Nick Dormer's express enjoyment of Paris, the shop-windows on the quays, the old books on the parapet, the gaiety of the river, the grandeur of the Louvre, every fine feature of that prodigious face, struck his companion as a sign of insularity; the appreciation of such things having become with Sherringham an unconscious habit, a contented assimilation. If poor Nick, for the hour, was demonstrative and lyrical, it was because he had no other way of sounding the note of farewell to the independent life of which the term seemed now definitely in sight—the sense so pressed upon him that these were the last moments of his freedom. He would waste time till half-past seven, because half-past seven meant dinner, and dinner meant his mother solemnly attended by the strenuous shade of his father and re-enforced by Julia.

Chapter 6

When he arrived with the three members of his family at the restaurant of their choice Peter Sherringham was already seated there by one of the immaculate tables, but Mrs. Dallow was not

yet on the scene, and they had time for a sociable settlement—time to take their places and unfold their napkins, crunch their rolls, breathe the savoury air, and watch the door, before the usual raising of heads and suspension of forks, the sort of stir that accompanied most of this lady's movements, announced her entrance. The dame de comptoir ducked and re-ducked, the people looked round, Peter and Nick got up, there was a shuffling of chairs—Julia had come. Peter was relating how he had stopped at her hotel to bring her with him and had found her, according to her custom, by no means ready; on which, fearing his guests would arrive first at the rendezvous and find no proper welcome, he had come off without her, leaving her to follow. He had not brought a friend, as he intended, having divined that Julia would prefer a pure family party if she wanted to talk about her candidate. Now she stood looking down at the table and her expectant kinsfolk, drawing off her gloves, letting her brother draw off her jacket, lifting her hands for some rearrangement of her hat. She looked at Nick last, smiling, but only for a moment. She said to Peter: "Are we going to dine here? Oh dear, why didn't you have a private room?"

Nick had not seen her at all for several weeks and had seen her but little for a year, but her off-hand cursory manner had not altered in the interval. She spoke remarkably fast, as if speech were not in itself a pleasure—to have it over as soon as possible; and her brusquerie was of the dark shade friendly critics account for by pleading shyness. Shyness had never appeared to him

an ultimate quality or a real explanation of anything; it only explained an effect by another effect, neither with a cause to boast of. What he suspected in Julia was that her mind was less pleasing than her person; an ugly, a really blighting idea, which as yet he had but half accepted. It was a case in which she was entitled to the benefit of every doubt and oughtn't to be judged without a complete trial. Nick meanwhile was afraid of the trial —this was partly why he had been of late to see her so little— because he was afraid of the sentence, afraid of anything that might work to lessen the charm it was actually in the power of her beauty to shed. There were people who thought her rude, and he hated rude women. If he should fasten on that view, or rather if that view should fasten on him, what could still please and what he admired in her would lose too much of its sweetness. If it be thought odd that he had not yet been able to read the character of a woman he had known since childhood the answer is that this character had grown faster than Nick's observation. The growth was constant, whereas the observation was but occasional, though it had begun early. If he had attempted inwardly to phrase the matter, as he probably had not, he might have pronounced the effect she produced upon him too much a compulsion; not the coercion of design, of importunity, nor the vulgar pressure of family expectation, a betrayed desire he should like her enough to marry her, but a mixture of divers urgent things; of the sense that she was imperious and generous—probably more the former than the latter—and of a certain prevision of doom, the influence

of the idea that he should come to it, that he was predestined.

This had made him shrink from knowing the worst about her; not the wish to get used to it in time, but what was more characteristic of him, the wish to interpose a temporary illusion. Illusions and realities and hopes and fears, however, fell into confusion whenever he met her after a separation. The separation, so far as seeing her alone or as continuous talk was concerned, had now been tolerably long; had lasted really ever since his failure to regain his seat. An impression had come to him that she judged that failure rather stiffly, had thought, and had somewhat sharply said, that he ought to have done better. This was a part of her imperious way, and a part not all to be overlooked on a mere present basis. If he were to marry her he should come to an understanding with her: he should give her his own measure as well as take hers. But the understanding might in the actual case suggest too much that he was to marry her. You could quarrel with your wife because there were compensations—for her; but you mightn't be prepared to offer these compensations as prepayment for the luxury of quarrelling.

It was not that such a luxury wouldn't be considerable, our young man none the less thought as Julia Dallow's fine head poised itself before him again; a high spirit was of course better than a mawkish to be mismated with, any day in the year. She had much the same colour as her brother, but as nothing else in her face was the same the resemblance was not striking. Her hair

was of so dark a brown that it was commonly regarded as black, and so abundant that a plain arrangement was required to keep it in natural relation to the rest of her person. Her eyes were of a grey sometimes pronounced too light, and were not sunken in her face, but placed well on the surface. Her nose was perfect, but her mouth was too small; and Nick Dormer, and doubtless other persons as well, had sometimes wondered how with such a mouth her face could have expressed decision. Her figure helped it, for she appeared tall—being extremely slender—yet was not; and her head took turns and positions which, though a matter of but half an inch out of the common this way or that, somehow contributed to the air of resolution and temper. If it had not been for her extreme delicacy of line and surface she might have been called bold; but as it was she looked refined and quiet—refined by tradition and quiet for a purpose. And altogether she was beautiful, with the gravity of her elegant head, her hair like the depths of darkness, her eyes like its earlier clearing, her mouth like a rare pink flower.

Peter said he had not taken a private room because he knew Biddy's tastes; she liked to see the world—she had told him so—the curious people, the coming and going of Paris. "Oh anything for Biddy!" Julia replied, smiling at the girl and taking her place. Lady Agnes and her elder daughter exchanged one of their looks, and Nick exclaimed jocosely that he didn't see why the whole party should be sacrificed to a presumptuous child. The presumptuous child blushingly protested she had never

expressed any such wish to Peter, upon which Nick, with broader humour, revealed that Peter had served them so out of stinginess: he had pitchforked them together in the public room because he wouldn't go to the expense of a cabinet. He had brought no guest, no foreigner of distinction nor diplomatic swell, to honour them, and now they would see what a paltry dinner he would give them. Peter stabbed him indignantly with a long roll, and Lady Agnes, who seemed to be waiting for some manifestation on Mrs. Dallow's part which didn't come, concluded, with a certain coldness, that they quite sufficed to themselves for privacy as well as for society. Nick called attention to this fine phrase of his mother's and said it was awfully neat, while Grace and Biddy looked harmoniously at Julia's clothes. Nick felt nervous and joked a good deal to carry it off—a levity that didn't prevent Julia's saying to him after a moment: "You might have come to see me to-day, you know. Didn't you get my message from Peter?"

"Scold him, Julia—scold him well. I begged him to go," said Lady Agnes; and to this Grace added her voice with an "Oh Julia, do give it to him!" These words, however, had not the effect they suggested, since Mrs. Dallow only threw off for answer, in her quick curt way, that that would be making far too much of him. It was one of the things in her that Nick mentally pronounced ungraceful, the perversity of pride or of shyness that always made her disappoint you a little if she saw you expected a thing. She snubbed effusiveness in a way that yet gave no interesting hint

of any wish to keep it herself in reserve. Effusiveness, however, certainly, was the last thing of which Lady Agnes would have consented to be accused; and Nick, while he replied to Julia that he was sure he shouldn't have found her, was not unable to perceive the operation on his mother of that shade of manner. "He ought to have gone; he owed you that," she went on; "but it's very true he would have had the same luck as we. I went with the girls directly after luncheon. I suppose you got our card."

"He might have come after I came in," said Mrs. Dallow.

"Dear Julia, I'm going to see you to-night. I've been waiting for that," Nick returned.

"Of course we had no idea when you'd come in," said Lady Agnes.

"I'm so sorry. You must come to-morrow. I hate calls at night," Julia serenely added.

"Well then, will you roam with me? Will you wander through Paris on my arm?" Nick asked, smiling. "Will you take a drive with me?"

"Oh that would be perfection!" cried Grace.

"I thought we were all going somewhere—to the Hippodrome, Peter," Biddy said.

"Oh not all; just you and me!" laughed Peter.

"I'm going home to my bed. I've earned my rest," Lady Agnes sighed.

"Can't Peter take us?" demanded Grace. "Nick can take you home, mamma, if Julia won't receive him, and I can look

perfectly after Peter and Biddy."

"Take them to something amusing; please take them," Mrs. Dallow said to her brother. Her voice was kind, but had the expectation of assent in it, and Nick observed both the good nature and the pressure. "You're tired, poor dear," she continued to Lady Agnes. "Fancy your being dragged about so! What did you come over for?"

"My mother came because I brought her," Nick said. "It's I who have dragged her about. I brought her for a little change. I thought it would do her good. I wanted to see the Salon."

"It isn't a bad time. I've a carriage and you must use it; you must use nothing else. It shall take you everywhere. I'll drive you about to-morrow." Julia dropped these words with all her air of being able rather than of wanting; but Nick had already noted, and he noted now afresh and with pleasure, that her lack of unction interfered not a bit with her always acting. It was quite sufficiently manifest to him that for the rest of the time she might be near his mother she would do for her numberless good turns. She would give things to the girls—he had a private adumbration of that; expensive Parisian, perhaps not perfectly useful, things.

Lady Agnes was a woman who measured outlays and returns, but she was both too acute and too just not to recognise the scantest offer from which an advantage could proceed. "Dear Julia!" she exclaimed responsively; and her tone made this brevity of acknowledgment adequate. Julia's own few words were all she wanted. "It's so interesting about Harsh," she added.

"We're immensely excited."

"Yes, Nick looks it. Merci, pas de vin. It's just the thing for you, you know," Julia said to him.

"To be sure he knows it. He's immensely grateful. It's really very kind of you."

"You do me a very great honour, Julia," Nick hastened to add.

"Don't be tiresome, please," that lady returned.

"We'll talk about it later. Of course there are lots of points," Nick pursued. "At present let's be purely convivial. Somehow Harsh is such a false note here. Nous causerons de ça."

"My dear fellow, you've caught exactly the tone of Mr. Gabriel Nash," Peter Sherringham declared on this.

"Who's Mr. Gabriel Nash?" Mrs. Dallow asked.

"Nick, is he a gentleman? Biddy says so," Grace Dormer interposed before this inquiry was answered.

"It's to be supposed that any one Nick brings to lunch with us —!" Lady Agnes rather coldly sighed.

"Ah Grace, with your tremendous standard!" her son said; while Peter Sherringham explained to his sister that Mr. Nash was Nick's new Mentor or oracle—whom, moreover, she should see if she would come and have tea with him.

"I haven't the least desire to see him," Julia made answer, "any more than I have to talk about Harsh and bore poor Peter."

"Oh certainly, dear, you'd bore me," her brother rang out.

"One thing at a time then. Let us by all means be convivial. Only you must show me how," Mrs. Dallow went on to Nick.

