

The Age of Innocence Book Notes

The Age of Innocence by Edith Wharton

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Author/Context

Edith Jones Wharton was born in 1862 into a wealthy New York family. She grew up in a house with an amazing library of six or seven hundred volumes. The Jones's wanted their daughter to be well-read in the European tradition of Shakespeare, Milton, and other major novelists and poets. Edith Jones, like many young women of her social station, did not attend school. Instead, governesses came to her home. They taught her not only the social skills necessary for the women of her class, but also encouraged her love of learning and books. Edith began writing early in life. She wrote her first novel at the age of eleven. As she grew up, she continued to write, even though New York society did not consider it a suitable occupation for a woman.

When Edith was twenty-three years old, nearing the age when unmarried women of her class were in danger of becoming spinsters, she married Edward (Teddy) Wharton, a man twelve years her senior. They led fashionable lives in New York society, and frequently vacationed in Newport, Rhode Island and Europe. Wharton, though, was unhappy in her marriage. She fell in love at least twice with men nearer her own age. During these hard times, she increasingly turned to writing for comfort.

In 1891, Wharton published her first story. She went on to write over forty-two books, including the bestselling *House of Mirth* (1905), *Ethan Frome* (1911), and *Summer* (1917). By the time she divorced Teddy Wharton in 1913, she could financially support herself with the income from her books. She moved to Paris, and continued to write.

Wharton won the Pulitzer Prize in 1921 for *The Age of Innocence*. Like many of her novels, it is set in the changing world of Wharton's post-Civil War New York society. The uneasy mixing of two different societies - the old, wealthy families who had ruled New York society for decades with the newer wealth that had sprung up from the war - is the source of many of her novels. *The Age of Innocence* is a historical novel, set in the 1870s New York of Wharton's childhood.

Wharton has emerged as a major early twentieth-century American author. Her novels shed light on the complicated world of upper class society - a world that few novelists of her time could probe with such accuracy and authority. She exposes in her writing many of the social hypocrisies that shaped America's rapidly changing upper class. Her importance, however, goes far beyond the upper-class society that she helped expose to the reading public. Wharton has influenced the imaginations of many other writers - her contemporaries as well as those she continues to inspire today. The scholar Adelaide R. Tintner writes, "we need to remember that Wharton's creative imagination operated as well in a literary context with her contemporaries. . . Within her literary context should be considered those writers who, after her death, inherited her legacy. The most interesting part of that legacy for current writers seems to have been her life and her 'figure.'"

Wharton died in Paris in 1937.

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Plot Summary

At a New York opera, a young lawyer named Newland Archer watches his fiancée, May Welland, from across the room. May is a well-bred young woman admired by upper-class New York society, and Archer is proud to have her as his fiancée. May's cousin, the Countess Ellen Olenska, joins her. Archer and the Countess knew each other as children before she had gone to Europe and married a Count. Now, she has returned to her family in New York amid scandalous rumors that she had divorced her husband and run off with his secretary.

Archer's male friends gossip about the Countess, and Archer is irritated by the scandal that Ellen is bringing upon his future family. In fact, he and May decide to announce their engagement earlier than planned in order to show May's family in a good light.

New York society does not know what to do with Ellen. On one hand, she is a member of one of the most powerful families. On the other hand, she is extremely eccentric and defies the rules of society in many ways. When Ellen's family decides to throw her a welcome party, almost no one attends - a sign of society's low opinion of her. When Ellen plans to get a divorce from her husband, it is too much for New York society to take. Archer's boss asks him to talk to Ellen in private, and to convince her not to go through with the divorce. Archer, wanting to stay out of the mess, reluctantly agrees.

As Archer learns more about Ellen's painful past and her miserable marriage to a husband she did not love, he feels closer to her. Ellen opens his eyes to the stifling New York society in which he has always lived. When she agrees to cancel the divorce, Archer is not completely relieved. He has begun to think more critically about society's view of acceptable marriages, and of divorce. More importantly, he thinks about Ellen long after he leaves her home.

They form a friendship, and Archer feels freer with Ellen than he does with anyone else, especially May. He even follows her to Skuytercliff, the vacation home of their family friends. Here, he realizes that he cares for Ellen as more than a future cousin. The thought scares him, and he escapes to St. Augustine, Florida, where May is vacationing with her parents. Archer tries unsuccessfully to convince May that they should have an earlier wedding. It is only after he returns to New York that he realizes that he truly loves Ellen, and wishes to be with her. Immediately after this realization, Ellen and Archer receive word that May and her mother have agreed to an earlier wedding (only a month away).

The wedding goes off perfectly, and May and Archer go to Europe on a traditional honeymoon tour. Ellen, by this time, has moved to Washington, D.C. Archer feels increasingly confined by May's traditional, narrow views of their social roles. But he puts his feeling for Ellen in the back of his mind, and tries to be a good husband.

Archer and May spend their second summer together at Newport, Rhode Island, the resort town where all the fashionable New York families vacation. Ellen, to Archer's

surprise, is here, too. Although they never see each other in Newport, his longing for Ellen comes back with renewed force. When he accidentally learns that Ellen will be in Boston, Archer immediately goes to see her.

In Boston, Archer learns that Ellen's husband is trying to get her to return. Ellen is very depressed, so Archer takes her on a steamboat ride. They passionately talk about their love for each other, and Ellen agrees to remain in America as long as Archer continues to love her. She returns to Washington, and Archer returns to New York with the understanding that they will love each other from a distance. He thinks about her constantly, even as he and May give off the appearance of a happy married life. May, though, has begun to sense the emptiness in Archer.

