

The Wheel of Time

Henry James

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"And your daughter?" said Lady Greyswood; "tell me about her. She must be nice."

"Oh, yes, she's nice enough. She's a great comfort." Mrs Knocker hesitated a moment, then she went on: "Unfortunately she's not good-looking not a bit."

"That doesn't matter, when they're not ill-natured," rejoined, insincerely, Lady Greyswood, who had the remains of great beauty.

"Oh, but poor Fanny is quite extraordinarily plain. I assure you it does matter. She knows it herself; she suffers from it. It's the sort of thing that makes a great difference in a girl's life."

"But if she's charming, if she's clever!" said Lady Greyswood, with more benevolence than logic. "I've known plain women who were liked."

"Do you mean *me*, my dear?" her old friend straightforwardly inquired. "But I'm not so awfully liked!"

"You?" Lady Greyswood exclaimed. "Why, you're grand!"

"I'm not so repulsive as I was when I was young perhaps, but that's not saying much."

"As when you were young!" laughed Lady Greyswood. "You sweet thing, you *are* young. I thought India dried people up."

"Oh, when you're a mummy to begin with!" Mrs Knocker returned, with her trick of self-abasement. "Of course I've not been such a fool as to keep my children there. My girl *is* clever," she continued, "but she's afraid to show it. Therefore you may judge whether, with her unfortunate appearance, she's charming."

"She shall show it to *me*! You must let me do everything for her."

"Does that include finding her a husband? I should like her to show it to someone who'll marry her."

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"I'll marry her!" said Lady Greyswood, who was handsomer than ever when she laughed and looked capable.

"What a blessing to meet you this way on the threshold of home! I give you notice that I shall cling to you. But that's what I meant; that's the thing the want of beauty makes so difficult — as if it were not difficult enough at the best."

"My dear child, one meets plenty of ugly women with husbands," Lady Greyswood argued, "and often with very nice ones."

"Yes, mine is very nice. There are men who don't mind one's face, for whom beauty isn't indispensable, but they are rare. I don't understand them. If I'd been a man about to marry I should have gone in for looks. However, the poor child will *have* something," Mrs I shall cling to you. But that's what I meant; that's the thing the want of beauty makes so difficult — as if it were not difficult enough at the best."

"My dear child, one meets plenty of ugly women with husbands," Lady Greyswood argued, "and often with very nice ones."

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Lady Greyswood rested thoughtful eyes on her. "Do you mean she'll be well off?"

"We shall do everything we can for her. We're not in such misery as we used to be. We've managed to save in India, strange to say, and six months ago my husband came into money (more than we had ever dreamed of), by the death of his poor brother. We feel quite opulent (it's rather nice!) and we should expect to do something decent for our daughter. I don't mind it's being known."

"It *shall* be known!" said Lady Greyswood, getting up. "Leave the dear child to me!" The old friends embraced, for the porter of the hotel had come in to say that the carriage ordered for her ladyship was at the door. They had met in Paris by the merest chance, in the court of an inn, after a separation of years, just as Lady Greyswood was going home. She had been to Aix-les-Bains early in the season and was resting on her way back to England. Mrs Knocker and the General, bringing their eastern exile to a close, had arrived only the night before from Marseilles and were to wait in Paris for their children, a tall girl and two younger boys, who, inevitably dissociated from their parents, had been for the past two years with a devoted aunt, their father's maiden sister, at Heidelberg. The reunion of the family was to take place with jollity in Paris, whither this good lady was now hurrying with her drilled and demoralized charges. Mrs Knocker had come to England to see them two years before, and the period at Heidelberg had been planned during this visit. With the termination of her husband's service a new life opened before them all, and they had plans of comprehensive rejoicing for the summer — plans involving however a continuance, for a few months, of useful foreign opportunities, during which various questions connected with the organization of a final home in England were practically to be dealt with. There was to be a salubrious house on the continent, taken in some neighbourhood that would both yield a stimulus to plain Fanny's French (her German was much commended), and permit of frequent 'running over' for the General. With these preoccupations Mrs Knocker, after her delightful encounter with Lady Greyswood, was less keenly conscious of the variations of destiny than she had been when, at the age of twenty, that intimate friend of her youth, beautiful, loveable and about to be united to a nobleman of ancient name, was brightly, almost insolently alienated. The less attractive of the two girls had married only several years later, and her marriage had perhaps emphasised the divergence of their ways. To-day however the inequality, as Mrs Knocker would have phrased it, rather dropped out of the impression produced by the somewhat wasted and faded dowager, exquisite still, but unexpectedly appealing, who made no secret (an attempt that in an age of such publicity would have been useless), of what she had had, in vulgar parlance, to put up with, or of her having been left badly off. She had spoken of her children — she had had no less than six — but she had evidently thought it better not to speak of her husband. That somehow made up, on Mrs Knocker's part, for some ancient aches.

It was not till a year after this incident that, one day in London, in her little house in Queen Street, Lady

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Greyswood said to her third son, Maurice — the one she was fondest of, the one who on his own side had given her most signs of affection:

"I don't see what there is for you but to marry a girl of a certain fortune."

"Oh, that's not my line! I may be an idiot, but I'm not mercenary," the young man declared. He was not an idiot, but there was an examination, rather stiff indeed, to which, without success, he had gone up twice. The diplomatic service was closed to him by this catastrophe; nothing else appeared particularly open; he was terribly at leisure. There had been a theory none the less that he was the ablest of the family. Two of his brothers had been squeezed into the army and had declared rather crudely that they would do their best to keep Maurice out. They were not put to any trouble in this respect however, as he professed a complete indifference to the trade of arms. His mother, who was vague about everything except the idea that people ought to like him, if only for his extraordinary good looks, thought it strange there shouldn't be some opening for him in political life, or something to be picked up even in the City. But no bustling borough solicited the advantage of his protection, no eminent statesman in want of a secretary took him by the hand, no great commercial house had been keeping a stool for him. Maurice, in a word, was not 'approached' from any quarter, and meanwhile he was as irritating as the intending traveller who allows you the pleasure of looking out his railway-connections. Poor Lady Greyswood fumbled the social Bradshaw in vain. The young man had only one marked taste, with which his mother saw no way to deal — an invincible passion for photography. He was perpetually taking shots at his friends, but she couldn't open premises for him in Baker Street. He smoked endless cigarettes — she was sure they made him languid. She would have been more displeased with him if she had not felt so vividly that someone ought to do something for him; nevertheless she almost lost patience at his remark about not being mercenary. She was on the point of asking him what he called it to live on his relations, but she checked the words as she remembered that she herself was the only one who did much for him. Nevertheless, as she hated open professions of disinterestedness, she replied that that was a nonsensical tone. Whatever one should get in such a way one would give quite as much, even if it didn't happen to be money; and when he inquired in return what it was (beyond the disgrace of his failures) that she judged a fellow like him would bring to his bride, she replied that he would bring himself, his personal qualities (she didn't like to be more definite about his appearance), his name, his descent, his connections — good honest commodities all, for which any girl of proper feeling would be glad to pay. Such a name as that of the Glanvils was surely worth something, and she appealed to him to try what he could do with it.

"Surely I can do something better with it than sell it," said Maurice.

"I should like then very much to hear what," she replied very calmly, waiting reasonably for his answer. She waited to no purpose; the question baffled him, like those of his examinations. She explained that she meant of course that he should care for the girl, who might easily have a worse fault than the command of bread and butter. To humour her, for he was always good-natured, he said after a moment, smiling:

"Dear mother, is she pretty?"

"Is who pretty?"

"The young lady you have in your eye. Of course I see you've picked her out."

She coloured slightly at this — she had planned a more gradual revelation. For an instant she thought of saying that she had only had a general idea, for the form of his question embarrassed her; but on reflection she determined to be frank and practical. "Well, I confess I *am* thinking of a girl — a very nice one. But she hasn't great beauty."

"Oh, then it's of no use."

"But she's delightful, and she'll have thirty thousand pounds down, to say nothing of expectations."

Maurice Glanvil looked at his mother. "She must be hideous — for you to admit it. Therefore if she's rich she becomes quite impossible; for how can a fellow have the air of having been bribed with gold to marry a monster?"

"Fanny Knocker isn't the least a monster, and I can see that she'll improve. She's tall, and she's quite strong, and there's nothing at all disagreeable about her. Remember that you can't have everything."

"I thought you contended that I could!" said Maurice, amused at his mother's description of her young friend's charms. He had never heard anyone damned, as regards that sort of thing, with fainter praise. He declared that he would be perfectly capable of marrying a poor girl, but that the prime necessity in any young person he should think of would be the possession of a face — to put it at the least — that it would give him positive pleasure to

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look at. "I don't ask for much, but I do ask for beauty," he went on. "My eye must be gratified — I must have a wife I can photograph."

Lady Greyswood was tempted to answer that he himself had good looks enough to make a handsome couple, but she withheld the remark as injudicious, though effective, for it was a part of her son's amiability that he appeared to have no conception of his plastic side. He would have been disgusted if she had put it forward; if he had the ideal he had just described it was not because his own profile was his standard. What she herself saw in it was a force for coercing heiresses. She had however to be patient, and she promised herself to be adroit; which was all the easier as she really liked Fanny Knocker.