"What does he mean, Cousin Agnes? Does he want us to drain the wine-cup, to flash with repartee?"

"You'll do very well," said Nick. "You're thoroughly charming to-night."

"Do go to Peter's, Julia, if you want something exciting. You'll see a wonderful girl," Biddy broke in with her smile on Peter.

"Wonderful for what?"

"For thinking she can act when she can't," said the roguish Biddy.

"Dear me, what people you all know! I hate Peter's theatrical people."

"And aren't you going home, Julia?" Lady Agnes inquired.

"Home to the hotel?"

"Dear, no, to Harsh—to see about everything."

"I'm in the midst of telegrams. I don't know yet."

"I suppose there's no doubt they'll have him," Lady Agnes decided to pursue.

"Who'll have whom?"

"Why, the local people and the party managers. I'm speaking of the question of my son's standing."

"They'll have the person I want them to have, I daresay. There are so many people in it, in one way or another—it's dreadful. I like the way you sit there," Julia went on to Nick.

"So do I," he smiled back at her; and he thought she was charming now, because she was gay and easy and willing really, though she might plead incompetence, to understand how jocose

a dinner in a pothouse in a foreign town might be. She was in good humour or was going to be, and not grand nor stiff nor indifferent nor haughty nor any of the things people who disliked her usually found her and sometimes even a little made him believe her. The spirit of mirth in some cold natures manifests itself not altogether happily, their effort of recreation resembles too much the bath of the hippopotamus; but when Mrs. Dallow put her elbows on the table one felt she could be trusted to get them safely off again.

For a family in mourning the dinner was lively; the more so that before it was half over Julia had arranged that her brother, eschewing the inferior spectacle, should take the girls to the Théâtre Français. It was her idea, and Nick had a chance to observe how an idea was apt to be not successfully controverted when it was Julia's. Even the programme appeared to have been prearranged to suit it, just the thing for the cheek of the young person—Il ne Faut Jurer de Rien and Mademoiselle de la Seiglière. Peter was all willingness, but it was Julia who settled it, even to sending for the newspaper—he was by a rare accident unconscious of the evening's bill—and to reassuring Biddy, who was happy but anxious, on the article of their being too late for good places. Peter could always get good places: a word from him and the best box was at his disposal. She made him write the word on a card and saw a messenger despatched with it to the Rue de Richelieu; and all this without loudness or insistence, parenthetically and authoritatively. The box was bespoken and

the carriage, as soon as they had had their coffee, found to be in attendance. Peter drove off in it with the girls, understanding that he was to send it back, and Nick waited for it over the finished repast with the two ladies. After this his mother was escorted to it and conveyed to her apartments, and all the while it had been Julia who governed the succession of events. "Do be nice to her," Lady Agnes breathed to him as he placed her in the vehicle at the door of the café; and he guessed it gave her a comfort to have left him sitting there with Mrs. Dallow.

He had every disposition to be nice to his charming cousin; if things went as she liked them it was the proof of a certain fine force in her—the force of assuming they would. Julia had her differences—some of them were much for the better; and when she was in a mood like this evening's, liberally dominant, he was ready to encourage most of what she took for granted. While they waited for the return of the carriage, which had rolled away with his mother, she sat opposite him with her elbows on the table, playing first with one and then with another of the objects that encumbered it; after five minutes of which she exclaimed, "Oh I say, well go!" and got up abruptly, asking for her jacket. He said something about the carriage and its order to come back for them, and she replied, "Well, it can go away again. I don't want a carriage," she added: "I want to walk"—and in a moment she was out of the place, with the people at the tables turning round again and the caissière swaying in her high seat. On the pavement of the boulevard she looked up and down; there were

people at little tables by the door; there were people all over the broad expanse of the asphalt; there was a profusion of light and a pervasion of sound; and everywhere, though the establishment at which they had been dining was not in the thick of the fray, the tokens of a great traffic of pleasure, that night-aspect of Paris which represents it as a huge market for sensations. Beyond the Boulevard des Capucines it flared through the warm evening like a vast bazaar, and opposite the Café Durand the Madeleine rose theatrical, a high artful décor before the footlights of the Rue Royale. "Where shall we go, what shall we do?" Mrs. Dallow asked, looking at her companion and somewhat to his surprise, as he had supposed she wanted but to go home.

"Anywhere you like. It's so warm we might drive instead of going indoors. We might go to the Bois. That would be agreeable."

"Yes, but it wouldn't be walking. However, that doesn't matter. It's mild enough for anything—for sitting out like all these people. And I've never walked in Paris at night. It would amuse me."

Nick hesitated. "So it might, but it isn't particularly recommended to ladies."

"I don't care for that if it happens to suit me."

"Very well then, we'll walk to the Bastille if you like."

Julia hesitated, on her side, still looking about. "It's too far; I'm tired; we'll sit here." And she dropped beside an empty table on the "terrace" of M. Durand. "This will do; it's amusing enough

and we can look at the Madeleine—that's respectable. If we must have something we'll have a madère—is that respectable? Not particularly? So much the better. What are those people having? Bocks? Couldn't we have bocks? Are they very low? Then I shall have one. I've been so wonderfully good—I've been staying at Versailles: je me dois bien cela."

She insisted, but pronounced the thin liquid in the tall glass very disgusting when it was brought. Nick was amazed, reflecting that it was not for such a discussion as this that his mother had left him with hands in his pockets. He had been looking out, but as his eloquence flowed faster he turned to his friend, who had dropped upon a sofa with her face to the window. She had given her jacket and gloves to her maid, but had kept on her hat; and she leaned forward a little as she sat, clasping her hands together in her lap and keeping her eyes on him. The lamp, in a corner, was so thickly veiled that the room was in tempered obscurity, lighted almost equally from the street and the brilliant shop-fronts opposite. "Therefore why be sapient and solemn about it, like an editorial in a newspaper?" Nick added with a smile.

She continued to look at him after he had spoken, then she said: "If you don't want to stand you've only to say so. You needn't give your reasons."

"It's too kind of you to let me off that! And then I'm a tremendous fellow for reasons; that's my strong point, don't you know? I've a lot more besides those I've mentioned, done up and ready for delivery. The odd thing is that they don't always govern

my behaviour. I rather think I do want to stand."

"Then what you said just now was a speech," Julia declared.

"A speech?"

"The 'rot,' the humbug of the hustings."

"No, those great truths remain, and a good many others. But an inner voice tells me I'm in for it. And it will be much more graceful to embrace this opportunity, accepting your co-operation, than to wait for some other and forfeit that advantage."

"I shall be very glad to help you anywhere," she went on.

"Thanks awfully," he returned, still standing there with his hands in his pockets. "You'd do it best in your own place, and I've no right to deny myself such a help."

Julia calmly considered. "I don't do it badly."

"Ah you're so political!"

"Of course I am; it's the only decent thing to be. But I can only help you if you'll help yourself. I can do a good deal, but I can't do everything. If you'll work I'll work with you; but if you're going into it with your hands in your pockets I'll have nothing to do with you." Nick instantly changed the position of these members and sank into a seat with his elbows on his knees. "You're very clever, but you must really take a little trouble. Things don't drop into people's mouths."

"I'll try—I'll try. I've a great incentive," he admitted.

"Of course you have."

"My mother, my poor mother." Julia breathed some vague sound and he went on: "And of course always my father, dear

good man. My mother's even more political than you."

"I daresay she is, and quite right!" said Mrs. Dallow.

"And she can't tell me a bit more than you can what she thinks, what she believes, what she wants."

"Pardon me, I can tell you perfectly. There's one thing I always immensely want—to keep out a Tory."

"I see. That's a great philosophy."

"It will do very well. And I desire the good of the country. I'm not ashamed of that."

"And can you give me an idea of what it is—the good of the country?"

"I know perfectly what it isn't. It isn't what the Tories want to do."

"What do they want to do?"

"Oh it would take me long to tell you. All sorts of trash."

"It would take you long, and it would take them longer! All they want to do is to prevent us from doing. On our side we want to prevent them from preventing us. That's about as clearly as we all see it. So on both sides it's a beautiful, lucid, inspiring programme."

"I don't believe in you," Mrs. Dallow replied to this, leaning back on her sofa.

"I hope not, Julia, indeed!" He paused a moment, still with his face toward her and his elbows on his knees; then he pursued: "You're a very accomplished woman and a very zealous one; but you haven't an idea, you know—not to call an idea. What you

mainly want is to be at the head of a political salon; to start one, to keep it up, to make it a success."

"Much you know me!" Julia protested; but he could see, through the dimness, that her face spoke differently.

"You'll have it in time, but I won't come to it," Nick went on.

"You can't come less than you do."

"When I say you'll have it I mean you've already got it. That's why I don't come."

"I don't think you know what you mean," said Mrs. Dallow. "I've an idea that's as good as any of yours, any of those you've treated me to this evening, it seems to me—the simple idea that one ought to do something or other for one's country."

"'Something or other' certainly covers all the ground. There's one thing one can always do for one's country, which is not to be afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

Nick Dormer waited a little, as if his idea amused him, but he presently said, "I'll tell you another time. It's very well to talk so glibly of standing," he added; "but it isn't absolutely foreign to the question that I haven't got the cash."

"What did you do before?" she asked.

"The first time my father paid."

"And the other time?"

"Oh Mr. Carteret."

"Your expenses won't be at all large; on the contrary," said Julia.

"They shan't be; I shall look out sharp for that. I shall have the great Hutchby."

"Of course; but you know I want you to do it well." She paused an instant and then: "Of course you can send the bill to me."

"Thanks awfully; you're tremendously kind. I shouldn't think of that." Nick Dormer got up as he spoke, and walked to the window again, his companion's eyes resting on him while he stood with his back to her. "I shall manage it somehow," he wound up.

"Mr. Carteret will be delighted," said Julia.

"I daresay, but I hate taking people's money."

"That's nonsense—when it's for the country. Isn't it for them?"

"When they get it back!" Nick replied, turning round and looking for his hat. "It's startlingly late; you must be tired." Mrs. Dallow made no response to this, and he pursued his quest, successful only when he reached a duskier corner of the room, to which the hat had been relegated by his cousin's maid. "Mr. Carteret will expect so much if he pays. And so would you."

"Yes, I'm bound to say I should! I should expect a great deal—everything." And Mrs. Dallow emphasised this assertion by the way she rose erect. "If you're riding for a fall, if you're only going in to miss it, you had better stay out."

"How can I miss it with you?" the young man smiled. She uttered a word, impatiently but indistinguishably, and he continued: "And even if I do it will have been immense fun."

"It is immense fun," said Julia. "But the best fun is to win. If

you don't——!"

"If I don't?" he repeated as she dropped.

"I'll never speak to you again."

"How much you expect even when you don't pay!"