When a crisis hits May's grandmother, Mrs. Manson Mingott, Ellen is called to return. Archer picks her up from the train station, and they talk in the carriage about the impossibility of their love. Archer leaves feeling frustrated and hopeless. Although he is overjoyed when Ellen decides to stay in New York to take care of her grandmother, the situation is too difficult and complicated. Ellen finally offers a suggestion: she will spend one night with him, and then return to Europe to live with her husband.

Archer is torn, but finally decides that he will take the offer. A few days later, though, he learns that Ellen has suddenly decided to return to Europe without giving him any explanation. May tells Archer that Ellen made this decision after the two cousins had a talk one afternoon. May hosts a farewell party for Ellen, and Ellen treats Archer formally all evening, as though they had never shared deeper feelings for each other. After the guests leave, May tells Archer that she is pregnant. When Archer learns that May had told Ellen of the pregnancy even before she was certain, he understands the reason behind Ellen's sudden departure.

Twenty-six years later, May has died and their oldest son, Dallas, stands with Archer in front of Ellen's apartment. Archer and Ellen have not seen each other since the night of the farewell party. As he looks into her apartment, Archer is torn by memories of their love, and the knowledge that they have led separate lives since they parted. He realizes that Ellen is more real to him in his memories than in person. After much thought, Archer decides not to go inside with Dallas. He sits by himself until dark, then walks away.

Major Characters

Newland Archer: Newland Archer is the protagonist of the story -- a young, popular, successful lawyer. He lives with his mother and sister in an elegant New York home. Since childhood, his life has been shaped by the customs and expectations of upper class New York society. His engagement to May Welland is one in a string of accomplishments. In the beginning of the novel, he is proud and content to dream about a traditional marriage in which he will be the teacher and his wife, the student. When he meets Ellen Olenska, his life changes. Through his relationship with her -- first friendship, and then love -- he begins to question the values with which he was raised. He comes to see the inequalities between sexes in New York society and the shallowness of its social customs. Archer struggles to balance his commitment to May with his love for Ellen. He cannot find a place for their love in the intricate, judgmental web of New York society. As the novel progresses, Archer is increasingly willing to break the boundaries of acceptable behavior. He follows her first to Skuytercliff, then to Boston, and is finally willing to follow her to Europe. In the end, though, Archer finds that the only place for their love is in his memories.

Mrs. Manson Mingott: Mrs. Manson Mingott is the fat, feisty matriarch of the powerful Mingott family and the grandmother of Ellen and May. At several points in the novel, she exerts tremendous control and influence over her family. At Archer's request, she convinces May and Mrs. Welland to agree to an earlier wedding. She also controls a large amount of money. When the family is angry with Ellen, Mrs. Mingott withholds her allowance. Her niece, Regina Beaufort, turns to her in a time of financial trouble. Mrs. Mingott is a maverick in the polite world of New York society. At times, she pushes the boundaries of acceptable behavior. For instance, she receives guests in the ground floor of her house even though New York society associates the practice with prostitutes. Her decision to welcome Ellen is accompanied by skepticism, but she insists that the rest of the family support Ellen as well.

Mrs. Welland: Mrs. Welland, May's mother, has raised her daughter to be a proper society lady. May's lack of imagination and rigid views of appropriate and inappropriate behavior can be largely traced to her mother's influence. Mrs. Welland is a driving force behind May's commitment to a long engagement. Without her mother's influence, May might have agreed early on to Archer's request for an early wedding. After a couple years of marriage, Archer sees in Mrs. Welland the woman that May will become - solid, unimaginative, and dull.

May Welland: May Welland is Archer's fiancée and later, his wife. She has been raised to be a perfect wife and mother, and she follows all of society's customs perfectly. Most of the time, she seems to be the type of shallow, uninteresting young woman that New York society adores. When they are in St. Augustine, though, May gives Archer a rare glimpse into maturity and compassion that he had not known was in her. She offers to release him from their engagement so he can marry the woman he truly loves, thinking that he wants to be with Mrs. Rushworth, a married woman with whom he had recently finished an affair. When Archer assures her of his love only for her, May returns to her

usual, shallow self. May struggles to reconcile Archer's love of her cousin with the desire to appear happy in front of society, and to give the illusion that she and Archer have the perfect marriage expected of them. Her unhappiness brings out a manipulative side that Archer doesn't realize until too late. To drive Ellen away from Archer, May tells Ellen of her pregnancy even before she is certain of it. Yet there is still a level of compassion in May, even in the long, boring years of marriage after Ellen leaves. Archer learns after May's death that she had known of his continuing love for Ellen. May, as she lay dying, told Dallas that the children could always trust Archer because he had once given up the thing that meant the most to him to remain loyal to their marriage.

Ellen Olenska: Ellen Olenska is May's cousin and Mrs. Manson Mingott's granddaughter. She became a Countess through her marriage to Count Olenski, a European nobleman who never actually appears in the novel. At the time the story begins, Ellen has fled her unhappy marriage, lived in Venice with her husband's secretary, and has returned to her family in New York. Ellen is a free spirit who helps Archer to look beyond the narrow scope of New York society. She treats her maid, Nastasia, as an equal, even offering the girl her own cape before sending her outside on an errand. She goes to parties with disreputable people like Julius Beaufort and Mrs. Lemuel Struthers, and she invites Archer, the fiancée of her cousin, to visit her. Ellen suffers just as much as Archer from their impossible love, but she is willing to live in limbo as long as they can love each other from a safe distance. Ellen's love for Archer drives many of her important decisions -- the decision to drop her divorce, to stay in America, and the choice she offers him to sleep with him once and then to disappear from his life forever. Her love for Archer is complicated by her conscience and sense of responsibility to her family. When she learns of May's pregnancy, Ellen immediately decides to step out of the picture completely. She refuses Archer's attempts to follow her to Europe, and through this, allows her cousin to start her family with Archer, her husband.