The girl's parents had at last taken a house in Ennismore Gardens, and the friend of her mother's youth had been confronted with the question of redeeming the pledges uttered in Paris. This unsophisticated and united family, with relations to visit and schoolboys' holidays to outlive, had spent the winter in the country and had but lately begun to talk of itself, extravagantly of course, through Mrs Knocker's droll lips, as open to social attentions. Lady Greyswood had not been false to her vows; she had on the contrary recognised from the first that, if he could only be made to see it, Fanny Knocker would be just the person to fill out poor Maurice's blanks. She had kept this confidence to herself, but it had made her very kind to the young lady. One of the forms of this kindness had been an ingenuity in keeping her from coming to Queen Street until Maurice should have been prepared. Was he to be regarded as prepared now that he asserted he would have nothing to do with Miss Knocker? This was a question that worried Lady Greyswood, who at any rate said to herself that she had told him the worst. Her idea had been to sound her old friend only after the young people should have met and Fanny should have fallen in love. Such a catastrophe for Fanny belonged for Lady Greyswood to that order of convenience that she could always take for granted.

She had found the girl, as she expected, ugly and awkward, but had also discovered a charm of character in her intelligent timidity. No one knew better than this observant woman how thankless a task in general it was in London to 'take out' a plain girl; she had seen the nicest creatures, in the brutality of balls, participate only through wistful, almost tearful eyes; her little drawing-room, at intimate hours, had been shaken by the confidences of desperate mothers. None the less she felt sure that Fanny's path would not be rugged; thirty thousand pounds were a fine set of features, and her anxiety was rather on the score of the expectations of the young lady's parents. Mrs Knocker had dropped remarks suggestive of a high imagination, of the conviction that there might be a real efficacy in what they were doing for their daughter. The danger, in other words, might well be that no younger son need apply — a possibility that made Lady Greyswood take all her precautions. The acceptability of her favourite child was consistent with the rejection of those of other people — on which indeed it even directly depended. She remembered on the other hand the proverb about taking your horse to the water; the crystalline spring of her young friend's homage might overflow, but she couldn't compel her boy to drink. The clever way was to break down his prejudice — to get him to consent to give poor Fanny a chance. Therefore if she was careful not to worry him she let him see her project as something patient and deeply wise; she had the air of waiting resignedly for the day on which, in the absence of other solutions, he would say to her: 'Well, let me have a look at my fate!' Meanwhile moreover she was nothing if not conscientious, and as she had made up her mind about the girl's susceptibility she had a scruple against exposing her. This exposure would not be justified so long as Maurice's theoretic rigour should remain unabated.

She felt virtuous in carrying her scruple to the point of rudeness; she knew that Jane Knocker wondered why, though so attentive in a hundred ways, she had never definitely included the poor child in any invitation to Queen Street. There came a moment when it gave her pleasure to suspect that her old friend had begun to explain this omission by the idea of a positive exaggeration of good faith — an honest recognition of the detrimental character of the young man in ambush there. As Maurice, though much addicted to kissing his mother at home, never dangled about her in public, he had remained a mythical figure to Mrs Knocker: he had been absent (culpably — there was a touch of the inevitable incivility in it), on each of the occasions on which, after their arrival in London, she and her husband dined with Lady Greyswood. This astute woman knew that her delightful Jane was whimsical enough to be excited good-humouredly by a mystery: she might very well want to make Maurice's acquaintance in just the degree in which she guessed that his mother's high sense of honour kept him out of the way. Moreover she desired intensely that her daughter should have the sort of experience that would help her to take confidence. Lady Greyswood knew that no one had as yet asked the girl to dinner and that this particular

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attention was the one for which her mother would be most grateful. No sooner had she arrived at these illuminations than, with deep diplomacy, she requested the pleasure of the company of her dear Jane and the General. Mrs Knocker accepted with delight — she always accepted with delight — so that nothing remained for Lady Greyswood but to make sure of Maurice in advance. After this was done she had only to wait. When the dinner, on a day very near at hand, took place (she had jumped at the first evening on which the Knockers were free), she had the gratification of seeing her prevision exactly fulfilled. Her whimsical Jane had thrown the game into her hands, had been taken at the very last moment with one of her Indian headaches and, infinitely apologetic and explanatory, had hustled poor Fanny off with the General. The girl, flurried and frightened by her responsibility, sat at dinner next to Maurice, who behaved beautifully — not in the least as the victim of a trick; and when a fortnight later Lady Greyswood was able to divine that her mind from that evening had been filled with a virginal ecstasy, she was also fortunately able to feel serenely, delightfully guiltless.

She knew this fact about Fanny's mind, she believed, some time before Jane Knocker knew it; but she also had reason to think that Jane Knocker had known it for some time before she spoke of it. It was not till the middle of June, after a succession of encounters between the young people, that her old friend came one morning to discuss the circumstance. Mrs Knocker asked her if she suspected it, and she promptly replied that it had never occurred to her. She added that she was extremely sorry and that it had probably in the first instance been the fault of that injudicious dinner.

"Ah, the day of my headache — my miserable headache?" said her visitor. "Yes, very likely that did it. He's so dreadfully good-looking."

"Poor child, he can't help that. Neither can I!" Lady Greyswood ventured to add.

"He comes by it honestly. He seems very nice."

"He's nice enough, but he hasn't a farthing, you know, and his expectations are *nil*." They considered, they turned the matter about, they wondered what they had better do. In the first place there was no room for doubt; of course Mrs Knocker hadn't sounded the girl, but a mother, a true mother was never reduced to that. If Fanny was in every relation of life so painfully, so constitutionally awkward, the still depths of her shyness, of her dissimulation even, in such a predicament as this, might easily be imagined. She would give no sign that she could possibly smother, she would say nothing and do nothing, watching herself, poor child, with trepidation; but she would suffer, and some day when the question of her future should really come up — it might after all in the form of some good proposal — they would find themselves beating against a closed door. That was what they had to think of; that was why Mrs Knocker had come over. Her old friend cross-examined her with a troubled face, but she was very impressive with her reasons, her intuitions.

"I'll send him away in a moment, if you'd like that," Lady Greyswood said at last. "I'll try and get him to go abroad."

Her visitor made no direct reply to this, and no reply at all for some moments. "What does he expect to do — what does he want to do?" she asked.

"Oh, poor boy, he's looking — he's trying to decide. He asks nothing of anyone. If he would only knock at a few doors! But he's too proud."

"Do you call him *very* clever?" Fanny's mother demanded.

"Yes, decidedly — and good and kind and true. But he has been unlucky."

"Of course he can't bear her!" said Mrs Knocker with a little dry laugh.

Lady Greyswood stared; then she broke out: "Do you mean you'd be willing?—"

"He's very charming."

"Ah, but you must have great ideas."

"He's very well connected," said Mrs Knocker, snapping the tight elastic on her umbrella.

"Oh, my dear Jane — 'connected!'" Lady Greyswood gave a sigh of the sweetest irony.

"He's connected with you, to begin with."

Lady Greyswood put out her hand and held her visitor's for a moment. "Of course it isn't as if he were a different sort of person. Of course I should like it!" she added.

"Does he dislike her *very* much?"

Lady Greyswood looked at her friend with a smile. "He resembles Fanny — he doesn't tell. But what would her father say?" she went on.

"He doesn't know it."

"You've not talked with him?"

Mrs Knocker hesitated a moment. "He thinks she's all right." Both the ladies laughed a little at the density of men; then the visitor said: "I wanted to see you first."

This circumstance gave Lady Greyswood food for thought; it suggested comprehensively that in spite of a

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probable deficiency of zeal on the General's part the worthy man would not be the great obstacle. She had begun so quickly to turn over in her mind the various ways in which this new phase of the business might make it possible the real obstacle should be surmounted that she scarcely heard her companion say next: "The General will only want his daughter to be happy. He has no definite ambitions for her. I dare say Maurice could make him like him." It was something more said by her companion about Maurice that sounded sharply through her reverie. "But unless the idea appeals to *him* a bit there's no use talking about it."

At this Lady Greyswood spoke with decision. "It *shall* appeal to him. Leave it to me! Kiss your dear child for me," she added as the ladies embraced and separated.

In the course of the day she made up her mind, and when she again broached the question to her son (it befell that very evening) she felt that she stood on firmer ground. She began by mentioning to him that her dear old friend had the same charming dream — for the girl — that *she* had; she sketched with a light hand a picture of their preconcerted happiness in the union of their children. When he replied that he couldn't for the life of him imagine what the Knockers could see in a poor beggar of a younger son who had publicly come a cropper, she took pains to prove that he was as good as anyone else and much better than many of the young men to whom persons of sense were often willing to confide their daughters. She had been in much tribulation over the circumstance announced to her in the morning, not knowing whether, in her present enterprise, to keep it back or put it forward. If Maurice should happen not to take it in the right way it was the sort of thing that might dish the whole experiment. He might be bored, he might be annoyed, he might be horrified — there was no limit, in such cases, to the perversity, to the possible brutality of even the most amiable man. On the other hand he might be pleased, touched, flattered — if he didn't dislike the girl too much. Lady Greyswood could indeed imagine that it might be unpleasant to know that a person who was disagreeable to you was in love with you; so that there was just that risk to run. She determined to run it only if there should be absolutely no other card to play. Meanwhile she said: "Don't you see, now, how intelligent she is, in her quiet way, and how perfect she is at home — without any nonsense or affectation or ill-nature? She's not a bit stupid, she's remarkably clever. She can do a lot of things; she has no end of talents. Many girls with a quarter of her abilities would make five times the show."

"My dear mother, she's a great swell, I freely admit it. She's far too good for me. What in the world puts it into your two heads that she would look at me?"