Mrs. Dallow's rejoinder was a justification of this remark, expressing as it did the fact that should they receive on the morrow information on which she believed herself entitled to count, information tending to show how hard the Conservatives meant to fight, she should look to him to be in the field as early as herself. Sunday was a lost day; she should leave Paris on Monday.

"Oh they'll fight it hard; they'll put up Kingsbury," said Nick, smoothing his hat. "They'll all come down—all that can get away. And Kingsbury has a very handsome wife."

"She's not so handsome as your cousin," Julia smiled.

"Oh dear, no—a cousin sooner than a wife any day!" Nick laughed as soon as he had said this, as if the speech had an awkward side; but the reparation perhaps scarcely mended it, the exaggerated mock-meekness with which he added: "I'll do any blessed thing you tell me."

"Come here to-morrow then—as early as ten." She turned round, moving to the door with him; but before they reached it she brought out: "Pray isn't a gentleman to do anything, to be anything?"

"To be anything——?"

"If he doesn't aspire to serve the State."

"Aspire to make his political fortune, do you mean? Oh bless

me, yes, there are other things."

"What other things that can compare with that?"

"Well, I for instance, I'm very fond of the arts."

"Of the arts?" she echoed.

"Did you never hear of them? I'm awfully fond of painting."

At this Julia stopped short, and her fine grey eyes had for a moment the air of being set further forward in her head. "Don't be odious! Good-night," she said, turning away and leaving him to go.

Part 2

Chapter 1

Peter Sherringham reminded Nick the next day that he had promised to be present at Madame Carré's interview with the ladies introduced to her by Gabriel Nash; and in the afternoon, conformably to this arrangement, the two men took their way to the Rue de Constantinople. They found Mr. Nash and his friends in the small beflounced drawing-room of the old actress, who, as they learned, had sent in a request for ten minutes' grace, having been detained at a lesson—a rehearsal of the comédie de salon about to be given for a charity by a fine lady, at which she had consented to be present as an adviser. Mrs. Rooth sat on a black satin sofa with her daughter beside her while Gabriel Nash, wandering about the room, looked at the votive offerings

which converted the little panelled box, decorated in sallow white and gold, into a theatrical museum: the presents, the portraits, the wreaths, the diadems, the letters, framed and glazed, the trophies and tributes and relics collected by Madame Carré during half a century of renown. The profusion of this testimony was hardly more striking than the confession of something missed, something hushed, which seemed to rise from it all and make it melancholy, like a reference to clappings which, in the nature of things, could now only be present as a silence: so that if the place was full of history it was the form without the fact, or at the most a redundancy of the one to a pinch of the other—the history of a mask, of a squeak, of a series of vain gestures.

Some of the objects exhibited by the distinguished artist, her early portraits, in lithograph or miniature, represented the costume and embodied the manner of a period so remote that Nick Dormer, as he glanced at them, felt a quickened curiosity to look at the woman who reconciled being alive to-day with having been alive so long ago. Peter Sherringham already knew how she managed this miracle, but every visit he paid her added to his amused, charmed sense that it was a miracle and that his extraordinary old friend had seen things he should never, never see. Those were just the things he wanted to see most, and her duration, her survival, cheated him agreeably and helped him a little to guess them. His appreciation of the actor's art was so systematic that it had an antiquarian side, and at the risk of representing him as attached to an absurd futility it must be said

that he had as yet hardly known a keener regret for anything than for the loss of that antecedent world, and in particular for his having belatedly missed the great comédienne, the light of the French stage in the early years of the century, of whose example and instruction Madame Carré had had the inestimable benefit. She had often described to him her rare predecessor, straight from whose hands she had received her most celebrated parts and of whom her own manner was often a religious imitation; but her descriptions troubled him more than they consoled, only confirming his theory, to which so much of his observation had already ministered, that the actor's art in general was going down and down, descending a slope with abysses of vulgarity at its foot, after having reached its perfection, more than fifty years ago, in the talent of the lady in question. He would have liked to dwell for an hour beneath the meridian.

Gabriel Nash introduced the new-comers to his companions; but the younger of the two ladies gave no sign of lending herself to this transaction. The girl was very white; she huddled there, silent and rigid, frightened to death, staring, expressionless. If Bridget Dormer had seen her at this moment she might have felt avenged for the discomfiture of her own spirit suffered at the Salon, the day before, under the challenging eyes of Maud Vavasour. It was plain at the present hour that Miss Vavasour would have run away had she not regarded the persons present as so many guards and keepers. Her appearance made Nick feel as if the little temple of art in which they were collected had

been the waiting-room of a dentist. Sherringham had seen a great many nervous girls tremble before the same ordeal, and he liked to be kind to them, to say things that would help them to do themselves justice. The probability in a given case was almost overwhelmingly in favour of their having any other talent one could think of in a higher degree than the dramatic; but he could rarely refrain from some care that the occasion shouldn't be, even as against his conscience, too cruel. There were occasions indeed that could scarce be too cruel to punish properly certain examples of presumptuous ineptitude. He remembered what Mr. Nash had said about this blighted maiden, and perceived that though she might be inept she was now anything but presumptuous. Gabriel fell to talking with Nick Dormer while Peter addressed himself to Mrs. Rooth. There was no use as yet for any direct word to the girl, who was too scared even to hear. Mrs. Rooth, with her shawl fluttering about her, nestled against her daughter, putting out her hand to take one of Miriam's soothingly. She had pretty, silly, near-sighted eyes, a long thin nose, and an upper lip which projected over the under as an ornamental cornice rests on its support. "So much depends—really everything!" she said in answer to some sociable observation of Sherringham's. "It's either this," and she rolled her eyes expressively about the room, "or it's—I don't know what!"

"Perhaps we're too many," Peter hazarded to her daughter. "But really you'll find, after you fairly begin, that you'll do better with four or five."

Before she answered she turned her head and lifted her fine eyes. The next instant he saw they were full of tears. The words she spoke, however, though uttered as if she had tapped a silver gong, had not the note of sensibility: "Oh, I don't care for you!" He laughed at this, declared it was very well said and that if she could give Madame Carré such a specimen as that——! The actress came in before he had finished his phrase, and he observed the way the girl ruefully rose to the encounter, hanging her head a little and looking out from under her brows. There was no sentiment in her face—only a vacancy of awe and anguish which had not even the merit of being fine of its kind, for it spoke of no spring of reaction. Yet the head was good, he noted at the same moment; it was strong and salient and made to tell at a distance. Madame Carré scarcely heeded her at first, greeting her only in her order among the others and pointing to seats, composing the circle with smiles and gestures, as if they were all before the prompter's box. The old actress presented herself to a casual glance as a red-faced, raddled woman in a wig, with beady eyes, a hooked nose, and pretty hands; but Nick Dormer, who had a sense for the over-scored human surface, soon observed that these comparatively gross marks included a great deal of delicate detail—an eyebrow, a nostril, a flitting of expressions, as if a multitude of little facial wires were pulled from within. This accomplished artist had in particular a mouth which was visibly a rare instrument, a pair of lips whose curves and fine corners spoke of a lifetime of "points" unerringly made

and verses exquisitely spoken, helping to explain the purity of the sound that issued from them. Her whole countenance had the look of long service—of a thing infinitely worn and used, drawn and stretched to excess, with its elasticity overdone and its springs relaxed, yet religiously preserved and kept in repair, even as some valuable old timepiece which might have quivered and rumbled but could be trusted to strike the hour. At the first words she spoke Gabriel Nash exclaimed endearingly: "Ah la voix de Célimène!" Célimène, who wore a big red flower on the summit of her dense wig, had a very grand air, a toss of the head, and sundry little majesties of manner; in addition to which she was strange, almost grotesque, and to some people would have been even terrifying, capable of reappearing, with her hard eyes, as a queer vision of the darkness. She excused herself for having made the company wait, and mouthed and mimicked in the drollest way, with intonations as fine as a flute, the performance and the pretensions of the belles dames to whom she had just been endeavouring to communicate a few of the rudiments. "Mais celles-là, c'est une plaisanterie," she went on to Mrs. Rooth; "whereas you and your daughter, chère madame —I'm sure you are quite another matter."

The girl had got rid of her tears, and was gazing at her, and Mrs. Rooth leaned forward and said portentously: "She knows four languages."

Madame Carré gave one of her histrionic stares, throwing back her head. "That's three too many. The thing's to do

something proper with one."

"We're very much in earnest," continued Mrs. Rooth, who spoke excellent French.

"I'm glad to hear it—il n'y a que ça. La tête est bien—the head's very good," she said as she looked at the girl. "But let us see, my dear child, what you've got in it!" The young lady was still powerless to speak; she opened her lips, but nothing came. With the failure of this effort she turned her deep sombre eyes to the three men. "Un beau regard—it carries well." Madame Carré further commented. But even as she spoke Miss Rooth's fine gaze was suffused again and the next moment she had definitely begun to weep. Nick Dormer sprung up; he felt embarrassed and intrusive—there was such an indelicacy in sitting there to watch a poor working-girl's struggle with timidity. There was a momentary confusion; Mrs. Rooth's tears were seen also to flow; Mr. Nash took it gaily, addressing, however, at the same time, the friendliest, most familiar encouragement to his companions, and Peter Sherringham offered to retire with Nick on the spot, should their presence incommode the young lady. But the agitation was over in a minute; Madame Carré motioned Mrs. Rooth out of her seat and took her place beside the girl, and Nash explained judiciously to the other men that she'd be worse should they leave her. Her mother begged them to remain, "so that there should be at least some English"; she spoke as if the old actress were an army of Frenchwomen. The young heroine of the occasion quickly came round, and Madame Carré, on the sofa beside her,

held her hand and emitted a perfect music of reassurance. "The nerves, the nerves—they're half our affair. Have as many as you like, if you've got something else too. Voyons—do you know anything?"

"I know some pieces."

"Some pieces of the répertoire?"

Miriam Rooth stared as if she didn't understand. "I know some poetry."

"English, French, Italian, German," said her mother.

Madame Carré gave Mrs. Rooth a look which expressed irritation at the recurrence of this announcement. "Does she wish to act in all those tongues? The phrase-book isn't the comedy!"

"It's only to show you how she has been educated."

"Ah, chère madame, there's no education that matters! I mean save the right one. Your daughter must have a particular form of speech, like me, like ces messieurs."

"You see if I can speak French," said the girl, smiling dimly at her hostess. She appeared now almost to have collected herself.

"You speak it in perfection."

"And English just as well," said Miss Rooth.

"You oughtn't to be an actress—you ought to be a governess."

"Oh don't tell us that: it's to escape from that!" pleaded Mrs. Rooth.

"I'm very sure your daughter will escape from that," Peter Sherringham was moved to interpose.

"Oh if you could help her!" said the lady with a world of

longing.

"She has certainly all the qualities that strike the eye," Peter returned.