New York Society: New York society is made up of the people from the powerful, wealthy families of the city. These people follow a strict, rigid code of social custom and behavior, and judge the people who do not follow the rules. Ellen has difficulties adapting to the behavior that society thinks is appropriate for a woman separated from her husband. New York society's judgment is clear; almost everyone refuses to attend a dinner party in honor of Ellen's return.

Minor Characters

Christine Nilsson: A famous singer who performs in an opera on the night of Archer and May's engagement. She sings in the same opera two years later.

Mrs. Lovell Mingott: May and Ellen's aunt, and the daughter-in-law of Mrs. Manson Mingott.

Lawrence Lefferts: A wealthy young man and a member of Archer's social circle. He is considered the expert on manners. Archer believes that Lefferts is behind New York society's rude refusal to attend the welcome dinner for Ellen. According to Archer,



Lefferts makes a big show of his morality every time that his wife, Mrs. Lefferts, suspects that he is having an affair.

Sillerton Jackson: The expert on the families that make up New York society. He knows who is related to whom, and the history of every important family. Mrs. Archer and Janey invite him over for dinner when they want to catch up on gossip.

Julius Beaufort: An arrogant banker who tries to have an affair with Ellen. He even follows her to Skuytercliff during the weekend that Archer goes to visit Ellen. His banking business eventually fails, and he leaves New York society in disgrace.

Regina Beaufort: Julius Beaufort's wife and Mrs. Manson Mingott's niece. She comes to Mrs. Mingott when her husband's bank fails to ask for a loan. Her visit causes Mrs. Mingott to have a stroke.

Janey Archer: Archer's dowdy, unmarried sister. She and her mother invite guests to dinner so they can gossip about New York society. Janey disapproves of Ellen.

Mrs. Archer: Archer's widowed mother. She doesn't get out to events often, but loves to hear about society. She and Janey strongly believe in the values of New York society. Like Janey, she views Ellen with suspicion.

Mrs. Lemuel Struthers: A woman on the fringes of New York society. She is treated with mistrust and scorn until Ellen befriends her. She eventually becomes popular; at the end of the novel, May thinks it appropriate to go to her parties.

Count Olenski: Ellen's husband. She fled with his secretary to escape the miserable marriage. At first, Count Olenski is content to let Ellen go. Later, though, he sends his secretary to America to ask Ellen to return.

Sophy Jackson: Sillerton Jackson's unmarried sister. She is a friend of Janey and Mrs. Archer.

Louisa and Henry van der Luyden: Cousins of the Archers, and the most powerful people in New York society. They only mingle with people when they are trying to save society. Mrs. Archer goes to the van der Luydens after New York society snubs Ellen. They invite her to a very exclusive party in honor of the Duke of Austry to show society that they support her.

Duke of Austry: A European Duke. He is the guest of honor at a dinner party thrown by the van der Luydens. Both Ellen and Archer find him dull.

Nastasia: Ellen's Italian maid. She invites Archer and the other guests to wait in Ellen's sitting room.

Mr. Letterblair: The senior partner of Archer's law firm. He gives Archer the responsibility of talking Ellen out of her plans to divorce the Count.

Mrs. Rushworth: The vain, foolish married woman with whom Archer had an affair before his engagement to May.

Ned Winsett: A journalist. He and Archer are friends, despite their different social circles. He is one of the only people with whom Archer feels that he can have a meaningful conversation. Ned Winsett challenges Archer to think of things outside of society.

Reggie Chivers: An important member of society. Archer spends a weekend at their country home on the Hudson River.

Marchioness Medora Manson: The aunt who took Ellen to Europe as a child. She now lives in Washington, where Ellen goes to take care of her. During a visit to New York, she tries to persuade Archer to convince Ellen that she should return to the Count. Beaufort's bank failure eventually ruins Mrs. Manson's fortune, and she moves back to Europe with Ellen.

Dr Agathon Carver: A friend (and possible love interest) of the Marchioness Manson. Archer meets him at Ellen's house.

Du Lac aunts: Archer's elderly aunts. They offer their country home to May and Archer for their honeymoon.

Mrs. Carfry: An English acquaintance of Janey and Mrs. Archer. She invites Archer and May to a dinner party while they are on their European wedding tour.

M. Rivière: The French tutor of Mrs. Carfry's nephew. He fascinates Archer with his life story and intellect. Later, Archer learns that he was Count Olenski's secretary and the man who helped Ellen escape her marriage. The count sends him to Boston to try to convince Ellen to return to Europe.

Emerson Sillerton: An unpopular, eccentric professor who spends his summers in Newport with the rest of society. He throws a party for the Blenker family that no one wants to attend.

Blenker family: The unpopular, socially inferior family with whom the Marchioness and Ellen stay while in Newport. They are the guests of honor at Emerson Sillerton's party.

Miss Blenker: The youngest daughter of the Blenker family. When Archer visits her empty family's house on the day of Sillerton's party, she is there. Archer briefly confuses her with Ellen, and she flirts with him. Through Miss Blenker, Archer learns that Ellen has gone to Boston.

Dallas Archer: May and Archer's eldest child. He takes his father on a trip to Europe. Through Dallas, Archer learns that May felt sorry for his empty heart after Ellen left.