At this Lady Greyswood was tempted to speak; but after an instant she said instead: "She *has* looked at you, and you've seen how. You've seen her several times now, and she has been remarkably nice to you."

"Nice? Ah, poor girl, she's frightened to death!"

"Believe me — I read her," Lady Greyswood replied.

"She knows she has money and she thinks I'm after it. She thinks I'm a ravening wolf and she's scared."

"I happen to know as a fact that she's in love with you!" Before she could check herself Lady Greyswood had played her card, and though she held her breath a little after doing so she felt that it had been a good moment. "If I hadn't known it," she hastened further to declare, "I should never have said another word." Maurice burst out laughing — how in the world *did* she know it? When she put the evidence before him she had the pleasure of seeing that he listened without irritation; and this emboldened her to say: "Don't you think you could *try* to like her?"

Maurice was lounging on a sofa opposite to her; jocose but embarrassed, he had thrown back his head, and while he stretched himself his eyes wandered over the upper expanse of the room. "It's very kind of her and of her mother, and I'm much obliged and all that, though a fellow feels rather an ass in talking about such a thing. Of course also I don't pretend — before such a proof of wisdom — that I think her in the least a fool. But, oh, dear—!" And the young man broke off with laughing impatience, as if he had too much to say. His mother waited an instant, then she uttered a persuasive, interrogative sound, and he went on: "It's only a pity she's so awful!"

"So awful?" murmured Lady Greyswood.

"Dear mother, she's about as ugly a woman as ever turned round on you. If there were only just a touch or two less of it!"

Lady Greyswood got up: she stood looking in silence at the tinted shade of the lamp. She remained in this position so long that he glanced at her — he was struck with the sadness in her face. He would have been in error however if he had suspected that this sadness was assumed for the purpose of showing him that she was wounded

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by his resistance, for the reflection that his last words caused her to make was as disinterested as it was melancholy. Here was an excellent, a charming girl — a girl, she was sure, with a rare capacity for devotion — whose future was reduced to nothing by the mere accident, in her face, of a certain want of drawing. A man could settle her fate with a laugh, could give her away with a snap of his fingers. She seemed to see Maurice administer to poor Fanny's image the little displeased shove with which he would have disposed of an ill-seasoned dish. Moreover he greatly exaggerated. Her heart grew heavy with a sense of the hardness of the lot of women, and when she looked again at her son there were tears in her eyes that startled him. "Poor girl — poor girl!" she simply sighed, in a tone that was to reverberate in his mind and to constitute in doing so a real appeal to his imagination. After a moment she added: "We'll talk no more about her — no, no!"

All the same she went three days later to see Mrs Kocker and say to her: "My dear creature, I think it's all right."

"Do you mean he'll take us up?"

"He'll come and see you, and you must give him plenty of chances." What Lady Greyswood would have liked to be able to say, crudely and comfortably, was: "He'll try to manage it — he promises to do what he can." What she did say, however, was: "He's greatly prepossessed in the dear child's favour."

"Then I dare say he'll be very nice."

"If I didn't think he'd behave like a gentleman I wouldn't raise a finger. The more he sees of her the more he'll be sure to like her."

"Of course with poor Fanny that's the only thing one can build on," said Mrs Kocker. "There's so much to get over."

Lady Greyswood hesitated a moment. "Maurice *has* got over it. But I should tell you that at first he doesn't want it known."

"Doesn't want what known?"

"Why, the footing on which he comes. You see it's just the least bit experimental."

"For what do you take me?" asked Mrs Kocker. "The child shall never dream that anything has passed between us. No more of course shall her father."

"It's too delightful of you to leave it that way," Lady Greyswood replied. "We must surround her happiness with every safeguard."

Mrs Kocker sat pensive for some moments. "So that if nothing comes of it there's no harm done? That idea — that nothing may come of it — makes one a little nervous," she added.

"Of course I can't absolutely answer for my poor boy!" said Lady Greyswood, with just the faintest ring of impatience. "But he's much affected by what he knows — I told him. That's what moves him."

"He must of course be perfectly free."

"The great thing is for her not to know."

Mrs Kocker considered. "Are you very sure?" She had apparently had a profounder second thought.

"Why, my dear — with the risk!"

"Isn't the risk, after all, greater the other way? Mayn't it help the matter on, mayn't it do the poor child a certain degree of good, the idea that, as you say, he's prepossessed in her favour? It would perhaps cheer her up, as it were, and encourage her, so that by the very fact of being happier about herself she may make a better impression. That's what she wants, poor thing — to be helped to hold up her head, to take herself more seriously, to believe that people can like her. And fancy, when it's a case of such a beautiful young man who's all ready to!"

"Yes, he's all ready to," Lady Greyswood conceded. "Of course it's a question for your own discretion. I can't advise you, for you know your child. But it seems to me a case for tremendous caution."

"Oh, trust me for that!" said Mrs Kocker. "We shall be very kind to him," she smiled, as her visitor got up.

"He'll appreciate that. But it's too nice of you to leave it so."

Mrs Kocker gave a hopeful shrug. "He has only to be civil to Blake!"

"Ah, he isn't a brute!" Lady Greyswood exclaimed, caressing her.

After this she passed a month of no little anxiety. She asked her son no question, and for two or three weeks he offered her no other information than to say two or three times that Miss Kocker really could ride; but she learned from her old friend everything she wanted to know. Immediately after the conference of the two ladies

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Maurice, in the Row, had taken an opportunity of making up to the girl. She rode every day with her father, and Maurice rode, though possessed of nothing in life to put a leg across; and he had been so well received that this proved the beginning of a custom. He had a canter with the young lady most days in the week, and when they parted it was usually to meet again in the evening. His relations with the household in Ennismore Gardens were indeed not left greatly to his initiative; he became on the spot the subject of perpetual invitations and arrangements, the centre of the friendliest manœuvres; so that Lady Greyswood was struck with Jane Knocker's feverish energy in the good cause — the ingenuity, the bribery, the cunning that an exemplary mother might be inspired to practise. She herself did nothing, she left it all to poor Jane, and this perhaps gave her for the moment a sense of contemplative superiority. She wondered if *she* would in any circumstances have plotted so almost fiercely for one of her children. She was glad her old friend's design had her full approbation; she held her breath a little when she said to herself: 'Suppose I hadn't liked it — suppose it had been for Chumleigh!' Chumleigh was the present Lord Greyswood, whom his mother still called by his earlier designation. Fanny Knocker's thirty thousand would have been by no means enough for Chumleigh. Lady Greyswood, in spite of her suspense, was detached enough to be amused when her accomplice told her that 'Blake' had said that Maurice really could ride. The two mothers thanked God for the riding — the riding would see them through. Lady Greyswood had watched Fanny narrowly in the Park, where, in the saddle, she looked no worse than lots of girls. She had no idea how Maurice got his mounts — she knew Chumleigh had none to give him; but there were directions in which she would have encouraged him to incur almost any liability. He was evidently amused and beguiled; he fell into comfortable attitudes on the soft cushions that were laid for him and partook with relish of the dainties that were served; he had his fill of the theatres, of the opera — entertainments of which he was fond. She could see he didn't care for the sort of people he met in Ennismore Gardens, but this didn't matter: so much as that she didn't ask of him. She knew that when he should have something to tell her he would speak; and meanwhile she pretended to be a thousand miles away. The only thing that worried her was that he had dropped photography. She said to Mrs Knocker more than once: "Does he make love? — that's what I want to know!" to which this lady replied with her incongruous drollery: "My dear, how can I make out? He's so little like Blake!" But she added that she believed Fanny was intensely happy. Lady Greyswood had been struck with the girl's looking so, and she rejoiced to be able to declare in perfectly good faith that she thought her greatly improved. "Didn't I tell you?" returned Mrs Knocker to this with a certain accent of triumph. It made Lady Greyswood nervous, for she took it to mean that Fanny had had a hint from her mother of Maurice's possible intentions. She was afraid to ask her old friend directly if this were definitely true: poor Fanny's improvement was after all not a gain sufficient to make up for the cruelty that would reside in the sense of being rejected.

One day, in Queen Street, Maurice said in an abrupt, conscientious way: "You were right about Fanny Knocker — she's a remarkably clever and a thoroughly nice girl; a fellow can really talk with her. But oh mother!"

"Well, my dear?"

The young man's face wore a strange smile. "Oh mother!" he expressively, quite tragically repeated. "But it's all right!" he presently added in a different tone, and Lady Greyswood was reassured. This confidence, however, received a shock a little later, on the evening of a day that had been intensely hot. A torrid wave had passed over London, and in the suffocating air the pleasures of the season had put on a purple face. Lady Greyswood, whose own fine lowness of tone no temperature could affect, knew, in her bedimmed drawing-room, exactly the detail of her son's engagements. She pitied him — *she* had managed to keep clear; she had in particular a vision of a distribution of prizes, by one of the princesses, at a big horticultural show; she saw the sweltering starers (and at what, after all?) under a huge glass roof, while there passed before her, in a blur of crimson, the glimpse of uncomfortable cheeks under an erratic white bonnet, together also with the sense that some of Jane Knocker's ideas of pleasure were of the oddest (she had such *lacunes*), and some of the ordeals to which she exposed poor Fanny singularly ill-chosen. Maurice came in, perspiring but pale (nothing could make *him* ugly!) to dress for dinner, and though he was in a great hurry he found time to pant: "Oh mother, what I'm going through for you!"

"Do you mean rushing about so — in this weather? We shall have a change to-night."