"You're most kind, sir!" Mrs. Rooth declared, elegantly draping herself.

"She knows Célimène; I've heard her do Célimène," Gabriel Nash said to Madame Carré".

"And she knows Juliet, she knows Lady Macbeth and Cleopatra," added Mrs. Rooth.

"Voyons, my dear child, do you wish to work for the French stage or for the English?" the old actress demanded.

"Ours would have sore need of you, Miss Rooth," Sherringham gallantly threw off.

"Could you speak to any one in London—could you introduce her?" her mother eagerly asked.

"Dear madam, I must hear her first, and hear what Madame Carré says."

"She has a voice of rare beauty, and I understand voices," said Mrs. Rooth.

"Ah then if she has intelligence she has every gift."

"She has a most poetic mind," the old lady went on.

"I should like to paint her portrait; she's made for that," Nick Dormer ventured to observe to Mrs. Rooth; partly because struck with the girl's suitability for sitting, partly to mitigate the crudity of inexpressive spectatorship.

"So all the artists say. I've had three or four heads of her, if

you would like to see them: she has been done in several styles. If you were to do her I'm sure it would make her celebrated."

"And me too," Nick easily laughed.

"It would indeed—a member of Parliament!" Nash declared.

"Ah, I have the honour——?" murmured Mrs. Rooth, looking gratified and mystified.

Nick explained that she had no honour at all, and meanwhile Madame Carré had been questioning the girl "Chère madame, I can do nothing with your daughter: she knows too much!" she broke out. "It's a pity, because I like to catch them wild."

"Oh she's wild enough, if that's all! And that's the very point, the question of where to try," Mrs. Rooth went on. "Into what do I launch her—upon what dangerous stormy sea? I've thought of it so anxiously."

"Try here—try the French public: they're so much the most serious," said Gabriel Nash.

"Ah no, try the English: there's such a rare opening!" Sherringham urged in quick opposition.

"Oh it isn't the public, dear gentlemen. It's the private side, the other people—it's the life, it's the moral atmosphere."

"Je ne connais qu'une scène,—la nôtre," Madame Carré declared. "I'm assured by every one who knows that there's no other."

"Very correctly assured," said Mr. Nash. "The theatre in our countries is puerile and barbarous."

"There's something to be done for it, and perhaps

mademoiselle's the person to do it," Sherringham contentiously suggested.

"Ah but, en attendant, what can it do for her?" Madame Carré asked.

"Well, anything I can help to bring about," said Peter Sherringham, more and more struck with the girl's rich type. Miriam Rooth sat in silence while this discussion went on, looking from one speaker to the other with a strange dependent candour.

"Ah, if your part's marked out I congratulate you, mademoiselle!"—and the old actress underlined the words as she had often underlined others on the stage. She smiled with large permissiveness on the young aspirant, who appeared not to understand her. Her tone penetrated, however, to certain depths in the mother's nature, adding another stir to agitated waters.

"I feel the responsibility of what she shall find in the life, the standards, of the theatre," Mrs. Rooth explained. "Where is the purest tone—where are the highest standards? That's what I ask," the good lady continued with a misguided intensity which elicited a peal of unceremonious but sociable laughter from Gabriel Nash.

"The purest tone—qu'est-ce que c'est que ça?" Madame Carré demanded in the finest manner of modern comedy.

"We're very, very respectable," Mrs. Rooth went on, but now smiling and achieving lightness too.

"What I want is to place my daughter where the conduct—and

the picture of conduct in which she should take part—wouldn't be quite absolutely dreadful. Now, chère madame, how about all that; how about conduct in the French theatre—all the things she should see, the things she should hear, the things she should learn?"

Her hostess took it, as Sherringham felt, de très-haut. "I don't think I know what you're talking about. They're the things she may see and hear and learn everywhere; only they're better done, they're better said, above all they're better taught. The only conduct that concerns an, actress, it seems to me, is her own, and the only way for her to behave herself is not to be a helpless stick. I know no other conduct."

"But there are characters, there are situations, which I don't think I should like to see her undertake."

"There are many, no doubt, which she would do well to leave alone!" laughed the Frenchwoman.

"I shouldn't like to see her represent a very bad woman—a really bad one," Mrs. Rooth serenely pursued.

"Ah in England then, and in your theatre, every one's immaculately good? Your plays must be even more ingenious than I supposed!"

"We haven't any plays," said Gabriel Nash.

"People will write them for Miss Rooth—it will be a new era," Sherringham threw in with wanton, or at least with combative, optimism.

"Will you, sir—will you do something? A sketch of one of

our grand English ideals?" the old lady asked engagingly.

"Oh I know what you do with our pieces—to show your superior virtue!" Madame Carré cried before he had time to reply that he wrote nothing but diplomatic memoranda. "Bad women? Je n'ai joué que ça, madame. 'Really' bad? I tried to make them real!"

"I can say 'L'Aventurière,'" Miriam interrupted in a cold voice which seemed to hint at a want of participation in the maternal solicitudes.

"Allow us the pleasure of hearing you then. Madame Carré will give you the réplique," said Peter Sherringham.

"Certainly, my child; I can say it without the book," Madame Carré responded. "Put yourself there—move that chair a little away." She patted her young visitor, encouraging her to rise, settling with her the scene they should take, while the three men sprang up to arrange a place for the performance. Miriam left her seat and looked vaguely about her; then having taken off her hat and given it to her mother she stood on the designated spot with her eyes to the ground. Abruptly, however, instead of beginning the scene, Madame Carré turned to the elder lady with an air which showed that a rejoinder to this visitor's remarks of a moment before had been gathering force in her breast.

"You mix things up, chère madame, and I have it on my heart to tell you so. I believe it's rather the case with you other English, and I've never been able to learn that either your morality or your talent is the gainer by it. To be too respectable to go where

things are done best is in my opinion to be very vicious indeed; and to do them badly in order to preserve your virtue is to fall into a grossness more shocking than any other. To do them well is virtue enough, and not to make a mess of it the only respectability. That's hard enough to merit Paradise. Everything else is base humbug! Voilà, chère madame, the answer I have for your scruples!"

"It's admirable—admirable; and I am glad my friend Dormer here has had the great advantage of hearing you utter it!" Nash exclaimed with a free designation of Nick.

That young man thought it in effect a speech denoting an intelligence of the question, yet he rather resented the idea that Gabriel should assume it would strike him as a revelation; and to show his familiarity with the line of thought it indicated, as well as to play his part appreciatively in the little circle, he observed to Mrs. Rooth, as if they might take many things for granted: "In other words, your daughter must find her safeguard in the artistic conscience." But he had no sooner spoken than he was struck with the oddity of their discussing so publicly, and under the poor girl's handsome nose, the conditions which Miss Rooth might find the best for the preservation of her personal integrity. However, the anomaly was light and unoppressive—the echoes of a public discussion of delicate questions seemed to linger so familiarly in the egotistical little room. Moreover, the heroine of the occasion evidently was losing her embarrassment; she was the priestess on the tripod, awaiting the afflatus and thinking only

of that. Her bared head, of which she had changed the position, holding it erect, while her arms hung at her sides, was admirable; her eyes gazed straight out of the window and at the houses on the opposite side of the Rue de Constantinople.

Mrs. Rooth had listened to Madame Carré with startled, respectful attention, but Nick, considering her, was very sure she hadn't at all taken in the great artist's little lesson. Yet this didn't prevent her from exclaiming in answer to himself: "Oh a fine artistic life—what indeed is more beautiful?"

Peter Sherringham had said nothing; he was watching Miriam and her attitude. She wore a black dress which fell in straight folds; her face, under her level brows, was pale and regular—it had a strange, strong, tragic beauty. "I don't know what's in her," he said to himself; "nothing, it would seem, from her persistent vacancy. But such a face as that, such a head, is a fortune!" Madame Carré brought her to book, giving her the first line of the speech of Clorinde: "Vous ne me fuyez pas, mon enfant, aujourd'hui." But still the girl hesitated, and for an instant appeared to make a vain, convulsive effort. In this convulsion she frowned portentously; her low forehead overhung her eyes; the eyes themselves, in shadow, stared, splendid and cold, and her hands clinched themselves at her sides. She looked austere and terrible and was during this moment an incarnation the vividness of which drew from Sherringham a stifled cry. "Elle est bien belle—ah ça," murmured the old actress; and in the pause which still preceded the issue of sound from the girl's lips Peter turned

to his kinsman and said in a low tone: "You must paint her just like that."

"Like that?"

"As the Tragic Muse."

She began to speak; a long, strong, colourless voice quavered in her young throat. She delivered the lines of Clorinde in the admired interview with Célie, the gem of the third act, with a rude monotony, and then, gaining confidence, with an effort at modulation which was not altogether successful and which evidently she felt not to be so. Madame Carré sent back the ball without raising her hand, repeating the speeches of Célie, which her memory possessed from their having so often been addressed to her, and uttering the verses with soft, communicative art. So they went on through the scene, which, when it was over, had not precisely been a triumph for Miriam Rooth. Sherringham forbore to look at Gabriel Nash, and Madame Carré said: "I think you've a voice, ma fille, somewhere or other. We must try and put our hand on it." Then she asked her what instruction she had had, and the girl, lifting her eyebrows, looked at her mother while her mother prompted her.

"Mrs. Delamere in London; she was once an ornament of the English stage. She gives lessons just to a very few; it's a great favour. Such a very nice person! But above all, Signor Ruggieri —I think he taught us most." Mrs. Rooth explained that this gentleman was an Italian tragedian, in Rome, who instructed Miriam in the proper manner of pronouncing his language and

also in the art of declaiming and gesticulating.

"Gesticulating I'll warrant!" declared their hostess. "They mimic as for the deaf, they emphasise as for the blind. Mrs. Delamere is doubtless an epitome of all the virtues, but I never heard of her. You travel too much," Madame Carré went on; "that's very amusing, but the way to study is to stay at home, to shut yourself up and hammer at your scales." Mrs. Rooth complained that they had no home to stay at; in reply to which the old actress exclaimed: "Oh you English, you're d'une légèreté à faire frémir. If you haven't a home you must make, or at least for decency pretend to, one. In our profession it's the first requisite."

"But where? That's what I ask!" said Mrs. Rooth.

"Why not here?" Sherringham threw out.

"Oh here!" And the good lady shook her head with a world of sad significance.

"Come and live in London and then I shall be able to paint your daughter," Nick Dormer interposed.

"Is that all it will take, my dear fellow?" asked Gabriel Nash.

"Ah, London's full of memories," Mrs. Rooth went on. "My father had a great house there—we always came up. But all that's over."

"Study here and then go to London to appear," said Peter, feeling frivolous even as he spoke.

"To appear in French?"

"No, in the language of Shakespeare."

"But we can't study that here."

"Mr. Sherringham means that he will give you lessons," Madame Carré explained. "Let me not fail to say it—he's an excellent critic."