Fanny Beaufort: Dallas Archer's fiancée and the daughter of Julius Beaufort and his second wife. She asks Dallas to visit Ellen while he and Archer are in Paris.

Objects/Places

opera: Archer goes to an opera on the night of his engagement. He meets Ellen there.

club box: The section of seats at the opera reserved for wealthy members of society. Archer usually sits in a box with other prominent young men. From his box, he can see into the club box of the Mingotts, where May and Ellen sit.

lilies-of-the-valley: The flowers that May brings to the opera on the night of her engagement. During their courtship, Archer sends May a bouquet of lilies-of-the-valley every day.

yellow roses: Archer twice sends yellow roses to Ellen after leaving her house.

Letterblair, Lamson, and Low: Archer's law firm. He unenthusiastically practices law because it's considered the appropriate career for a gentleman. When Ellen attempts to get a divorce, she contacts this firm.

Skuytercliff: The van dera Luydens' country home on the Hudson River. It's supposed to look like an Italian villa. Archer visits Ellen at Skuytercliff.

'The Shaughran': A play about love that reminds Archer of his relationship with Ellen.

St. Augustine: The city in Florida where the Wellands vacation. Archer goes there to find May when he becomes confused about his feelings for Ellen.

the Patroon's house: A little cottage on the Skuytercliff grounds. Ellen and Archer go there to talk about their feelings for each other. After the wedding, May and Archer spend their honeymoon here.

'House of Light': A book of sonnets by the Victorian British poet D. G. Rossetti. When Archer reads it, he sees Ellen in his imagination.

Newport: The town in Rhode Island where New York society spends the summers.

pink parasol: Archer finds it in the Blenkers' garden. He believes that it belongs to Ellen, and is surprised to learn that it belongs to the young, gawky Miss Blenker.

Art Museum: Where Archer and Ellen meet after Ellen decides to remain in New York. It is here that Ellen offers to sleep with Archer once, and then return to Europe.

steamboat : Archer and Ellen dine on a steamboat when he goes to Boston to find her. During their conversation on the steamboat, they decide that Ellen will stay in America as long as she and Archer continue to love each other.



May's carriage: When Mrs. Mingott suffers from a stroke, Archer picks up Ellen from the train station in May's carriage. On the way to Mrs. Mingott's house, they try to deal with the impossibility of their love.

'Faust': An opera based on a poem by the German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The poem is about a 16th century German doctor who traveled widely, performed magical feats, and died under mysterious circumstances. According to legend, he had sold his soul to the devil.

Quotes

Quote 1: "And he contemplated her own absorbed young face with a thrill of possessorship in which pride in his own masculine initiation was mingled with a tender reverence for her abysmal purity. 'We'll read *italics* Faust*italics* together . . . by the Italian lakes . . .' he thought, somewhat hazily confusing the scene of his projected honeymoon with the masterpieces of literature which it would be his manly privilege to reveal to his bride." Chapter 1, pg. 13

Quote 2: "'I didn't think the Mingott's would have tried it on.'" Chapter 1, pg. 16

Quote 3: "The persons of their world lived in an atmosphere of faint implications and pale delicacies, and the fact that he and she understood each other without a word seemed to the young man to bring them nearer than any explanation would have done." Chapter 2, pg. 14

Quote 4: "'I shall never let her see by the least sign that I am conscious of there being a shadow of a shade on poor Ellen Olenska's reputation.'" Chapter 3, pg. 27

Quote 5: "To the general relief the Countess Olenska was not present in her grandmother's drawing-room . . . it spared them the embarrassment of her presence, and the faint shadow that her unhappy past might seem to shed on their radiant future." Chapter 4, pg. 29

Quote 6: "'Women ought to be free - as free as we are,' he declared, making a discovery of which he was too irritated to measure the terrific consequences." Chapter 5, pg. 40

Quote 7: "That terrifying product of the social system he belonged to and believed in, the young girl who knew nothing and expected everything, looked back at him like a stranger through May Welland's familiar features; and once more it was borne in on him that marriage was not the safe anchorage he had been taught to think, but a voyage on uncharted seas." Chapter 6, pg. 41

Quote 8: "'It shows what Society has come to.'" Chapter 7, pg. 51

Quote 9: "But there was about her the mysterious authority of beauty, a sureness in the carriage of the head, the movement of the eyes, which, without being in the least theatrical, struck him as highly trained and full of a conscious power." Chapter 8, pg. 55-56

Quote 10: "The young man felt that his fate was sealed: for the rest of his life he would go up every evening between the cast-iron railings of that greenish-yellow doorstep, and pass through a Pompeian vestibule into a hall with a wainscoting of varnished yellow wood. But beyond that his imagination could not travel." Chapter 9, pg. 63

Quote 11: "He had never seen any as sun-golden before, and his first impulse was to send them to May instead of the lilies. But they did not look like her - there was something too rich, too strong, in their fiery beauty." Chapter 9, pg. 69

Quote 12: "What if, when he had bidden May Welland to open (her eyes,) they could only look out blankly at blankness?" Chapter 10, pg. 71

Quote 13: ". . . a haunting horror of doing the same thing every day at the same hour besieged his brain." Chapter 10, pg. 72

Quote 14: "A gentleman simply stayed at home and abstained. But you couldn't make a man like Winsett see that; and that was why the New York of literary clubs and exotic restaurants, though a first shake made it seem more of a kaleidoscope, turned out, in the end, to be a smaller box, with a more monotonous pattern, than the assembled atoms of Fifth Avenue." Chapter 14, pg. 104