"I hope so! There are people for whom it doesn't do at all; ah, not a bit!" said Maurice with a laugh that she didn't fancy. But he went upstairs before she could think of anything to reply, and after he had dressed he passed out without speaking to her again. The next morning, on entering her room, her maid mentioned as a delicate duty

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that Mr Glanvil, whose door stood wide open and whose bed was untouched, had apparently not yet come in. While, however, her ladyship was in the first freshness of meditation on this singular fact the morning's letters were brought up, and as it happened that the second envelope she glanced at was addressed in Maurice's hand she was quickly in possession of an explanation still more startling than his absence. He wrote from a club, at nine o'clock the previous evening, to announce that he was taking the night train for the continent. He hadn't dressed for dinner, he had dressed otherwise, and having stuffed a few things with surreptitious haste into a Gladstone bag, had slipped unperceived out of the house and into a hansom. He had sent to Ennismore Gardens, from his club, an apology — a request he should not be waited for; and now he should just have time to get to Charing Cross. He was off he didn't know where, but he was off he did know why. 'You'll know why, dear mother too, I think,' this wonderful communication continued; 'you'll know why, because I haven't deceived you. I've done what I could, but I've broken down. I felt to-day that it was no use; there was a moment, at that beastly exhibition, when I saw it, when the question was settled. The truth rolled over me in a stifling wave. After that I made up my mind there was nothing to do but to bolt. I meant to put it off till to-morrow, and to tell you first, but while I was dressing to-day it struck me irresistibly that my true course is to break now — never to enter the house or go near her again. I was afraid of a scene with you about this. I haven't uttered a word of 'love' to her (heaven save us!) but my position this afternoon became definitely false, and that fact prescribes the course I am taking. You shall hear from me again in a day or two. I have the greatest regard for her, but I can't bear to look at her. I don't care a bit for money, but, hang it, I *must* have beauty! Please send me twenty pounds, *poste restante*, Boulogne.'

"What I want, Jane, is to get at *this*," Lady Greyswood said, later in the day, with an austerity that was sensible even through her tears. "Does the child know, or doesn't she, what was at stake?"

"She hasn't an inkling of it — how should she? I recognised that it was best not to tell her — and I didn't."

On this, as Mrs Knocker's tears had also flowed, Lady Greyswood kissed her. But she didn't believe her. Fanny herself, however, for the rest of the season, proved inscrutable. "She's a character!" Lady Greyswood reflected with admiration. In September, in Yorkshire, the girl was taken seriously ill.

After luncheon at the Crisfords' — the big Sunday banquets of twenty people and a dozen courses — the men, lingering a little in the dining-room, dawdling among displaced chairs and dropped napkins while the ladies rustled away, ended by shuffling in casual pairs up to the studio, where coffee was served and where, presently, before the cigarettes were smoked out, Mrs Crisford always reappeared to usher in her contingent. The studio was high and handsome, and luncheon at the Crisfords' was, in the common esteem, more amusing than almost anything else in London except dinner. It was Bohemia with excellent service — Bohemia not debtor but creditor. Upstairs the pictures, finished or nearly finished, and arranged in a shining row, gave an obviousness of topic, so that conversation could easily touch bottom. Maurice Glanvil, who had never been in the house before, looked about and wondered; he was struck with the march of civilization — the rise of the social tide. There were new notes in English life, which he caught quickly with his fresh sense; during his long absence — twenty years of France and Italy — all sorts of things had happened. In his youth, in England, artists and authors and actors — people of that general kind — were not nearly so 'smart'. Maurice Glanvil was forty-nine to-day, and he thought a great deal of his youth. He regretted it, he missed it, he tried to beckon it back; but the differences in London made him feel that it had gone forever. There might perhaps be some sudden compensation in being fifty, some turn of the dim telescope, some view from the brow of the hill; it was a round, gross, stupid number, which probably would make one pompous, make one think one's self venerable. Meanwhile at any rate it was odious to be forty-nine. Maurice observed the young now more than he had ever done; observed them, that is, as the young. He wished he could have had a son, to be twenty with again; his daughter was only eighteen, but fond as he was of her he couldn't live instinctively into her girliness. It was not that there was not plenty of it, for she was simple, sweet, indefinite, without the gifts that the boy would have had, the gifts — what had become of them now? — that he himself used to have.

The youngest person present, before the ladies came in, was the young man who had sat next to Vera and whom, being on the same side of the long table, he had not had under his eye. Maurice noticed him now, noticed that he was very good-looking, fair and fresh and clean, impeccable in his straight smoothness; also that apparently knowing none of the other guests and moving by himself about the studio with visible interest in the charming things, he had the modesty of his age and of his position. He had however something more besides, which had begun to prompt this observer to speak to him in order to hear the sound of his voice — a strange, elusive resemblance, lost in the profile but flickering straight out of the full face, to someone Maurice had known. For a minute Glanvil was worried by it — he had a sense that a name would suddenly come to him if he should see the lips in motion; but as he was on the point of laying the ghost by an experiment Mrs Crisford led in her companions. His daughter was among them, and in company, as he was constantly anxious about her appearance and her attitude, she had at moments the faculty of drawing his attention from everything else. The poor child, the only fruit of his odd, romantic union, the *coup de foudre* of his youth, with her strangely beautiful mother, whose own mother had been a Russian and who had died in giving birth to her — his short, colourless, insignificant Vera was excessively, incorrigibly plain. She had been the disappointment of his life, but he greatly pitied her. Her want of beauty, with her antecedents, had been one of the strangest tricks of fate; she was acutely conscious of it and, being good and docile, would have liked to please. She did sometimes, to her father's delight, in spite of everything; she had been educated abroad, on foreign lines, near her mother's people. He had brought her to England to take her out, to do what he could for her; but he was not unaware that in England her manners, which had been thought very pretty on the continent, would strike some persons as artificial. They were exactly what her mother's had been; they made up to a certain extent for the want of other resemblance. An extreme solicitude at any rate as to the impression they might make was the source of his habit, in London, of watching her covertly. He tried to see at a given moment how she looked, if she were happy; it was always with an intention of encouragement, and there was a frequent exchange between them of little invisible affectionate signs. She wore charming clothes, but she was terribly short; in England the girls were gigantic and it was only the tallest who were noticed. Their manners, alas, had nothing to do with it — many of them indeed hadn't any manners. As soon

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as he had got near Vera he said to her, scanning her through his single glass from head to foot:

"Who is the young man who sat next you? the one at the other end of the room."

"I don't know his name, papa — I didn't catch it."

"Was he civil — did he talk to you?"

"Oh, a great deal, papa — about all sorts of things."

Something in the tone of her voice made him look with greater intensity and even with greater tenderness than usual into her little dim green eyes. "Then you're all right — you're getting on?"

She gave her effusive smile — the one that perhaps wouldn't do in England. "Oh beautifully, papa — everyone's so kind."

She never complained, was a brave little optimist, full of sweet resources; but he had detected to-day as soon as he looked at her the particular shade of her content. It made him continue, after an hesitation: "He didn't say anything about his relations — anything that could give you a clue?"

Vera thought a moment. "Not that I can remember — unless that Mr Crisford is painting the portrait of his mother. Ah, there it is!" the girl exclaimed, looking across the room at a large picture on an easel, which the young man had just approached and from which their host had removed the drapery that covered it. Maurice Glanvil had observed this drapery, and as the artist unveiled the canvas with a flourish he saw that he had been waiting for the ladies to show it, to produce a surprise, a grand effect. Everyone moved toward it, and Maurice, with his daughter beside him, recognised that the production, a portrait, was striking, a great success for Crisford — the figure, down to the knees, with an extraordinary look of life, of a tall, handsome woman of middle age, in full dress, in black. Yet he saw it for the moment vaguely, through a preoccupation, that of a discovery which he had just made and which had recalled to him an incident of his youth — his juxtaposition, in London, at a dinner, to a girl, insurmountably charmless to him, who had fallen in love with him (so that she was nearly to die of it), within the first five minutes, before he had even spoken; as he had subsequently learned from a communication made him by his poor mother — a reminder uttered with a pointless bitterness that he had failed to understand and accompanied with unsuspected details, much later — too late, long after his marriage and shortly before her death. He said to himself that he must look out, and he wondered if poor Vera would also be insurmountably charmless to the good-looking young man. "But what a likeness, papa — what a likeness!" he heard her murmur at his elbow with suppressed excitement.

"How can you tell, my dear, if you haven't seen her?"

"I mean to the gentleman — the son."

Everyone was exclaiming "How wonderfully clever — how beautiful!" and under cover of the agitation and applause Maurice Glanvil had drawn nearer the picture. The movement had brought him close to the young man of whom he had been talking with Vera and who, with his happy eyes on the painted figure, seemed to smile in acknowledgment of the artist's talent and of the sitter's charm.

"Do you know who the lady is?" Maurice said to him.

He turned his bright face to his interlocutor. "She's my mother — Mrs Tregent. Isn't it wonderful?"

His eyes, his lips, his voice flashed a light into Glanvil's uncertainty — the tormenting resemblance was simply a prolonged echo of Fanny Knocker, in whose later name, precisely, he recognised the name pronounced by the young man. Maurice Glanvil stared in some bewilderment; this stately, splendid lady, with a face so vivid that it was handsome, was what that unfortunate girl had become? The eyes, as if they picked him out, looked at him strangely from the canvas; the face, with all its difference, asserted itself, and he felt himself turning as red as if he had been in the presence of the original. Young Tregent, pleased and proud, had given way to the pressing spectators, placing himself at Vera's other side; and Maurice heard the girl exclaim to him in one of her pretty effusions: "How beautiful she must be, and how amiable!"