"How do you know that—you who're beyond criticism and perfect?" asked Sherringham: an inquiry to which the answer was forestalled by the girl's rousing herself to make it public that she could recite the "Nights" of Alfred de Musset.

"Diable!" said the actress: "that's more than I can! By all means give us a specimen."

The girl again placed herself in position and rolled out a fragment of one of the splendid conversations of Musset's poet with his muse—rolled it loudly and proudly, tossed it and tumbled it about the room. Madame Carré watched her at first, but after a few moments she shut her eyes, though the best part of the business was to take in her young candidate's beauty. Sherringham had supposed Miriam rather abashed by the flatness of her first performance, but he now saw how little she could have been aware of this: she was rather uplifted and emboldened. She made a mush of the divine verses, which in spite of certain sonorities and cadences, an evident effort to imitate a celebrated actress, a comrade of Madame Carré, whom she had heard declaim them, she produced as if she had been dashing blindfold at some playfellow she was to "catch." When she had finished Madame Carré passed no judgement, only dropping: "Perhaps you had better say something English." She suggested some little piece of verse—some fable if there were

fables in English. She appeared but scantily surprised to hear that there were not—it was a language of which one expected so little. Mrs. Rooth said: "She knows her Tennyson by heart. I think he's much deeper than La Fontaine"; and after some deliberation and delay Miriam broke into "The Lotus-Eaters," from which she passed directly, almost breathlessly, to "Edward Gray." Sherringham had by this time heard her make four different attempts, and the only generalisation very present to him was that she uttered these dissimilar compositions in exactly the same tone—a solemn, droning, dragging measure suggestive of an exhortation from the pulpit and adopted evidently with the "affecting" intention and from a crude idea of "style." It was all funereal, yet was artlessly rough. Sherringham thought her English performance less futile than her French, but he could see that Madame Carré listened to it even with less pleasure. In the way the girl wailed forth some of her Tennysonian lines he detected a faint gleam as of something pearly in deep water. But the further she went the more violently she acted on the nerves of Mr. Gabriel Nash: that also he could discover from the way this gentleman ended by slipping discreetly to the window and leaning there with his head out and his back to the exhibition. He had the art of mute expression; his attitude said as clearly as possible: "No, no, you can't call me either ill-mannered or ill-natured. I'm the showman of the occasion, moreover, and I avert myself, leaving you to judge. If there's a thing in life I hate it's this idiotic new fashion of the drawing-room recitation

and of the insufferable creatures who practise it, who prevent conversation, and whom, as they're beneath it, you can't punish by criticism. Therefore what I'm doing's only too magnanimous —bringing these benighted women here, paying with my person, stifling my just repugnance."

While Sherringham judged privately that the manner in which Miss Rooth had acquitted herself offered no element of interest, he yet remained aware that something surmounted and survived her failure, something that would perhaps be worth his curiosity. It was the element of outline and attitude, the way she stood, the way she turned her eyes, her head, and moved her limbs. These things held the attention; they had a natural authority and, in spite of their suggesting too much the school-girl in the tableau-vivant, a "plastic" grandeur. Her face, moreover, grew as he watched it; something delicate dawned in it, a dim promise of variety and a touching plea for patience, as if it were conscious of being able to show in time more shades than the simple and striking gloom which had as yet mainly graced it. These rather rude physical felicities formed in short her only mark of a vocation. He almost hated to have to recognise them; he had seen them so often when they meant nothing at all that he had come at last to regard them as almost a guarantee of incompetence. He knew Madame Carré valued them singly so little that she counted them out in measuring an histrionic nature; when deprived of the escort of other properties which helped and completed them she almost held them a positive hindrance to success—success of the

only kind she esteemed. Far oftener than himself she had sat in judgement on young women for whom hair and eyebrows and a disposition for the statuesque would have worked the miracle of sanctifying their stupidity if the miracle were workable. But that particular miracle never was. The qualities she rated highest were not the gifts but the conquests, the effects the actor had worked hard for, had dug out of the mine by unwearied study. Sherringham remembered to have had in the early part of their acquaintance a friendly dispute with her on this subject, he having been moved at that time to defend doubtless to excess the cause of the gifts. She had gone so far as to say that a serious comedian ought to be ashamed of them—ashamed of resting his case on them; and when Sherringham had cited the great Rachel as a player whose natural endowment was rich and who had owed her highest triumphs to it, she had declared that Rachel was the very instance that proved her point;—a talent assisted by one or two primary aids, a voice and a portentous brow, but essentially formed by work, unremitting and ferocious work. "I don't care a straw for your handsome girls," she said; "but bring me one who's ready to drudge the tenth part of the way Rachel drudged, and I'll forgive her her beauty. Of course, notez bien, Rachel wasn't a grosse bête: that's a gift if you like!"

Mrs. Rooth, who was evidently very proud of the figure her daughter had made—her daughter who for all one could tell affected their hostess precisely as a grosse bête—appealed to Madame Carré rashly and serenely for a verdict; but fortunately

this lady's voluble bonne came rattling in at the same moment with the tea-tray. The old actress busied herself in dispensing this refreshment, an hospitable attention to her English visitors, and under cover of the diversion thus obtained, while the others talked together, Sherringham put her the question: "Well, is there anything in my young friend?"

"Nothing I can see. She's loud and coarse."

"She's very much afraid. You must allow for that."

"Afraid of me, immensely, but not a bit afraid of her authors—nor of you!" Madame Carré smiled.

"Aren't you prejudiced by what that fellow Nash has told you?"

"Why prejudiced? He only told me she was very handsome."

"And don't you think her so?"

"Admirable. But I'm not a photographer nor a dressmaker nor a coiffeur. I can't do anything with 'back hair' nor with a mere big stare."

"The head's very noble," said Peter Sherringham. "And the voice, when she spoke English, had some sweet tones."

"Ah your English—possibly! All I can say is that I listened to her conscientiously, and I didn't perceive in what she did a single nuance, a single inflexion or intention. But not one, mon cher. I don't think she's intelligent."

"But don't they often seem stupid at first?"

"Say always!"

"Then don't some succeed—even when they're handsome?"

"When they're handsome they always succeed—in one way or another."

"You don't understand us English," said Peter Sherringham.

Madame Carré drank her tea; then she replied: "Marry her, my son, and give her diamonds. Make her an ambassadress; she'll look very well."

"She interests you so little that you don't care to do anything for her?"

"To do anything?"

"To give her a few lessons."

The old actress looked at him a moment; after which, rising from her place near the table on which the tea had been served, she said to Miriam Rooth: "My dear child, I give my voice for the scène anglaise. You did the English things best."

"Did I do them well?" asked the girl.

"You've a great deal to learn; but you've rude force. The main things sont encore a dégager, but they'll come. You must work."

"I think she has ideas," said Mrs. Rooth.

"She gets them from you," Madame Carré replied.

"I must say that if it's to be our theatre I'm relieved. I do think ours safer," the good lady continued.

"Ours is dangerous, no doubt."

"You mean you're more severe," said the girl.

"Your mother's right," the actress smiled; "you have ideas."

"But what shall we do then—how shall we proceed?" Mrs. Rooth made this appeal, plaintively and vaguely, to the three

gentlemen; but they had collected a few steps off and were so occupied in talk that it failed to reach them.

"Work—work—work!" exclaimed the actress.

"In English I can play Shakespeare. I want to play Shakespeare," Miriam made known.

"That's fortunate, as in English you haven't any one else to play."

"But he's so great—and he's so pure!" said Mrs. Rooth.

"That indeed seems the saving of you," Madame Carré returned.

"You think me actually pretty bad, don't you?" the girl demanded with her serious face.

"Mon Dieu, que vous dirai-je? Of course you're rough; but so was I at your age. And if you find your voice it may carry you far. Besides, what does it matter what I think? How can I judge for your English public?"

"How shall I find my voice?" asked Miriam Rooth.

"By trying. Il n'y a que ça. Work like a horse, night and day. Besides, Mr. Sherringham, as he says, will help you."

That gentleman, hearing his name, turned round and the girl appealed to him. "Will you help me really?"

"To find her voice," said Madame Carré.

"The voice, when it's worth anything, comes from the heart; so I suppose that's where to look for it," Gabriel Nash suggested.

"Much you know; you haven't got any!" Miriam retorted with the first scintillation of gaiety she had shown on this occasion.

"Any voice, my child?" Mr. Nash inquired.

"Any heart—or any manners!"

Peter Sherringham made the secret reflexion that he liked her better lugubrious, as the note of pertness was not totally absent from her mode of emitting these few words. He was irritated, moreover, for in the brief conference he had just had with the young lady's introducer he had had to meet the rather difficult call of speaking of her hopefully. Mr. Nash had said with his bland smile, "And what impression does my young friend make?"—in respect to which Peter's optimism felt engaged by an awkward logic. He answered that he recognised promise, though he did nothing of the sort;—at the same time that the poor girl, both with the exaggerated "points" of her person and the vanity of her attempt at expression, constituted a kind of challenge, struck him as a subject for inquiry, a problem, an explorable tract. She was too bad to jump at and yet too "taking"—perhaps after all only vulgarly—to overlook, especially when resting her tragic eyes on him with the trust of her deep "Really?" This note affected him as addressed directly to his honour, giving him a chance to brave verisimilitude, to brave ridicule even a little, in order to show in a special case what he had always maintained in general, that the direction of a young person's studies for the stage may be an interest of as high an order as any other artistic appeal.

"Mr. Nash has rendered us the great service of introducing us to Madame Carré, and I'm sure we're immensely indebted to

him," Mrs. Rooth said to her daughter with an air affectionately corrective.

"But what good does that do us?" the girl asked, smiling at the actress and gently laying her finger-tips upon her hand. "Madame Carré listens to me with adorable patience, and then sends me about my business—ah in the prettiest way in the world."

"Mademoiselle, you're not so rough; the tone of that's very juste. A la bonne heure; work—work!" the actress cried. "There was an inflexion there—or very nearly. Practise it till you've got it."

"Come and practise it to me, if your mother will be so kind as to bring you," said Peter Sherringham.

"Do you give lessons—do you understand?" Miriam asked.

"I'm an old play-goer and I've an unbounded belief in my own judgement."

"'Old,' sir, is too much to say," Mrs. Rooth remonstrated. "My daughter knows your high position, but she's very direct. You'll always find her so. Perhaps you'll say there are less honourable faults. We'll come to see you with pleasure. Oh I've been at the embassy when I was her age. Therefore why shouldn't she go to-day? That was in Lord Davenant's time."

"A few people are coming to tea with me to-morrow. Perhaps you'll come then at five o'clock."

"It will remind me of the dear old times," said Mrs. Rooth.

"Thank you; I'll try and do better to-morrow," Miriam professed very sweetly.

"You do better every minute!" Sherringham returned—and he looked at their hostess in support of this declaration.