Quote 15: "He took it up, and found himself plunged in an atmosphere unlike any he had ever breathed in books; so warm, so rich, and yet so ineffably tender, that it gave a new and haunting beauty to the most elementary of human passions. All through the night he pursued through those enchanting pages the vision of a woman who had the face of Ellen Olenska . . ." Chapter 15, pg. 114

Quote 16: "But in another moment she seemed to have descended from her womanly eminence to helpless and timorous girlhood . . . at his first word of reassurance, she had dropped back into the usual, as a too adventurous child takes refuge in its mother's arms." Chapter 16, pg. 123

Quote 17: "Perhaps that faculty of unawareness was what gave her eyes their transparency, and her face the look of representing a type rather than a person; as if she might have been chosen to pose for a Civic Virtue or a Greek goddess." Chapter 19, pg. 154

Quote 18: "There was no use in trying to emancipate a wife who had not the dimmest notion that she was not free; and he had long since discovered that May's only use of the liberty she supposed herself to possess would be to lay it on the altar of her wifely adoration." Chapter 20, pg. 159

Quote 19: "The longing was with him day and night, an incessant undefinable craving, like the sudden whim of a sick man for food and drink once tasted and long since forgotten. . . He simply felt that if he could carry away the vision of the spot of earth she walked on, and the way the sky and sea enclosed it, the rest of the world might seem less empty." Chapter 22, pg. 180

Quote 20: "His whole future seemed suddenly to be unrolled before him; and passing down its endless emptiness he saw the dwindling figure of a man to whom nothing was ever to happen." Chapter 22, pg. 183



Quote 21: "'What's the use? You gave me my first glimpse of a real life, and at the same moment you asked me to go on with a sham one.'" Chapter 24, pg. 194

Quote 22: "'I want - I want somehow to get away with you into a world where words like that - categories like that - won't exist. Where we shall be simply two human beings who love each other, who are the whole of life to each other; and nothing else on earth will matter.'

"She drew a deep sigh that ended in another laugh. 'Oh, my dear - where is that country? Have you ever been there? . . . I know so many who've tried to find it; and, believe me, they all got out by mistake at wayside stations: at places like Boulogne, or Pisa, or Monte Carlo - and it wasn't at all different from the old world they'd left, but only rather smaller and dingier and more promiscuous.'" Chapter 29, pg. 230

Quote 23: "She had spent her poetry and romance on their short courting: the function was exhausted because the need was past. Now she was simply ripening into a copy of her mother, and mysteriously, by the very process, trying to turn him into a Mr. Welland." Chapter 30, pg. 234

Quote 24: "This was her answer to his final appeal of the other day: if she would not take the extreme step he had urged, she had at last yielded to half-measures. He sank back into the thought with the involuntary relief of a man who has been ready to risk everything, and suddenly tastes the dangerous sweetness of security." Chapter 30, pg. 238

Quote 25: "The silent organization which held his little world together was determined to put itself on record as never for a moment having questioned the propriety of Madame Olenska's conduct, or the completeness of Archer's domestic felicity." Chapter 33, pg. 267

Quote 26: "'No; I wasn't sure then - but I told her I was. And you see I was right!' she exclaimed, her blue eyes wet with victory. Chapter 33, pg. 270

Quote 27: "During that time he had been living with his youthful memory of her; but she had doubtless had other and more tangible companionship. Perhaps too had kept her memory of him as something apart; but if she had, it must have been like a relic in a small dim chapel, where there was not time to pray every day . . . " Chapter 34, pg. 282

Quote 28: "His father smiled again. 'Say I'm old-fashioned: that's enough.'" Chapter 34, pg. 283

Topic Tracking: Marriage

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Chapter 1

Marriage 1: As he daydreams at the opera, Archer imagines a traditional type of marriage in which he will be a teacher and his wife, a student. Even his fantasy about their honeymoon is a traditional daydream about the classic Italian lakes by which he will introduce May to a classic piece of literature.

Chapter 2

Marriage 2: The men in the call-box view Ellen suspiciously. They have heard whispered rumors of the scandal that surrounds her: she had left her husband for another. She threatens the idea of a stable marriage with which they all were raised. Her independence frightens and horrifies them. Although Archer doesn't feel threatened by Ellen, he also looks down on her based on the scandalous rumors of her past, and he is embarrassed to see her sitting with his fiancée's family.

Chapter 3

Marriage 3: Archer and May both see their marriage as a tool to draw attention away from Ellen. They decide to announce their engagement earlier than a couple normally would. After the opera, all of society goes to the Beaufort's ball; May and Archer announce it there. Even though a ball is normally considered a rather crude and unrefined place to make such an important announcement, they want society to associate their family with this good news as soon as possible, to avoid any gossip about Ellen.

Chapter 4

Marriage 4: While his mother and Janey criticize Ellen over dinner, Archer finds himself defending her decision to escape her marriage to Count Olenski. He even tells Janey that he hopes Ellen will get a divorce. When Sillerton Jackson informs Archer that Ellen might have had an affair with her husband's secretary, Archer defends the marital freedom of women - something he has never done before. Archer is beginning to question the fairness of marriage as it is practiced in New York society.

Chapter 6

Marriage 5: Archer thinks about marriage after the gossip-filled dinner with his mother, sister, and Sillerton Jackson. He realizes that knowing Ellen has changed the traditional ideas about marriage with which he was raised (such as the rule that men must conceal their past romances from their wives).



Chapter 9

Marriage 6: When Archer visits Ellen for the first time, he has the opportunity to see a house unlike any other he has visited in New York. Ellen's exotic, unconventional sitting room makes him think about the house that he and May will own together. Archer begins to feel that his upcoming marriage will trap him in an elegant house for the rest of his life.