"She is indeed — it's not a bit flattered." And while Maurice still stared, more and more mystified — for 'flattered, flattered!' was the unspoken solution in which he had instantly taken refuge — his neighbour continued: "I wish you could know her — you must; she's delightful. She couldn't come here to-day — they asked her: she has people lunching at home."

"I should be so glad; perhaps we may meet her somewhere," said Vera.

"If I ask her and if you'll let her I'm sure she'll come to see you," the young man responded. Maurice had

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glanced at him while the face of the portrait watched them with the oddest, the grimmest effect. He was filled with a confusion of feelings, asking himself half-a-dozen questions at once. Was young Tregent, with his attentive manner, 'making up' to Vera? was he going out of his way in answering for his mother's civility? Little did he know what he was taking on himself! Above all was Fanny Knocker to-day this extraordinary figure — extraordinary in the light of the early plainness that had made him bolt? He became conscious of an extreme curiosity, an irresistible desire to see her.

"Oh, papa," said Vera, "Mr Tregent's so kind; he's so good as to promise us a visit from his mother."

The young man's friendly eyes were still on the child's face. "I'll tell her all about you. Oh, if I ask her she'll come!" he repeated.

"Does she do everything you ask her?" the girl inquired.

"She likes to know my friends!"

Maurice hesitated, wondering if he were in the presence of a smooth young humbug to whom compliments cost nothing, or in that of an impression really made — made by his little fluttered, unpopular Vera. He had a horror of exposing his child to risks, but his curiosity was greater than his caution. "Your mother mustn't come to us — it's our duty to go to her," he said to Mr Tregent; "I had the honour of knowing her — a long time ago. Her mother and mine were intimate friends. Be so good as to mention my name to her, that of Maurice Glanvil, and to tell her how glad I have been to make your acquaintance. And now, my dear child," he added to Vera, "we must take leave."

During the rest of that day it never occurred to him that there might be an awkwardness in his presenting himself, even after many years, before a person with whom he had broken as he had broken with Fanny Knocker. This was partly because he held, justly enough, that he had never committed himself, and partly because the intensity of his desire to measure with his own eyes the change represented — misrepresented perhaps — by the picture was a force greater than any embarrassment. His mother had told him that the poor girl had cruelly suffered, but there was no present intensity in that idea. With her expensive portrait, her grand air, her handsome son, she somehow embodied success, whereas he himself, standing for mere bereavement and disappointment, was a failure not to be surpassed. With Vera that evening he was very silent; she saw him smoke endless cigarettes and wondered what he was thinking of. She guessed indeed, but she was too subtle a little person to attempt to fall in with his thoughts or to be willing to betray her own by asking him random questions about Mrs Tregent. She had expressed as they came away from their luncheon-party a natural surprise at the coincidence of his having known the mother of her amusing neighbour, but the only other words that dropped from her on the subject were contained in a question that, before she went to bed, she put to him with abrupt gaiety, while she carefully placed a marker in a book she had not been reading.

"When is it then that we're to call upon this wonderful old friend?"

He looked at her through the smoke of his cigarette. "I don't know. We must wait a little, to allow her time to give some sign."

"Oh, I see!" And Vera took leave of him with one of her sincere little kisses.

He had not long to wait for the sign from Mrs Tregent; it arrived the very next morning in the shape of an invitation to dinner. This invitation was immediately accepted, but a fortnight was still to intervene — a trial to Maurice Glanvil's patience. The promptitude of the demonstration gave him pleasure — it showed him no bitterness had survived. What place was there indeed for resentment, since she had married and given birth to children and thought so well of the face God had conferred on her as to wish to hand it on to her posterity? Her husband was in Parliament, or had been — that came back to him from his mother's story. He caught himself reverting to her with a frequency that surprised him; he was haunted by the image of that bright, strong woman on Crisford's canvas, in whom there was just enough of Fanny Knocker to put a sort of defiance into the difference. He wanted to see it again, and his opportunity was at hand in the form of a visit to Mrs Crisford. He called on this lady, without his daughter, four days after he had lunched with her, and, finding her at home, he presently led the conversation to the portrait and to his ardent desire for another glimpse of it. Mrs Crisford gratified this eagerness — perhaps he struck her as a possible sitter; it was late in the afternoon and her husband was out: she led him into the studio. Mrs Tregent, splendid and serene, stood there as if she had been watching for him. There was no doubt the picture was a masterpiece. Maurice had mentioned that he had known the original years before and then had lost sight of her. He questioned his hostess with artful detachment.

"What sort of a person has she become — agreeable, popular?"

"Everyone adores her — she's so clever."

"Really — remarkably?"

"Extraordinarily — one of the cleverest women I've ever known, and quite one of the most charming."

Maurice looked at the portrait — at the super-subtle smile which seemed to tell him Mrs Tregent knew they were talking about her; a kind of smile he had never expected to live to see in Fanny Knocker's eyes. Then he asked: "Has she literally become as handsome as that?"

Mrs Crisford hesitated. "She's beautiful."

"Beautiful?" Maurice echoed.

"What shall I say? It's a peculiar charm! It's her spirit. One sees that her life has been beautiful in spite of her sorrows!" Mrs Crisford added.

"What sorrows has she had?" Maurice coloured a little as soon as he had spoken.

"Oh, lots of deaths. She has lost her husband; she has lost several children."

"Ah, that's new to me. Was her marriage happy?"

"It must have been for Mr Tregent. If it wasn't for her, no one ever knew."

"But she has a son," said Maurice.

"Yes, the only one — such a dear. She thinks all the world of him."

At this moment a message was brought to Mrs Crisford, and she asked to be excused while she went to say a word to someone who was waiting. Maurice Glanvil in this way was left alone for five minutes with the intensity of the presence evoked by the artist. He found himself agitated, excited by it: the face of the portrait was so intelligent and conscious that as he stood there he felt as if some strange communication had taken place between his being and Mrs Tregent's. The idea made him nervous: he moved about the room and ended, by turning his back. Mrs Crisford reappeared, but he soon took leave of her; and when he had got home (he had settled himself in South Kensington, in a little indiscriminated house which he had hated from the first), he learned from his daughter that she had had a visit from young Tregent. He had asked first for Mr Glanvil and then, in the second instance, for herself, telling her when admitted, as if to attenuate his possible indiscretion, that his mother had charged him to try to see her even if he should not find her father. Vera had never before received a gentleman alone, and the incident had left traces of emotion. 'Poor little thing!' Maurice said to himself: he always took a melancholy view of any happiness of his daughter's, tending to believe, in his pessimism, that it could only lead to some refinement of humiliation. He encouraged her however to talk about young Tregent, who, according to her

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account, had been extravagantly amusing. He had said moreover that his mother was tremendously impatient to renew such an old acquaintance. 'Why in the world doesn't she, then?' Maurice asked himself; 'why doesn't she come and see Vera?' He reflected afterwards that such an expectation was unreasonable, but it represented at the moment a kind of rebellion of his conscience. Then, as he had begun to be a little ashamed of his curiosity, he liked to think that Mrs Tregent would have quite as much. On the morrow he knocked at her door — she lived in a 'commodious' house in Manchester Square — and had the satisfaction, as he had chosen his time carefully, of learning that she had just come in.

Upstairs, in a high, quiet, old-fashioned drawing-room, she was before him. What he saw was a tall woman in black, in her bonnet, with a white face, smiling intensely — smiling and smiling before she spoke. He quickly perceived that she was agitated and was making an heroic effort, which would presently be successful, not to show it. But it was above all clear to him that she wasn't Fanny Knocker — was simply another person altogether. She had nothing in common with Fanny Knocker — it was impossible to meet her on the ground of any former acquaintance. What acquaintance had he ever had with this graceful, harmonious, expressive English matron, whose smile had a singular radiance? That rascal of a Crisford had done her such perfect justice that he felt as if he had before him the portrait of which the image in the studio had been the original. There were nevertheless things to be said, and they said them on either side, sinking together, with friendly exclamations and exaggerated laughs, on the sofa, where her nearness seemed the span of all the distance that separated her from the past. The phrase that hummed through everything, to his sense, was his own inarticulate 'How could I have known? how could I have known?' How could he have foreseen that time and life and happiness (it was probably more than anything happiness), would transpose her into such a different key? Her whole personality revealed itself from moment to moment as something so agreeable that even after all these years he felt himself blushing for the crass stupidity of his mistake. Yes, he was turning red, and she could see it and would know why: a perception that could only constitute for her a magnificent triumph, a revenge. All his natural and acquired coolness, his experience of life, his habit of society, everything that contributed to make him a man of the world, were of no avail to cover his confusion. He took refuge from it almost angrily in trying to prove to himself that she had on a second look a likeness to the ugly girl he had not thought good enough — in trying to trace Fanny Knocker in her fair, ripe bloom, the fine irregularity of her features. To put his finger on the identity would make him feel better. Some of the facts of the girl's crooked face were still there — conventional beauty was absent; but the proportions and relations had changed, and the expression and the spirit: she had accepted herself or ceased to care — had found oblivion and activity and appreciation. What Maurice mainly discovered however in this intenser observation was an attitude of hospitality toward himself which immediately effaced the presumption of 'triumph'. Vulgar vanity was far from her, and the grossness of watching her effect upon him: she was watching only the lost vision that had come back, the joy that, if for a single hour, she had found again. She herself had no measure of the alteration that struck him, and there was no substitution for her in the face that her deep eyes seemed to brush with their hovering. Presently they were talking like old friends, and before long each was in possession of the principal facts concerning the other. Many things had come and gone and the common fate had pressed them hard. Her parents were dead, and her husband and her first-born children. He, on his side, had lost his mother and his wife. They matched bereavements and compared bruises, and in the way she expressed herself there was a charm which forced him, as he wondered, to remember that Fanny Knocker had at least been intelligent.