"She's finding her voice," Madame Carré acknowledged.

"She's finding a friend!" Mrs. Rooth threw in.

"And don't forget, when you come to London, my hope that you'll come and see me," Nick Dormer said to the girl. "To try and paint you—that would do me good!"

"She's finding even two," said Madame Carré.

"It's to make up for one I've lost!" And Miriam looked with very good stage-scorn at Gabriel Nash. "It's he who thinks I'm bad."

"You say that to make me drive you home; you know it will," Nash returned.

"We'll all take you home; why not?" Sherringham asked.

Madame Carré looked at the handsome girl, handsomer than ever at this moment, and at the three young men who had taken their hats and stood ready to accompany her. A deeper expression came for an instant into her hard, bright eyes. "Ah la jeunesse!" she sighed. "You'd always have that, my child, if you were the greatest goose on earth!"

Chapter 2

At Peter Sherringham's the next day Miriam had so evidently come with the expectation of "saying" something that it was impossible such a patron of the drama should forbear to invite her, little as the exhibition at Madame Carré's could have

contributed to render the invitation prompt. His curiosity had been more appeased than stimulated, but he felt none the less that he had "taken up" the dark-browed girl and her reminiscential mother and must face the immediate consequences of the act. This responsibility weighed upon him during the twenty-four hours that followed the ultimate dispersal of the little party at the door of the Hôtel de la Garonne.

On quitting Madame Carré the two ladies had definitely declined Mr. Nash's offered cab and had taken their way homeward on foot and with the gentlemen in attendance. The streets of Paris at that hour were bright and episodical, and Sherringham trod them good-humouredly enough and not too fast, leaning a little to talk with Miriam as he went. Their pace was regulated by her mother's, who advanced on the arm of Gabriel Nash (Nick Dormer was on her other side) in refined deprecation. Her sloping back was before them, exempt from retentive stillness in spite of her rigid principles, with the little drama of her lost and recovered shawl perpetually going on.

Sherringham said nothing to the girl about her performance or her powers; their talk was only of her manner of life with her mother—their travels, their pensions, their economies, their want of a home, the many cities she knew well, the foreign tongues and the wide view of the world she had acquired. He guessed easily enough the dolorous type of exile of the two ladies, wanderers in search of Continental cheapness, inured to queer contacts and compromises, "remarkably well connected"

in England, but going out for their meals. The girl was but indirectly communicative; though seemingly less from any plan of secrecy than from the habit of associating with people whom she didn't honour with her confidence. She was fragmentary and abrupt, as well as not in the least shy, subdued to dread of Madame Carré as she had been for the time. She gave Sherringham a reason for this fear, and he thought her reason innocently pretentious. "She admired a great artist more than anything in the world; and in the presence of art, of great art, her heart beat so fast." Her manners were not perfect, and the friction of a varied experience had rather roughened than smoothed her. She said nothing that proved her intelligent, even though he guessed this to be the design of two or three of her remarks; but he parted from her with the suspicion that she was, according to the contemporary French phrase, a "nature."

The Hôtel de la Garonne was in a small unrenovated street in which the cobble-stones of old Paris still flourished, lying between the Avenue de l'Opéra and the Place de la Bourse. Sherringham had occasionally traversed the high dimness, but had never noticed the tall, stale maison meublée, the aspect of which, that of a third-rate provincial inn, was an illustration of Mrs. Rooth's shrunken standard. "We would ask you to come up, but it's quite at the top and we haven't a sitting-room," the poor lady bravely explained. "We had to receive Mr. Nash at a café."

Nick Dormer declared that he liked cafés, and Miriam, looking at his cousin, dropped with a flash of passion the

demand: "Do you wonder I should want to do something—so that we can stop living like pigs?"

Peter recognised the next day that though it might be boring to listen to her it was better to make her recite than to let her do nothing, so effectually did the presence of his sister and that of Lady Agnes, and even of Grace and Biddy, appear, by a strange tacit opposition, to deprive hers, ornamental as it was, of a reason. He had only to see them all together to perceive that she couldn't pass for having come to "meet" them—even her mother's insinuating gentility failed to put the occasion on that footing—and that she must therefore be assumed to have been brought to show them something. She was not subdued, not colourless enough to sit there for nothing, or even for conversation—the sort of conversation that was likely to come off—so that it was inevitable to treat her position as connected with the principal place on the carpet, with silence and attention and the pulling together of chairs. Even when so established it struck him at first as precarious, in the light, or the darkness, of the inexpressive faces of the other ladies, seated in couples and rows on sofas—there were several in addition to Julia and the Dormers; mainly the wives, with their husbands, of Sherringham's fellow-secretaries—scarcely one of whom he felt he might count upon for a modicum of gush when the girl should have finished.

Miss Rooth gave a representation of Juliet drinking the potion, according to the system, as her mother explained, of the famous

Signor Ruggieri—a scene of high fierce sound, of many cries and contortions: she shook her hair (which proved magnificent) half-down before the performance was over. Then she declaimed several short poems by Victor Hugo, selected among many hundred by Mrs. Rooth, as the good lady was careful to make known. After this she jumped to the American lyre, regaling the company with specimens, both familiar and fresh, of Longfellow, Lowell, Whittier, Holmes, and of two or three poetesses now revealed to Sherringham for the first time. She flowed so copiously, keeping the floor and rejoicing visibly in her luck, that her host was mainly occupied with wondering how he could make her leave off. He was surprised at the extent of her repertory, which, in view of the circumstance that she could never have received much encouragement—it must have come mainly from her mother, and he didn't believe in Signor Ruggieri—denoted a very stiff ambition and a blundering energy. It was her mother who checked her at last, and he found himself suspecting that Gabriel Nash had intimated to the old woman that interference was necessary. For himself he was chiefly glad Madame Carré hadn't come. It was present to him that she would have judged the exhibition, with its badness, its impudence, the absence of criticism, wholly indecent.

His only new impression of the heroine of the scene was that of this same high assurance—her coolness, her complacency, her eagerness to go on. She had been deadly afraid of the old actress but was not a bit afraid of a cluster of femmes du monde, of

Julia, of Lady Agnes, of the smart women of the embassy. It was positively these personages who were rather in fear; there was certainly a moment when even Julia was scared for the first time he had ever remarked it. The space was too small, the cries, the convulsions and rushes of the dishevelled girl were too near. Lady Agnes wore much of the time the countenance she might have shown at the theatre during a play in which pistols were fired; and indeed the manner of the young reciter had become more spasmodic and more explosive. It appeared, however, that the company in general thought her very clever and successful; which showed, to Sherringham's sense, how little they understood the matter. Poor Biddy was immensely struck; she grew flushed and absorbed in proportion as Miriam, at her best moments, became pale and fatal. It was she who spoke to her first, after it was agreed that they had better not fatigue her any more; she advanced a few steps, happening to be nearest—she murmured: "Oh thank you so much. I never saw anything so beautiful, so grand."

She looked very red and very pretty as she said this, and Peter Sherringham liked her enough to notice her more and like her better when she looked prettier than usual. As he turned away he heard Miriam make answer with no great air of appreciation of her tribute: "I've seen you before—two days ago at the Salon with Mr. Dormer. Yes, I know he's your brother. I've made his acquaintance since. He wants to paint my portrait. Do you think he'll do it well?" He was afraid the girl was something of a brute —also somewhat grossly vain. This impression would perhaps

have been confirmed if a part of the rest of the short conversation of the two young women had reached his ear. Biddy ventured to observe that she herself had studied modelling a little and that she could understand how any artist would think Miss Rooth a splendid subject. If indeed she could attempt her head, that would be a chance indeed.

"Thank you," said Miriam with a laugh as of high comedy. "I think I had rather not passer par toute la famille!" Then she added: "If your brother's an artist I don't understand how he's in Parliament."

"Oh he isn't in Parliament now—we only hope he will be."

"Ah I see."

"And he isn't an artist either," Biddy felt herself conscientiously bound to state.

"Then he isn't anything," said Miss Rooth.

"Well—he's immensely clever."

"Ah I see," Miss Rooth again replied. "Mr. Nash has puffed him up so."

"I don't know Mr. Nash," said Biddy, guilty of a little dryness as well as of a little misrepresentation, and feeling rather snubbed.

"Well, you needn't wish to."

Biddy stood with her a moment longer, still looking at her and not knowing what to say next, but not finding her any less handsome because she had such odd manners. Biddy had an ingenious little mind, which always tried as much as possible

to keep different things separate. It was pervaded now by the reflexion, attended with some relief, that if the girl spoke to her with such unexpected familiarity of Nick she said nothing at all about Peter. Two gentlemen came up, two of Peter's friends, and made speeches to Miss Rooth of the kind Biddy supposed people learned to make in Paris. It was also doubtless in Paris, the girl privately reasoned, that they learned to listen to them as this striking performer listened. She received their advances very differently from the way she had received Biddy's. Sherringham noticed his young kinswoman turn away, still very red, to go and sit near her mother again, leaving Miriam engaged with the two men. It appeared to have come over her that for a moment she had been strangely spontaneous and bold, and that she had paid a little of the penalty. The seat next her mother was occupied by Mrs. Rooth, toward whom Lady Agnes's head had inclined itself with a preoccupied tolerance. He had the conviction Mrs. Rooth was telling her about the Neville-Nugents of Castle Nugent and that Lady Agnes was thinking it odd she never had heard of them. He said to himself that Biddy was generous. She had urged Julia to come in order that they might see how bad the strange young woman would be, but now that the event had proved dazzling she forgot this calculation and rejoiced in what she innocently supposed to be the performer's triumph. She kept away from Julia, however; she didn't even look at her to invite her also to confess that, in vulgar parlance, they had been sold. He himself spoke to his sister, who was leaning back with a detached air in

the corner of a sofa, saying something which led her to remark in reply: "Ah I daresay it's extremely fine, but I don't care for tragedy when it treads on one's toes. She's like a cow who has kicked over the milking-pail. She ought to be tied up."

"My poor Julia, it isn't extremely fine; it isn't fine at all," Sherringham returned with some irritation.

"Pardon me then. I thought that was why you invited us."

"I imagined she was different," Peter said a little foolishly.

"Ah if you don't care for her so much the better. It has always seemed to me you make too awfully much of those people."