Chapter 11

Marriage 7: Ellen asks Letterblair, Lamson, and Low, attorneys-at-law (Archer's law firm) to handle her divorce suit. Archer's reluctance to persuade Ellen against it surprises Mr. Letterblair, who had assumed that Archer, like any sensible member of New York society, would be eager to prevent the scandal of divorce from falling on his future family. Archer, though, is too caught up with Ellen to really care about the negative reputation a divorce would bring upon his family.

Chapter 12

Marriage 8: As Ellen tells Archer of her painful, difficult marriage to Count Olenski, Archer finds himself sympathizing with her. He can now see the human side of the rumors behind her divorce; he can see what a disastrous marriage would be like through a woman's perspective.

Chapter 15

Marriage 9: When Archer follows Ellen to Skuytercliff, he realizes the depth of his romantic feelings for her. In her note to him, Ellen offers to give him an explanation for Julius Beaufort's surprise appearance at Skuytercliff. Archer chooses to ignore the note. He is frightened that his fascination with Ellen is affecting the way in which he thinks about May. Archer wants the safety of believing in his old, traditional ideas of marriage.

Chapter 18

Marriage 10: Archer visits Ellen after his trip to St. Augustine. For the first time, they fully realize (and admit to themselves) their love for each other. Once Archer comes to this realization, he is even willing to call off his wedding to May and publicly admit his love for Ellen.

Chapter 20

Marriage 11: During their wedding tour of Europe, Archer realizes that May truly was raised to act the part of the perfect New York society wife. At the beginning of the novel, he had harbored grand plans of opening her mind to the world. Now that he's married, he realizes that his plans would be wasted on May; she can't imagine any other type of marriage than the one they have. Archer has given up his radical plan, and is reconciling himself to living with society's traditional ideas about women and marriage.

Chapter 29

Marriage 12: At the Art Museum, Ellen and Archer try to find a solution to the problems that their love for each other has created. Archer is extremely frustrated with New York society's narrow definition of marriage, and feels completely trapped in his marriage to May. He wants to love Ellen, and be in a place where they can express their love for each other freely. His love for Ellen far outweighs any for his wife, but the consequences of leaving May for Ellen would be grave for both of their families.

Topic Tracking: Places

Chapter 1

Places 1: The opera house is a central gathering place for the people of upper class New York society. Here, in this classy, genteel building, they can see all of the people in one room; the call boxes offer an excellent vantage point from which to gossip. Ellen's entrance at the opera house sparks the social scandal that will be the basis for the novel.

Places 2: At the opera house, Archer daydreams about taking May on a honeymoon by the Italian lakes. This imagined Italian honeymoon is the kind of honeymoon that New York society considers proper. Archer's act of imagination takes him outside of the confining New York that makes up his world, and places him on a completely different continent.

Chapter 2

Places 3: The members of New York society consider Ellen exotic because she comes from Europe. At the opera, Ellen stands out in a striking blue dress that looks as though it might come from the Old World. Part of their distrust and dislike of her might come from the foreign appearance that surrounds her.

Chapter 14

Places 4: Ellen flees to Skuytercliff, the van der Luydens' country estate, to escape Julius Beaufort and the social pressures of New York. Here, in this rural area, she is able to relax. When Archer sees her, she looks vivid and cheerful - quite unlike the unhappy woman he had last seen in the city.

Chapter 15

Places 5: May's family takes a yearly vacation to St. Augustine, Florida, where the warm weather is thought to help Mr. Welland's poor health. Archer's confusion over his feelings for Ellen lead him to find May in St. Augustine. He leaves a bleak, wintry New York - which reflects his own bleakness and confusion - for the sunny orange groves of Florida.

Chapter 20

Places 6: Archer and May spend three months in Europe on a traditional wedding tour. To Archer, his experience in Europe brings no relief from his daily life in New York. Even in Europe, he cannot escape the confining social traditions of New York society; May insists on following all of society's conventions during their time abroad.

Chapter 21



Places 7: May and Archer spend their second summer in Newport, Rhode Island. The rest of New York society is also vacationing in this affluent, seaside town. Rather than finding a refreshing change from the confining social customs of the city, Archer finds all of the conventions are simply uprooted and transplanted to the Newport community. He sees Ellen there, but cannot bring himself to actually speak to her.

Chapter 23

Places 8: Ellen leaves Newport to meet her husband's messenger in Boston. Archer follows her. Boston also has as a large, influential upper class, but Archer's ties are too New York society only; his trip to Boston is not complicated by anyone he knows there aside from Ellen. In Boston, once they are away from New York society, Ellen and Archer are finally able to clearly declare their love for each other.

Chapter 26

Places 9: Washington, D.C. is a place we hear about several times, but never actually visit in the novel. During the first year of Archer and May's marriage, Ellen lives in Washington with her aunt, the Marchioness Medora Manson. After their meeting in Boston, Archer wants to see Ellen so badly that he buys a ticket to Washington to visit her. When Mrs. Mingott suffers from the stroke, however, Ellen returns to New York, and Ellen and Archer never meet in Washington.

Chapter 29

Places 10: Archer wants to escape New York and its world of rigid, confining social codes; it prevents him from loving Ellen honestly and openly. At the Art Museum, he and Ellen have a heated discussion about what they can and should do about the intolerable situation that their love for each other has created. Archer tells Ellen that he longs to go to some imaginary world where the definitions and conventions of society don't exist and they can love each other freely and openly.

Chapter 33

Places 11: After May tells Ellen that she is pregnant, Ellen decides to return to Europe. With her return to Europe, Ellen shuts off any possibility for an affair with Archer.