"I wish I could have seen your wife — you must tell me all about her," she said. "Haven't you some portraits?"

"Some poor little photographs. I'll show them to you. She was very pretty and very gentle; she was also very un-English. But she only lived a year. She wasn't clever an accomplished — like you."

"Ah, me; you don't know *me!*"

"No, but I want to — oh particularly. I'm prepared to give a good deal of time to the study."

"We must be friends," said Mrs Tregent. "I shall take an extraordinary interest in your daughter."

"She'll be grateful for it. She's a good little reasonable thing, without a scrap of beauty."

"You care greatly for that," said Mrs Tregent.

He hesitated a moment. "Don't you?"

She smiled at him with her basking candour. "I used to. That's my husband," she added, with an odd, though evidently accidental, inconsequence. She had reached out to a table for a photograph in a silver frame. "He was very good to me."

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Maurice saw that Mr Tregent had been many years older than his wife — a prosperous, prosaic, parliamentary person whom she couldn't impose on a man of the world. He sat an hour, and they talked of the mutilated season of their youth: he wondered at the things she remembered. In this little hour he felt his situation change — something strange and important take place: he seemed to see why he had come back to England. But there was an implication that worried him — it was in the very air, a reverberation of that old assurance of his mother's. He wished to clear the question up — it would matter for the beginning of a new friendship. Had she had any sense of injury when he took to his heels, any glimpse of the understanding on which he had begun to come to Ennismore Gardens? He couldn't find out to-day except by asking her, which, at their time of life, after so many years and consolations, would be legitimate and even amusing. When he took leave of her he held her hand a moment, hesitating; then he brought out:

"Did they ever tell you — a hundred years ago — that between your mother and mine there was a great question of our marrying?"

She stared — she broke into a laugh. "*Was there?*"

"Did you ever know it? Did you ever suspect it?"

She hesitated and, for the first time since he had been in the room, ceased for an instant to look straight at him. She only answered, still laughing however: "Poor dears — they were altogether too deep!"

She evidently wished to convey that she had never known. Maurice was a little disappointed: at present he would have preferred her knowledge. But as he walked home across the park, through Kensington Gardens, he felt it impossible to believe in her ignorance.

At the end of a month he broke out to her. "I can't get over it, it's so extraordinary — the difference between your youth and your maturity!"

"Did you expect me to be an eternal child?" Mrs Tregent asked composedly.

"No, it isn't that." He stopped — it would be difficult to explain.

"What is it then?" she inquired, with her systematic refusal to acknowledge a complication. There was always, to Maurice Glanvil's ear, in her impenetrability to allusion, the faintest, softest glee, and it gave her on this occasion the appearance of recognising his difficulty and being amused at it. She would be excusable to be a little cold-blooded. He really knew however that the penalty was all in his own reflections, for it had not taken him even a month to perceive that she was supremely, almost strangely indulgent. There was nothing he was ready to say that she might not hear, and her absence of coquetry was a remarkable rest to him.

"It isn't what I expected — it's what I didn't expect. To say exactly what I mean, it's the way you've improved."

"I've improved? I'm so glad!"

"Surely you've been aware of it — you've been conscious of the transformation."

"As an improvement? I don't know. I've been conscious of changes enough — of all the stages and strains and lessons of life. I've been aware of growing old, and I hold, in dissent from the usual belief, that there's no fool like a young fool. One is never, I suppose, such a fool as one *has* been, and that may count perhaps as amelioration. But I can't flatter myself that I've had two different identities. I've had to make one, such as it is, do for everything. I think I've been happier than I originally supposed I should be — and yet I had my happiness too as a girl. At all events if you were to scratch me, as they say, you'd still find—" She paused a moment, and he really hung upon her lips: there was such a charm of tone in whatever she said. "You'd still find, underneath, the blowsy girl—" With this she again checked herself and, slightly to his surprise, gave a nervous laugh.

"The blowsy girl?" he repeated, with an artlessness of interrogation that made her laugh again.

"Whom you went with that hot day to see the princess give the prizes."

"Oh yes — that dreadful day!" he answered gravely, musingly, with the whole scene pictured by her words and without contesting the manner in which she qualified herself. It was the nearest allusion that had passed between them to that crudest conception of his boyhood, his flight from Ennismore Gardens. Almost every day for a month he had come to see her, and they had talked of a thousand things; never yet however had they made any explicit mention of this remote instance of premature wisdom. Moreover if he now felt the need of going back it was not to be apologetic, to do penance; he had nothing to explain, for his behaviour, as he considered it, still struck him, given the circumstances, as natural. It was to himself indeed that explanations were owing, for he had been the one who had been most deceived. He liked Mrs Tregent better than he had ever liked a woman — that is he liked her for more reasons. He had liked his poor little wife only for one, which was after all no reason at all: he had been in love with her. In spite of the charm that the renewal of acquaintance with his old friend had so unexpectedly added to his life there was a vague torment in his relation with her, the sense of a revenge (oh a very kind one!) to take, a haunting idea that he couldn't pacify. He could still feel sore at the trick that had been played him. Even after a month the curiosity with which he had approached her was not assuaged; in a manner indeed it had only borrowed force from all she had insisted on doing for him. She was literally doing everything now; gently, gaily, with a touch so familiar that protestations on his part would have been pedantic, she had taken his life in hand. Rich as she was she had known how to give him lessons in economy; she had taught him how to manage in London on his means. A month ago his servants had been horrid — to-day they were the best he had ever known. For Vera she was plainly a providence — her behaviour to Vera was transcendent.

He had privately made up his mind that Vera had in truth had her *coup de foudre* — that if she had had a chance she would have laid down her little life for Arthur Tregent; yet two circumstances, he could perceive, had helped to postpone, to attenuate even somewhat, her full consciousness of what had befallen her. One of these

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influences had been the prompt departure of the young man from London; the other was simply the diversion produced by Mrs Tregent's encompassing art. It had had immediate consequences for the child: it was like a drama in perpetual climaxes. This surprising benefactress rejoiced in her society, took her 'out', treated her as if there were mysterious injustices to repair. Vera was agitated not a little by such a change in her life; she had English kindred enough, uncles and aunts and cousins; but she had felt herself lost in her father's family and was principally aware, among them, of their strangeness and their indifference. They affected her mainly as mere number and stature. Mrs Tregent's was a performance unpromised and uninterrupted, and the girl desired to know if all English people took so generous a view of friendship. Maurice laughed at this question and, without meeting his daughter's eyes, answered in the negative. Vera guessed so many things that he didn't know what she would be guessing next. He saw her caught up to the blue like Ganymede, and surrendered her contentedly. She had been the occupation of his life, yet to Mrs Tregent he was willing to part with her; this lady was the only person of whom he would not have been jealous. Even in the young man's absence moreover Vera lived with the son of the house and breathed his air; Manchester Square was full of him, his photograph was on every table. How often she spoke of him to his mother Maurice had no means of knowing, nor whether Mrs Tregent encouraged such a topic; he had reason to believe indeed that there were reserves on either side, and he felt that he could trust his old friend's prudence as much as her liberality. The attitude of forbearance from rash allusions, which was Maurice's own, could not at any rate keep Arthur from being a presence in the little drama which had begun for them all, as the older man was more and more to recognise with nervous prefigurements, on that occasion at the Crisfords'.

Arthur Tregent had gone to Ireland to spend a few weeks with an old university friend — the gentleman indeed, at Cambridge, had been his tutor — who had lately, in a district classified as 'disturbed', come into a bewildering heritage. He had chosen in short for a study of the agrarian question on the spot the moment of the year when London was most absorbing. Maurice Glanvil made no remark to his mother on this anomaly, and she offered him no explanation of it; they talked in fact of almost everything except Arthur. Mrs Tregent had to her constant visitor the air of feeling that she owed him in relation to her son an apology which she had not the materials for making. It was certainly a high standard of courtesy that would suggest to her that he ought to have put himself out for these social specimens; but it was obvious that her standard was high. Maurice Glanvil smiled when he thought to what bare civility the young man would have deemed himself held had he known of a certain passage of private history. But he knew nothing — Maurice was sure of that; his reason for going away had been quite another matter. That Vera's brooding parent should have had such an insight into the young man's motives is a proof of the amount of reflection that he devoted to him. He had not seen much of him and in truth he found him provoking, but he was haunted by the odd analogy of which he had had a glimpse on their first encounter. The late Mr Tregent had had 'interests in the north', and the care of them had naturally devolved upon his son, who by the mother's account had shown an admirable capacity for business. The late Mr Tregent had also been actively political, and it was fondly hoped, in Manchester Square at least, that the day was not distant when his heir would, in turn and as a representative of the same respectabilities, speak reported words in debate. Maurice himself, vague about the House of Commons, had nothing to say against his making a figure there. Accordingly if these natural gifts continued to remind him of his own fastidiously clever youth, it was with the difference that Arthur Tregent's cleverness struck him as much the greater of the two. If the changes in England were marked this indeed was in general one of them, that the sharp young men were still sharper than of yore. When they had ability at anyrate they showed it all; Maurice would never have pretended that he had shown all his. He had not cared whether anyone knew it. It was not however this superior intensity which provoked him, and poor young Tregent could not be held responsible for his irritation. If the circumstance in which they most resembled each other was the disposition to escape from plain girls who aspired to them, such a characteristic, as embodied in the object of Vera's admiration, was purely interesting, was even amusing, to Vera's father; but it would have gratified him to be able to ascertain from Mrs Tregent whether, to her knowledge, her son thought his child really repulsive, and what annoyed him was the fact that such an inquiry was practically impossible. Arthur was provoking in short because he had an advantage — an advantage residing in the fact that his mother's friend couldn't ask questions about him without appearing to indulge in hints and overtures. The idea of this officiousness was odious to Maurice Glanvil; so that he confined himself to meditating in silence on the happiness it would be for poor Vera to marry a beautiful young man with a fortune and a future.