"Oh I do care for her too—rather. She's interesting." His sister gave him a momentary, mystified glance and he added: "And she's dreadful." He felt stupidly annoyed and was ashamed of his annoyance, as he could have assigned no reason for it. It didn't grow less for the moment from his seeing Gabriel Nash approach Julia, introduced by Nick Dormer. He gave place to the two young men with some alacrity, for he had a sense of being put in the wrong in respect to their specimen by Nash's very presence. He remembered how it had been a part of their bargain, as it were, that he should present that gentleman to his sister. He was not sorry to be relieved of the office by Nick, and he even tacitly and ironically wished his kinsman's friend joy of a colloquy with Mrs. Dallow. Sherringham's life was spent with people, he was used to people, and both as host and as guest he carried the social burden in general lightly. He could observe, especially in the former capacity, without uneasiness and take

the temperature without anxiety. But at present his company oppressed him; he felt worried and that he showed it—which was the thing in the world he had ever held least an honour to a gentleman dedicated to diplomacy. He was vexed with the levity that had made him call his roomful together on so poor a pretext, and yet was vexed with the stupidity that made the witnesses so evidently find the pretext sufficient. He inwardly groaned at the delusion under which he had saddled himself with the Tragic Muse—a tragic muse who was strident and pert—and yet wished his visitors would go away and leave him alone with her.

Nick Dormer said to Mrs. Dallow that he wanted her to know an old friend of his, one of the cleverest men he knew; and he added the hope that she would be gentle and encouraging with him; he was so timid and so easily disconcerted. Mr. Nash hereupon dropped into a chair by the arm of her sofa, their companion went away, and Mrs. Dallow turned her glance upon her new acquaintance without a perceptible change of position. Then she emitted with rapidity the remark: "It's very awkward when people are told one's clever."

"It's only awkward if one isn't," Gabriel smiled.

"Yes, but so few people are—enough to be talked about."

"Isn't that just the reason why such a matter, such an exception, ought to be mentioned to them?" he asked. "They mightn't find it out for themselves. Of course, however, as you say, there ought to be a certainty; then they're surer to know it. Dormer's a dear fellow, but he's rash and superficial."

Mrs. Dallow, at this incitement, turned her glance a second time on her visitor; but during the rest of the conversation she rarely repeated the movement. If she liked Nick Dormer extremely—and it may without more delay be communicated to the reader that she did—her liking was of a kind that opposed no difficulty whatever to her not liking, in case of such a complication, a person attached or otherwise belonging to him. It was not in her nature to "put up" with others for the sake of an individual she loved: the putting up was usually consumed in the loving, and with nothing left over. If the affection that isolates and simplifies its object may be distinguished from the affection that seeks communications and contracts for it, Julia Dallow's was quite of the encircling, not to say the narrowing sort. She was not so much jealous as essentially exclusive. She desired no experience for the familiar and yet partly unsounded kinsman in whom she took an interest that she wouldn't have desired for herself; and indeed the cause of her interest in him was partly the vision of his helping her to the particular extensions she did desire—the taste and thrill of great affairs and of public action. To have such ambitions for him appeared to her the highest honour she could do him; her conscience was in it as well as her inclination, and her scheme, to her sense, was noble enough to varnish over any disdain she might feel for forces drawing him another way. She had a prejudice, in general, against his existing connexions, a suspicion of them, and a supply of off-hand contempt in waiting. It was a singular circumstance that

she was sceptical even when, knowing her as well as he did, he thought them worth recommending to her: the recommendation indeed mostly confirmed the suspicion.

This was a law from which Gabriel Nash was condemned to suffer, if suffering could on any occasion be predicated of Gabriel Nash. His pretension was in truth that he had purged his life of such possibilities of waste, though probably he would have admitted that if that fair vessel should spring a leak the wound in its side would have been dealt by a woman's hand. In dining two evenings before with her brother and with the Dormers Mrs. Dallow had been moved to exclaim that Peter and Nick knew the most extraordinary people. As regards Peter the attitudinising girl and her mother now pointed that moral with sufficient vividness; so that there was little arrogance in taking a similar quality for granted of the conceited man at her elbow, who sat there as if he might be capable from one moment to another of leaning over the arm of her sofa. She had not the slightest wish to talk with him about himself, and was afraid for an instant that he was on the point of passing from the chapter of his cleverness to that of his timidity. It was a false alarm, however, for he only animadverted on the pleasures of the elegant extract hurled—literally hurlé in general—from the centre of the room at one's defenceless head. He intimated that in his opinion these pleasures were all for the performers. The auditors had at any rate given Miss Rooth a charming afternoon; that of course was what Mrs. Dallow's kind brother had mainly intended

in arranging the little party. (Julia hated to hear him call her brother "kind": the term seemed offensively patronising.) But he himself, he related, was now constantly employed in the same beneficence, listening two-thirds of his time to "intonations" and shrieks. She had doubtless observed it herself, how the great current of the age, the adoration of the mime, was almost too strong for any individual; how it swept one along and dashed one against the rocks. As she made no response to this proposition Gabriel Nash asked her if she hadn't been struck with the main sign of the time, the preponderance of the mountebank, the glory and renown, the personal favour, he enjoyed. Hadn't she noticed what an immense part of the public attention he held in London at least? For in Paris society was not so pervaded with him, and the women of the profession, in particular, were not in every drawing-room.

"I don't know what you mean," Mrs. Dallow said. "I know nothing of any such people."

"Aren't they under your feet wherever you turn—their performances, their portraits, their speeches, their autobiographies, their names, their manners, their ugly mugs, as the people say, and their idiotic pretensions?"

"I daresay it depends on the places one goes to. If they're everywhere"—and she paused a moment—"I don't go everywhere."

"I don't go anywhere, but they mount on my back at home like the Old Man of the Sea. Just observe a little when you return

to London," Mr. Nash went on with friendly instructiveness. Julia got up at this—she didn't like receiving directions; but no other corner of the room appeared to offer her any particular reason for crossing to it: she never did such a thing without a great inducement. So she remained standing there as if she were quitting the place in a moment, which indeed she now determined to do; and her interlocutor, rising also, lingered beside her unencouraged but unperturbed. He proceeded to remark that Mr. Sherringham was quite right to offer Miss Rooth an afternoon's sport; she deserved it as a fine, brave, amiable girl. She was highly educated, knew a dozen languages, was of illustrious lineage, and was immensely particular.

"Immensely particular?" Mrs. Dallow repeated.

"Perhaps I should say rather that her mother's so on her behalf. Particular about the sort of people they meet—the tone, the standard. I'm bound to say they're like you: they don't go everywhere. That spirit's not so common in the mob calling itself good society as not to deserve mention."

She said nothing for a moment; she looked vaguely round the room, but not at Miriam Rooth. Nevertheless she presently dropped as in forced reference to her an impatient shake. "She's dreadfully vulgar."

"Ah don't say that to my friend Dormer!" Mr. Nash laughed.

"Are you and he such great friends?" Mrs. Dallow asked, meeting his eyes.

"Great enough to make me hope we shall be greater."

Again for a little she said nothing, but then went on: "Why shouldn't I say to him that she's vulgar?"

"Because he admires her so much. He wants to paint her."

"To paint her?"

"To paint her portrait."

"Oh I see. I daresay she'd do for that."

Mr. Nash showed further amusement. "If that's your opinion of her you're not very complimentary to the art he aspires to practise."

"He aspires to practise?" she echoed afresh.

"Haven't you talked with him about it? Ah you must keep him up to it!"

Julia Dallow was conscious for a moment of looking uncomfortable; but it relieved her to be able to demand of her neighbour with a certain manner: "Are you an artist?"

"I try to be," Nash smiled, "but I work in such difficult material."

He spoke this with such a clever suggestion of mysterious things that she was to hear herself once more pay him the attention of taking him up. "Difficult material?"

"I work in life!"

At this she turned away, leaving him the impression that she probably misunderstood his speech, thinking he meant that he drew from the living model or some such platitude: as if there could have been any likelihood he would have dealings with the dead. This indeed would not fully have explained the abruptness

with which she dropped their conversation. Gabriel, however, was used to sudden collapses and even to sudden ruptures on the part of those addressed by him, and no man had more the secret of remaining gracefully with his conversational wares on his hands. He saw Mrs. Dallow approach Nick Dormer, who was talking with one of the ladies of the embassy, and apparently signify that she wished to speak to him. He got up and they had a minute's talk, after which he turned and took leave of his fellow-visitors. She said a word to her brother, Nick joined her, and they then came together to the door. In this movement they had to pass near Nash, and it gave her an opportunity to nod good-bye to him, which he was by no means sure she would have done if Nick hadn't been with her. The young man just stopped; he said to Nash: "I should like to see you this evening late. You must meet me somewhere."

"Well take a walk—I should like that," Nash replied. "I shall smoke a cigar at the café on the corner of the Place de l'Opéra—you'll find me there." He prepared to compass his own departure, but before doing so he addressed himself to the duty of a few civil words to Lady Agnes. This effort proved vain, for on one side she was defended by the wall of the room and on the other rendered inaccessible by Miriam's mother, who clung to her with a quickly-rooted fidelity, showing no symptom of desistance. Nash declined perforce upon her daughter Grace, who said to him: "You were talking with my cousin Mrs. Dallow."

"To her rather than with her," he smiled.

"Ah she's very charming," Grace said.

"She's very beautiful."

"And very clever," the girl continued.

"Very, very intelligent." His conversation with Miss Dormer went little beyond this, and he presently took leave of Peter Sherringham, remarking to him as they shook hands that he was very sorry for him. But he had courted his fate.

"What do you mean by my fate?" Sherringham asked.

"You've got them for life."

"Why for life, when I now clearly and courageously recognise that she isn't good?"

"Ah but she'll become so," said Gabriel Nash.

"Do you think that?" Sherringham brought out with a candour that made his visitor laugh.

"You will—that's more to the purpose!" the latter declared as he went away.

Ten minutes later Lady Agnes substituted a general, vague assent for all further particular ones, drawing off from Mrs. Rooth and from the rest of the company with her daughters. Peter had had very little talk with Biddy, but the girl kept her disappointment out of her pretty eyes and said to him: "You told us she didn't know how—but she does!" There was no suggestion of disappointment in this.

Sherringham held her hand a moment. "Ah it's you who know how, dear Biddy!" he answered; and he was conscious that if the occasion had been more private he would have all lawfully kissed

her.

Presently three more of his guests took leave, and Mr. Nash's assurance that he had them for life recurred to him as he observed that Mrs. Rooth and her damsel quite failed to profit by so many examples. The Lovicks remained—a colleague and his sociable wife—and Peter gave them a hint that they were not to plant him there only with the two ladies. Miriam quitted Mrs. Lovick, who had attempted, with no great subtlety, to engage her, and came up to her host as if she suspected him of a design of stealing from the room and had the idea of preventing it.

"I want some more tea: will you give me some more? I feel quite faint. You don't seem to suspect how this sort of thing takes it out of one."