Chapter 34

Places 12: At the end of the story, Archer visits Paris with his son, Dallas. He finally has a chance to see Ellen again, and with May dead, he is free to pursue his love for her that still remains. Paris, an ocean away from the New York society that had prevented the realization of their love, seems to be a perfect place to revisit his feelings for Ellen. However, Paris is a foreign world to Archer. He thinks about all the memories that Ellen has formed in a city unfamiliar to him. Feeling his love for Ellen must exist only in his youthful memories, Archer does not go upstairs to meet her, and returns to his hotel room.



Topic Tracking: Power

Topic Tracking: Power

Chapter 4

Power 1: May and Archer have very different ideas about when the wedding should take place. Archer wants to be married as soon as possible; May and her mother want a long engagement because it's what New York society considers fashionable and appropriate. Archer and May are locked in a power struggle over the outcome. Mrs. Manson Mingott complicates the matter when she sides with Archer.

Chapter 6

Power 2: The members of New York society join forces to show Ellen that she is not welcome. Together, they can purposely make life difficult for her. When almost all of the invitations to Ellen's welcome dinner are declined, the Mingott family begins to realize the powerful forces working against Ellen.

Chapter 7

Power 3: The van der Luydens are among the most powerful members of New York society. Mrs. Archer turns to them as a last resort to help restore the reputation of her son's future family after New York society refuses to attend Ellen's welcome dinner. The van der Luydens agree to repair the damage by inviting Ellen to a special dinner in honor of a visiting European Duke. In this way, the van der Luydens use their influence to make the community accept Ellen.

Chapter 9

Power 4: Archer, like the rest of New York society, has always held the van der Luydens in awe. Ellen thinks that the secret to the van der Luydens' social power lies in their refusal to consistently attend parties and mingle with society. For the most part, they tend to ignore social events except in rare cases, such as the small party they throw to welcome Ellen. This idea had never occurred to Archer before; Ellen's theory makes him look at the power structure of New York society in a new way.

Chapter 10

Power 5: During their walk in Central Park, Archer tries to convince May to agree to an earlier wedding. May likes to daydream about married life, but she can't even begin to fathom that it could take place as soon as the following month. Her imagination, in large part, is due to the enormous amount of power and influence that Mrs. Welland holds over her.

**Chapter 12**

Power 6: When Ellen seeks a divorce from Count Olenski, Mr. Letterblair sends Archer to change her mind. Despite his own confusion about the matter, Archer has the power to convince Ellen to drop the divorce. The Mingot family is also an influence in her decision; she decides to let go of the divorce mostly because she doesn't want to bring shame to her family.

Chapter 16

Power 7: In St. Augustine, May makes Archer a generous and courageous offer: she offers to release him from their engagement so that he might marry the woman he truly loves. For a few seconds, May seems mature and far more powerful than the young girl that Archer perceives her to be. Yet she quickly loses this aura of maturity as soon as Archer assures her that he loves only her.

Chapter 18

Power 8: Ellen receives a telegram from May, saying that she and Archer will be married after Easter. All of Archer's attempts to convince May and Mrs. Welland to an earlier wedding amount to nothing. In the end, Mrs. Mingott and Ellen, not Archer, have the power to convince May and Mrs. Welland to move up the day of the wedding.

Chapter 20

Power 9: M. Rivière fascinates Archer, who wishes to invite him to dinner. May, however, cannot imagine why Archer would want to dine with someone she considers common. Her sense of disbelief is so strong that Archer quickly changes his mind. As he does so, he realizes the amount of power that May will hold over their marriage, including the people with whom he is and is not allowed to socialize.

Chapter 27

Power 10: When Julius Beaufort's bank is in jeopardy, Regina Beaufort turns to Mrs. Manson Mingott for help. She tries to convince her aunt to use her powerful influence in New York society to convince Julius's banking customers to remain loyal, and thus to save the bank from financial ruin. Mrs. Mingott refuses to show her support. By doing so, she has the power to turn Julius and Regina Beaufort into disgraced social outcasts.

Chapter 33

Power 11: When May suspects that Archer and Ellen might be having an affair, she tells Ellen about her pregnancy even before she is certain. Ellen decides to leave in order to give the new family a chance for happiness. May has the ultimate victory; she is the one who has the power to drive Ellen away from Archer.

Chapter 1

At the Academy of Music in New York City, the famous opera singer Christine Nilsson sings in *Faust*. In the middle of a stirring love song, Newland Archer arrives fashionably late. He enters the club box of seats reserved for young, wealthy, important men like himself.

Topic Tracking: Places 1

Directly opposite is the club box of Mrs. Manson Mingott, the obese matriarch of another prominent New York family (and the grandmother of Archer's new fiancée.) Seated in her box are her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Lovell Mingott, her daughter, Mrs. Welland, and her granddaughter, May Welland.

Archer gazes across the room at May. Just that afternoon, he and May had become engaged. Unlike Archer, May lacks romantic experience. Archer sees himself as a teacher to his future wife. As he proudly watches May watching the opera, he begins dreaming about their future together.

"And he contemplated her own absorbed young face with a thrill of possessorship in which pride in his own masculine initiation was mingled with a tender reverence for her abysmal purity. 'We'll read Faust together . . . by the Italian lakes . . .' he thought, somewhat hazily confusing the scene of his projected honeymoon with the masterpieces of literature which it would be his manly privilege to reveal to his bride."
Chapter 1, pg. 13

Topic Tracking: Marriage 1

Topic Tracking: Places 2

The people sitting near him suddenly interrupt his daydreams. Lawrence Lefferts, New York's expert on manners, and Sillerton Jackson, its expert on important families, are staring at Mrs. Mingott's opera box in surprise and shock. Archer looks, too. Seated next to his fiancée is a newcomer: a slim, exotic, dramatic-looking woman. She seems unconscious of the attention that is focused on her.