Though the opportunity for this recreation — it engaged much of his time — should be counted as one of the

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pleasant results of his intimacy with Mrs Tregent, yet the sense, perverse enough, that he had a ground of complaint against her subsisted even to the point of finally steadying him while he expressed his grievance. This happened in the course of one of those afternoon hours that had now become indispensable to him — hours of belated tea and egotistical talk in the long summer light and the chastened roar of London.

"No, it wasn't fair," he said, "and I wasn't well used — a hundred years ago. I'm sore about it now; you ought to have notified me, to have instructed me. Why didn't you, in common honesty? Why didn't my poor mother, who was so eager and shrewd? Why didn't yours? She used to talk to me. Heaven forgive me for saying it, but our mothers weren't up to the mark! You may tell me they didn't know; to which I reply that mine was universally supposed, and by me in particular, to know everything that could be known. No, it wasn't well managed, and the consequence has been this odious discovery, an awful shock to a man of my time of life and under the effect of which I now speak to you, that for a quarter of a century I've been a fool."

"What would you have wished us to do?" Mrs Tregent asked as she gave him another cup of tea.

"Why, to have said 'Wait, wait — at any price; have patience and hold on!' They ought to have told me, *you* ought to have told me, that your conditions at that time were a temporary phase and that you would infallibly break your shell. You ought to have warned me, they ought to have warned me, that there would be wizardry in the case, that you were to be the subject, at a given moment, of a transformation absolutely miraculous. I couldn't know it by inspiration; I measured you by the common law — how could I do anything else? But it wasn't kind to leave me in error."

Maurice Glanvil treated himself without scruple to this fine ironic flight, this sophistry which eased his nerves, because though it brought him nearer than he had yet come to putting his finger, visibly to Mrs Tregent, on the fact that he had once tried to believe he could marry her and had found her too ugly, their present relation was so extraordinary and his present appreciation so liberal as to make almost any freedom excusable, especially as his companion had the advantage of being to all intents and purposes a different person from the one he talked of, while he suffered the ignominy of being the same.

"There has been no miracle," said Mrs Tregent after a moment. "I've never known anything but the common, ah the very common, law, and anything that I may have become only the common things have made me."

He shook his head. "You wore a disfiguring mask, a veil, a disguise. One fine day you dropped them all and showed the world the real creature."

"It wasn't one fine day — it was little by little."

"Well, one fine day I saw the result; the process doesn't matter. To arrive at a goal invisible from the starting-point is no doubt an incident in the life of a certain number of women. But what is absolutely unprecedented is to have traversed such a distance."

"Hadn't I a single redeeming point?" Mrs Tregent demanded.

He hesitated a little, and while he hesitated she looked at him. Her look was but of an instant, but it told him everything, told him, in one misty moonbeam, all she had known of old. She had known perfectly — she had been as conscious of the conditions of his experiment as of the invincibility of his repugnance. Whether her mother had betrayed him didn't matter; she had read everything clear and had had to accept the cruel truth. He was touched as he had never been by that moment's communication; he was, unexpectedly, almost awestruck, for there was something still more in it than he had guessed. "I was letting my fancy play just now," he answered, apologetically. "It was I who was wanting — it was I who was the idiot!"

"Don't say that. You were so kind." And hereupon Mrs Tregent startled her visitor by bursting into tears.

She recovered herself indeed, and they forbore on that occasion, in the interest of the decorum expected of persons of their age and in their circumstances, to rake over these smouldering ashes; but such a conversation had made a difference, and from that day onward Maurice Glanvil was awake to the fact that he had been the passion of this extraordinary woman's life. He felt humiliated for an hour, but after that his pleasure was almost as great as his wonder. For wonder there was plenty of room, but little by little he saw how things had come to pass. She was not subjected to the ordeal of telling him or to the abasement of any confession, but day by day he sounded, with a purity of gratitude that renewed, in his spirit, the sources of youth, the depths of everything that her behaviour implied. Of such a studied tenderness as she showed him the roots could only be in some unspeakably sacred past. She had not to explain, she had not to clear up inconsistencies, she had only to let him be with her. She had striven, she had accepted, she had conformed, but she had thought of him every day of her life. She had taken up

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duties and performed them, she had banished every weakness and practised every virtue, but the still, hidden flame had never been quenched. His image had interposed, his reality had remained, and she had never denied herself the sweetness of hoping that she should see him again and that she should know him. She had never raised a little finger for it, but fortune had answered her prayer. Women were capable of these mysteries of sentiment, these intensities of fidelity, and there were moments in which Maurice Glanvil's heart beat strangely before a vision really so sublime. He seemed to understand now by what miracle Fanny Knocker had been beautified — the miracle of heroic docilities and accepted pangs and vanquished egotisms. It had never come in a night, but it had come by living for others. She was living for others still; it was impossible for him to see anything else at last than that she was living for him. The time of passion was over, but the time of service was long. When all this became vivid to him he felt that he couldn't recognise it enough and yet that recognition might only be tacit and, as it were, circuitous. He couldn't say to her even humorously 'It's very kind of you to be in love with such a donkey,' for these words would have implied somehow that he had rights — an attitude from which his renovated delicacy shrank. He bowed his head before such charity and seemed to see moreover that Mrs Tregent's desire to befriend him was a feeling independent of any prospect of gain and indifferent to any chance of reward. It would be described vulgarly, after so much had come and gone, as the state of being 'in love' — the state of the instinctive and the simple, which they both had left far behind; so that there was a certain sort of reciprocity which would almost constitute an insult to it.

He soared on these high thoughts till, toward the end of July (Mrs Tregent stayed late in town — she was awaiting her son's return) he made the discovery that to some persons, perhaps indeed to many, he had all the air of being in love. This image was flashed back to him from the irreverent lips of a lady who knew and admired Mrs Tregent and who professed amusement at his surprise, at his artless declaration that he had no idea he had made himself conspicuous. She assured him that everyone was talking about him — though people after all had a tenderness for elderly romance; and she left him divided between the acute sense that he was comical (he had a horror of that) and the pale perception of something that he could 'help' still less. At the end of a few hours of reflection he had sacrificed the penalty to the privilege; he was about to be fifty, and he knew Fanny Knocker's age — no one better; but he cared no straw for vulgar judgments and moreover could think of plenty of examples of unions admired even after longer delays. For three days he enjoyed the luxury of admitting to himself without reserve how indispensable she had become to him; as the third drew to a close he was more nervous than really he had ever been in his life, for this was the evening on which, after many hindrances, Mrs Tregent had agreed to dine with him. He had planned the occasion for a month — he wanted to show her how well he had learned from her how to live on his income. Her occupations had always interposed — she was teaching him new lessons; but at last she gave him the joy of sitting at his table. At the evening's end he begged her to remain after the others, and he asked one of the ladies who had been present, and who was going to a pair of parties, to be so good as to take Vera away. This indeed had been arranged in advance, and when, in the discomposed drawing-room, of which the windows stood open to the summer night, he was alone with his old friend, he saw in her face that she knew it had been arranged. He saw more than this — that she knew what he was waiting to say and that if, after a visible reluctance, she had consented to come, it was in order to meet him, with whatever effort, on the ground he had chosen — meet him once and then leave it forever. This was why, without interrupting him, but before he had finished, putting out her hand to his own, with a strange clasp of refusal, she was ready to show him, in a woeful but beautiful headshake to which nothing could add, that it was impossible at this time of day for them to marry. She stayed only a moment, but in that moment he had to accept the knowledge that by as much as it might have been of old, by so much might it never be again. After she had gone he walked up and down the drawing-room half the night. He sent the servants to bed, he blew out the candles; the forsaken place was lighted only by the lamps in the street. He gave himself the motive of waiting for Vera to come back, but in reality he threshed about in the darkness because his cheeks had begun to burn. There was a sting for him in Mrs Tregent's refusal, and this sting was sharper even than the disappointment of his desire. It was a reproach to his delicacy; it made him feel as if he had been an ass for the second time. When she was young and free his faith had been too poor and his perceptions too dense; he had waited to show her that he only bargained for certainties and only recognised success. He dropped into a chair at last and sat there a long time, his elbows on his knees, his face in his hands, trying to cover up his humiliation, waiting for it to ebb. As the sounds of the night died away it began to come back to him that she had given him a promise to which a rich meaning could be attached. What was it that before going away she had said about Vera, in words he had been at the moment too disconcerted to take in? Little by little he reconstructed these words with comfort; finally, when after hearing a carriage stop at the door he hastily pulled himself together and went down to admit his daughter, the sight of the child on his threshold, as the brougham that had restored her drove away, brought them all back in their generosity.