Peter apologised extravagantly for not having seen to it that she had proper refreshment, and took her to the round table, in a corner, on which the little collation had been served. He poured out tea for her and pressed bread and butter on her and petits fours, of all which she profusely and methodically partook. It was late; the afternoon had faded and a lamp been brought in, the wide shade of which shed a fair glow on the tea-service and the plates of pretty food. The Lovicks sat with Mrs. Rooth at the other end of the room, and the girl stood at the table, drinking her tea and eating her bread and butter. She consumed these articles so freely that he wondered if she had been truly in want of a meal—if they were so poor as to have to count with that sort of privation. This supposition was softening, but still not so much so

as to make him ask her to sit down. She appeared indeed to prefer to stand: she looked better so, as if the freedom, the conspicuity of being on her feet and treading a stage were agreeable to her. While Sherringham lingered near her all vaguely, his hands in his pockets and his mind now void of everything but a planned evasion of the theatrical question—there were moments when he was so plentifully tired of it—she broke out abruptly: "Confess you think me intolerably bad!"

"Intolerably—no."

"Only tolerably! I find that worse."

"Every now and then you do something very right," Sherringham said.

"How many such things did I do to-day?"

"Oh three or four. I don't know that I counted very carefully."

She raised her cup to her lips, looking at him over the rim of it—a proceeding that gave her eyes a strange expression. "It bores you and you think it disagreeable," she then said—"I mean a girl always talking about herself." He protested she could never bore him and she added: "Oh I don't want compliments—I want the hard, the precious truth. An actress has to talk about herself. What else can she talk about, poor vain thing?"

"She can talk sometimes about other actresses."

"That comes to the same thing. You won't be serious. I'm awfully serious." There was something that caught his attention in the note of this—a longing half hopeless, half argumentative to be believed in. "If one really wants to do anything one must

worry it out; of course everything doesn't come the first day," she kept on. "I can't see everything at once; but I can see a little more—step by step—as I go; can't I?"

"That's the way—that's the way," he gently enough returned. "When you see the things to do the art of doing them will come—if you hammer away. The great point's to see them."

"Yes; and you don't think me clever enough for that."

"Why do you say so when I've asked you to come here on purpose?"

"You've asked me to come, but I've had no success."

"On the contrary; every one thought you wonderful."

"Oh but they don't know!" said Miriam Rooth. "You've not said a word to me. I don't mind your not having praised me; that would be too banal. But if I'm bad—and I know I'm dreadful—I wish you'd talk to me about it."

"It's delightful to talk to you," Peter found himself saying.

"No, it isn't, but it's kind"; and she looked away from him.

Her voice had with this a quality which made him exclaim: "Every now and then you 'say' something—!"

She turned her eyes back to him and her face had a light. "I don't want it to come by accident." Then she added: "If there's any good to be got from trying, from showing one's self, how can it come unless one hears the simple truth, the truth that turns one inside out? It's all for that—to know what one is, if one's a stick!"

"You've great courage, you've rare qualities," Sherringham risked. She had begun to touch him, to seem different: he was

glad she had not gone.

But for a little she made no answer, putting down her empty cup and yearning over the table as for something more to eat. Suddenly she raised her head and broke out with vehemence: "I will, I will, I will!"

"You'll do what you want, evidently."

"I will succeed—I will be great. Of course I know too little, I've seen too little. But I've always liked it; I've never liked anything else. I used to learn things and do scenes and rant about the room when I was but five years old." She went on, communicative, persuasive, familiar, egotistical (as was necessary), and slightly common, or perhaps only natural; with reminiscences, reasons, and anecdotes, an unexpected profusion, and with an air of comradeship, of freedom in any relation, which seemed to plead that she was capable at least of embracing that side of the profession she desired to adopt. He noted that if she had seen very little, as she said, she had also seen a great deal; but both her experience and her innocence had been accidental and irregular. She had seen very little acting—the theatre was always too expensive. If she could only go often—in Paris for instance every night for six months—to see the best, the worst, everything, she would make things out, would observe and learn what to do, what not to do: it would be a school of schools. But she couldn't without selling the clothes off her back. It was vile and disgusting to be poor, and if ever she were to know the bliss of having a few francs in her pocket she would make up

for it—that she could promise! She had never been acquainted with any one who could tell her anything—if it was good or bad or right or wrong—except Mrs. Delamere and poor Ruggieri. She supposed they had told her a great deal, but perhaps they hadn't, and she was perfectly willing to give it up if it was bad. Evidently Madame Carré thought so; she thought it was horrid. Wasn't it perfectly divine, the way the old woman had said those verses, those speeches of Célie? If she would only let her come and listen to her once in a while like that it was all she would ask. She had got lots of ideas just from that half-hour; she had practised them over, over, and over again, the moment she got home. He might ask her mother—he might ask the people next door. If Madame Carré didn't think she could work, she might have heard, could she have listened at the door, something that would show her. But she didn't think her even good enough to criticise—since that wasn't criticism, telling her her head was good. Of course her head was good—she needn't travel up to the quartiers excentriques to find that out. It was her mother, the way she talked, who gave the idea that she wanted to be elegant and moral and a femme du monde and all that sort of trash. Of course that put people off, when they were only thinking of the real right way. Didn't she know, Miriam herself, that this was the one thing to think of? But any one would be kind to her mother who knew what a dear she was. "She doesn't know when any thing's right or wrong, but she's a perfect saint," said the girl, obscuring considerably her vindication. "She doesn't mind when

I say things over by the hour, dinning them into her ears while she sits there and reads. She's a tremendous reader; she's awfully up in literature. She taught me everything herself. I mean all that sort of thing. Of course I'm not so fond of reading; I go in for the book of life." Sherringham wondered if her mother had not at any rate taught her that phrase—he thought it highly probable. "It would give on my nerves, the life I lead her," Miriam continued; "but she's really a delicious woman."

The oddity of this epithet made Peter laugh, and altogether, in a few minutes, which is perhaps a sign that he abused his right to be a man of moods, the young lady had produced in him a revolution of curiosity, set his sympathy in motion. Her mixture, as it spread itself before him, was an appeal and a challenge: she was sensitive and dense, she was underbred and fine. Certainly she was very various, and that was rare; quite not at this moment the heavy-eyed, frightened creature who had pulled herself together with such an effort at Madame Carré's, nor the elated "phenomenon" who had just been declaiming, nor the rather affected and contradictious young person with whom he had walked home from the Rue de Constantinople. Was this succession of phases a sign she was really a case of the celebrated artistic temperament, the nature that made people provoking and interesting? That Sherringham himself was of this shifting complexion is perhaps proved by his odd capacity for being of two different minds very nearly at the same time. Miriam was pretty now, with felicities and graces,

with charming, unusual eyes. Yes, there were things he could do for her; he had already forgotten the chill of Mr. Nash's irony, of his prophecy. He was even scarce conscious how little in general he liked hints, insinuations, favours asked obliquely and plaintively: that was doubtless also because the girl was suddenly so taking and so fraternising. Perhaps indeed it was unjust to qualify as roundabout the manner in which Miss Rooth conveyed that it was open to him not only to pay for her lessons, but to meet the expense of her nightly attendance with her mother at instructive exhibitions of theatrical art. It was a large order, sending the pair to all the plays; but what Peter now found himself thinking of was not so much its largeness as the possible interest of going with them sometimes and pointing the moral—the technical one—of showing her the things he liked, the things he disapproved. She repeated her declaration that she recognised the fallacy of her mother's view of heroines impossibly virtuous and of the importance of her looking out for such tremendously proper people. "One must let her talk, but of course it creates a prejudice," she said with her eyes on Mr. and Mrs. Lovick, who had got up, terminating their communion with Mrs. Rooth. "It's a great muddle, I know, but she can't bear anything coarse or nasty—and quite right too. I shouldn't either if I didn't have to. But I don't care a sou where I go if I can get to act, or who they are if they'll help me. I want to act—that's what I want to do; I don't want to meddle in people's affairs. I can look out for myself—I'm all right!" the girl exclaimed roundly, frankly, with a ring

of honesty which made her crude and pure. "As for doing the bad ones I'm not afraid of that."

"The bad ones?"

"The bad women in the plays—like Madame Carré. I'll do any vile creature."

"I think you'll do best what you are"—and Sherringham laughed for the interest of it. "You're a strange girl."

"Je crois bien! Doesn't one have to be, to want to go and exhibit one's self to a loathsome crowd, on a platform, with trumpets and a big drum, for money—to parade one's body and one's soul?"

He looked at her a moment: her face changed constantly; now it had a fine flush and a noble delicacy. "Give it up. You're too good for it," he found himself pleading. "I doubt if you've an idea of what girls have to go through."

"Never, never—never till I'm pelted!" she cried.

"Then stay on here a bit. I'll take you to the theatres."

"Oh you dear!" Miriam delightedly exclaimed. Mr. and Mrs. Lovick, accompanied by Mrs. Rooth, now crossed the room to them, and the girl went on in the same tone: "Mamma dear, he's the best friend we've ever had—he's a great deal nicer than I thought."

"So are you, mademoiselle," said Peter Sherringham.

"Oh, I trust Mr. Sherringham—I trust him infinitely," Mrs. Rooth returned, covering him with her mild, respectable, wheedling eyes. "The kindness of every one has been beyond

everything. Mr. and Mrs. Lovick can't say enough. They make the most obliging offers. They want you to know their brother."

"Oh I say, he's no brother of mine," Mr. Lovick protested good-naturedly.

"They think he'll be so suggestive, he'll put us up to the right things," Mrs. Rooth went on.

"It's just a little brother of mine—such a dear, amusing, clever boy," Mrs. Lovick explained.

"Do you know she has got nine? Upon my honour she has!" said her husband. "This one is the sixth. Fancy if I had to take them all over!"

"Yes, it makes it rather awkward," Mrs. Lovick amiably conceded. "He has gone on the stage, poor darling—but he acts rather well."

"He tried for the diplomatic service, but he didn't precisely dazzle his examiners," Mr. Lovick further mentioned.

"Edmund's very nasty about him. There are lots of gentlemen on the stage—he's not the first."

"It's such a comfort to hear that," said Mrs. Rooth.

"I'm much obliged to you. Has he got a theatre?" Miriam asked.

"My dear young lady, he hasn't even got an engagement," replied the young man's terrible brother-in-law.

"He hasn't been at it very long, but I'm sure he'll get on. He's immensely in earnest and very good-looking. I just said that if he should come over to see us you might rather like to meet him.

He might give you some tips, as my husband says."

"I don't care for his looks, but I should like his tips," Miriam liberally smiled.

"And is he coming over to see you?" asked Sherringham, to whom, while this exchange of remarks, which he had not lost, was going on, Mrs. Rooth had in lowered accents addressed herself.

"Not if I can help it I think!" But Mr. Lovick was so gaily rude that it wasn't embarrassing.

"Oh sir, I'm sure you're fond of him," Mrs. Rooth remonstrated as the party passed together into the antechamber.

"No, really, I like some of the others—four or five of them; but I don't like Arty."

"We'll make it up to him, then; we'll like him," Miriam answered with spirit; and her voice rang in the staircase—Sherringham attended them a little way—with a charm which her host had rather missed in her loudness of the day before.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.