"Have you danced?" he asked.

She hesitated. "A little, papa."

He knew what that meant — she had danced once. He followed her upstairs in silence; she had not wasted her time — she had had her humiliation. Ah, clearly she was too short! Yet on the landing above, where her bedroom candle stood, she tried to be gay with him, asking him about his own party and whether the people had stayed late.

"Mrs Tregent stayed after the others. She spoke very kindly of you."

The girl looked at her father with an anxiety that showed through her smile. "What did she say?"

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He hesitated, as Vera had done a moment before. "That you must be our compensation."

His daughter's eyes, still wondering, turned away. "What did she mean?"

"That it's all right, darling!" And he supplied the deficiencies of this explanation with a long kiss for good-night.

The next day he went to see Mrs Tregent, who wore the air of being glad to have something at once positive and pleasant to say. She announced immediately that Arthur was coming back.

"I congratulate you." Then, as they exchanged one of their looks of unreserved recognition, Maurice added: "Now it's for Vera and me to go."

"To go?"

"Without more delay. It's high time we should take ourselves off."

Mrs Tregent was silent a moment. "Where shall you go?"

"To our old haunts, abroad. We must see some of our old friends. We shall spend six months away."

"Then what becomes of *my* months?"

"Your months?"

"Those it's all arranged she's to spend at Blankley." Blankley was Mrs Tregent's house in Derbyshire, and she laughed as she went on: "Those that I spoke of last evening. Don't look as if we had never discussed it and settled it!"

"What shall I do without her?" Maurice Glanvil presently demanded.

"What will you do *with* her?" his hostess replied, with a world of triumphant meaning. He was not prepared to say, in the sense of her question, and he took refuge in remarking that he noted her avoidance of any suggestion that he too would be welcome in Derbyshire; which led her to continue, with unshrinking frankness: "Certainly, I don't want you a bit. Leave us alone."

"Is it safe?"

"Of course I can't absolutely answer for anything, but at least it will be safer than with *you*," said Mrs Tregent. Maurice Glanvil turned this over. "Does he dislike me?"

"What an idea!"

But the question had brought the colour to her face, and the sight of this, with her evasive answer, kindled in Maurice's heart a sudden relief, a delight almost, that was strange enough. Arthur was in opposition, plainly, and that was why he had so promptly quitted London, that was why Mrs Tregent had refused Mr Glanvil. The idea was an instant balm. "He'd be quite right, poor fellow!" Maurice declared. "I'll go abroad alone."

"Let me keep her six months," said Mrs Tregent. "I'll try it — I'll try it!"

"I wouldn't interfere for the world."

"It's an immense responsibility; but I should like so to succeed."

"She's an angel!" Maurice said.

"That's what gives me courage."

"But she mustn't dream of any plot," he added.

"For what do you take me?" Mrs Tregent exclaimed with a smile which lightened up for him intensely that far-away troubled past as to which she had originally baffled his inquiry.

The joy of perceiving in an aversion to himself a possible motive for Arthur's absence was so great in him that before he took leave of her he ventured to say to his old friend: "Does he like her at all?"

"He likes her very much."

Maurice remembered how much he had liked Fanny Knocker and been willing to admit it to his mother; but he presently observed: "Of course he can't think her in the least pretty."

"As you say, she's an angel," Mrs Tregent rejoined.

"She would pass for one better if she were a few inches taller."

"It doesn't matter," said Mrs Tregent.

"One must remember that in that respect, at her age, she won't change," Maurice pursued, wondering after he had spoken whether he had pressed upon the second pronoun.

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"No, she won't change. But she's a darling!" Mrs Tregent exclaimed; and it was in these meagre words, which were only half however of what passed between them, that an extraordinary offer was made and accepted. They were so ready to understand each other that no insistence and no professions now were necessary, and that Maurice Glanvil had not even broken into a murmur of gratitude at this quick revelation of his old friend's beautiful conception of a nobler remedy — the endeavour to place their union outside themselves, to make their children know the happiness they had missed. They had not needed to teach each other what they saw, what they guessed, what moved them with pity and hope, and there were transitions enough safely skipped in the simple conversation I have preserved. But what Mrs Tregent was ready to do for him filled Maurice Glanvil, for days after this, with an even greater wonder, and it seemed to him that not till then had she fully shown him that she had forgiven him.

Six months, however, proved much more than sufficient for her attempt to test the plasticity of her son. Maurice Glanvil went abroad, but was nervous and restless, wandering from place to place, revisiting old scenes and old friends, reverting, with a conscious, an even amused incongruity, and yet with an effect that was momentarily soothing, to places at which he had stayed with his wife, but feeling all the while that he was really staking his child's happiness. It only half reassured him to feel that Vera would never know what poor Fanny Knocker had been condemned to know, for the daily contact was cruel from the moment the issue was uncertain; and it only half helped him to reflect that she was not so plain as Fanny, for had not Arthur Tregent given him the impression that the young man of the present was intrinsically even more difficult to please than the young man of the past? The letters he received from Blankley conveyed no information about Arthur beyond the fact that he was at home; only once Vera mentioned that he was 'remarkably good' to her. Toward the end of November he found himself in Paris, submitting reluctantly to social accidents which put off from day to day his return to London, when, one morning in the Rue de Rivoli, he had to stop short to permit the passage of a vehicle which had emerged from the court of an hotel. It was an open cab — the day was mild and bright — with a small quantity of neat, leathery luggage, which Maurice vaguely recognised as English, stowed in the place beside the driver — luggage from which his eyes shifted straight to the occupant of the carriage, a young man with his face turned to the allurements of travel and the urbanity of farewell to bowing waiters still visible in it. The young man was so bright and so on his way, as it were, that Maurice, standing there to make room for him, felt for the instant that he too had taken a tip. The feeling became acute as he recognised that this humiliating obligation was to no less a person than Arthur Tregent. It was Arthur who was so much on his way — it was Arthur who was catching a train. He noticed his mother's friend as the cab passed into the street, and, with a quick demonstration, caused the driver to pull up. He jumped out, and under the arcade the two men met with every appearance of cordiality, but with conscious confusion. Each of them coloured perceptibly, and Maurice was angry with himself for blushing before a boy. Long afterwards he remembered how cold, and even how hard, was the handsome clearness of the young eyes that met his own in an artificial smile.

"You here? I thought you were at Blankley."

"I left Blankley yesterday; I'm on my way to Spain."

"To Spain? How charming!"

"To join a friend there — just for a month or two."

"Interesting country — well worth seeing. Your mother's all right?"

"Oh, yes, all right. And Miss Glanvil—" Arthur Tregent went on, cheerfully.

"Vera's all right?" interrupted Maurice, with a still gayer tone.

"Everyone, everything's all right!" Arthur laughed.

"Well, I mustn't keep you. *Bon voyage!*"

Maurice Glanvil, after the young man had driven on, flattered himself that in this brief interview he had suppressed every indication of surprise; but that evening he crossed the Channel, and on the morrow he went down to Blankley. 'To Spain — to Spain!' the words kept repeating themselves in his ears. He, when he had taken flight in a similar conjunction, had only got, for the time, as far as Boulogne; and he was reminded afresh of the progress of the species. When he was introduced into the drawing-room at Blankley — a chintzy, flowery, friendly expanse — Mrs Tregent rose before him alone and offered him a face that she had never shown before. She was white and she looked scared; she faltered in her movement to meet him.

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"I met Arthur in Paris, so I thought I might come."

Oh, yes; there was pain in her face, and a kind of fear of him that frightened her, but their hands found each other's hands while she replied: "He went off — I didn't know it."

"But you had a letter the next morning," Maurice said.

She stared. "How did you know that?"

"Who should know better than I? He wrote from London, explaining."

"I did what I could — I believed in it!" said Mrs Tregent. "He was charming, for a while."

"But he broke down. She's too short, eh?" Maurice asked.

"Don't laugh; she's ill."

"What's the matter with her?"

Mrs Tregent gave the visitor a look in which there was almost a reproach for the question. "She has had a chill; she's in bed. You must see her."

She took him upstairs and he saw his child. He remembered what his mother had told him of the grievous illness of Fanny Knocker. Poor little Vera lay there in the flush of a feverish cold which had come on the evening before. She grew worse from the effect of a complication, and for three days he was anxious about her; but even more than with his alarm he held his breath before the distress, the disappointment, the humility of his old friend. Up to this hour he had not fully measured the strength of her desire to do something for him, or the intensity of passion with which she had wished to do it in the particular way that had now broken down. She had counted on her influence with her son, on his affection and on the maternal art, and there was anguish in her compunction for her failure, for her false estimate of the possible. Maurice Glanvil reminded her in vain of the consoling fact that Vera had known nothing of any plan, and he guessed indeed the reason why this theory had no comfort. No one could be better aware than Fanny Tregent of how much girls knew who knew nothing. It was doubtless this same sad wisdom that kept her sombre when he expressed a confidence that his child would promptly recover. She herself had had a terrible fight — and yet with the physical victory, had she recovered? Her apprehension for Vera was justified, for the poor girl was destined finally to forfeit even the physical victory. She got better, she got up, she quitted Blankley, she quitted England with her father, but her health had failed and a year later it gave way. Overtaken in Rome by a second illness, she succumbed; unlike Fanny Knocker she was never to have her revenge.

THE END