The other men in Archer's box wait in suspense to hear what Sillerton Jackson has to say about this woman: "'I didn't think the Mingott's would have tried it on.'" Chapter 1, pg. 16

Chapter 2

Archer soon recognizes the new woman as the May's cousin, Ellen Olenska. The men in his opera box whisper about the scandal that surrounds her. She was married to a European count, then ran off with his secretary and lived with him in Venice for a while before coming to her family in New York. The men disapprove of the Mingott family for bringing a woman with such a shady reputation to a classy place like the opera.

Topic Tracking: Places 3

Topic Tracking: Marriage 2

Although Archer is embarrassed that his fiancée's cousin is attracting so much attention, he approves of the family's loyalty. When the act ends, he leaves his opera box and hurries over to May. He wants to show the world that he is engaged to May, and will stand behind her family's decision to embrace the scandalous Ellen Olenska. May, as soon as she sees Archer enter her box, understands his reasons for visiting:

"The persons of their world lived in an atmosphere of faint implications and pale delicacies, and the fact that he and she understood each other without a word seemed to the young man to bring them nearer than any explanation would have done." Chapter 2, pg. 14

Mrs. Welland re-introduces Ellen and Archer; they had known each other as children. Archer sits next to May, and they whisper about the engagement. He wants to announce it as soon as possible. May gives him permission to tell Ellen.

Archer sits next to the Countess, hoping that the entire opera house can see them talking together. He doesn't tell her about the engagement, though. Ellen talks about childhood memories: she remembers that Archer kissed her behind a door, and mentions that she can picture everybody in the audience in their knickerbockers and pantalettes. Her disrespectful way of talking about New York society in its underwear shocks Archer.

Chapter 3

After the opera, the audience goes to the home of Julius Beaufort and his wife, Regina Beaufort, for their annual ball. Although New York society distrusts Julius Beaufort because he has "common" roots, they all agree that the Beauforts have the best ballroom in the city. Archer, as usual, arrives fashionably late. He is nervous that May's family might bring Ellen to the ball. Judging from the men's gossip at the opera, Archer knows that Ellen's appearance at this ball would be a social blunder.

When he enters the ballroom, he sees May announcing their engagement to a group of young people. Archer and May both know that a ballroom is not an ideal place to make such an important announcement, but it's necessary. They both want to take some attention off of Ellen and show the family in a positive light.

Topic Tracking: Marriage 3

Archer goes up to the crowd and draws May onto the dance floor. After the dance ends, they walk to the conservatory to talk privately. May asks if he had told Ellen of the engagement, and is disappointed when she learns that he had not. She asks him again to tell her cousin, and Archer agrees.

He is relieved when May tells him that Ellen decided not to come to the ball because her dress wasn't fancy enough. However, both Archer and May know the real reason why she decided to go home. Archer admires May's commitment to ignoring the unpleasant circumstances that surround Ellen. He makes a decision: "I shall never let her see by the least sign that I am conscious of there being a shadow of a shade on poor Ellen Olenska's reputation." Chapter 3, pg. 27

Chapter 4

On the day after the ball, Archer, May, and Mrs. Welland pay the traditional betrothal visit to Mrs. Manson Mingott's house.

All are relieved that the Countess Olenska is not there. She has gone out during the "shopping hour," which is not considered acceptable for someone in her fragile social position to do. May's family doesn't care at this point: "To the general relief the Countess Olenska was not present in her grandmother's drawing-room . . . it spared them the embarrassment of her presence, and the faint shadow that her unhappy past might seem to shed on their radiant future." Chapter 4, pg. 29

Mrs. Mingott is delighted with their engagement, although she is not surprised; relatives had long ago predicted that Archer and May would marry. Archer tells her that he wants to be married soon, but May and her mother do not agree. Mrs. Mingott sides with Archer.

Topic Tracking: Power 1

The visit is interrupted by the return of Ellen Olenska. To everyone's surprise, she is followed by Julius Beaufort, who ran into her in Madison Square and walked her home.

Beaufort stays in the drawing room to gossip with Mrs. Mingott about last night's ball. Everyone else gathers in the hallway to put on their coats. Archer finally tells Ellen about the engagement, which she already knew. She invites him to visit her someday.

In the carriage, Archer, May, and Mrs. Welland talk about Mrs. Mingott. They are careful not to say anything about Ellen, but they are all thinking the same thing: that Ellen made a mistake in being seen in public with Julius Beaufort the day after her arrival in New York. Archer silently criticizes Ellen for inviting him to visit; after all, men who are engaged don't spend their time calling on married women. Archer is thankful that his future wife knows and follows the manners and customs of New York society.

Chapter 5

The next evening, Sillerton Jackson comes to dine with Newland Archer, his mother, and his unmarried sister, Janey. Mrs. Archer is shy, but likes to be kept informed of New York society. She uses Sillerton Jackson as her news source, especially after big events such as the Beaufort's ball.

Although Jackson, Mrs. Archer, and Janey really want to talk about Ellen Olenska, they feel uncomfortable because Archer, who will soon be her cousin, is at the table. Instead, they begin by talking about Mrs. Lemuel Struthers, a woman whom they don't think is classy enough to have attended the Beaufort's ball.

Eventually, the conversation turns to Ellen. Mrs. Archer is disturbed that Archer and May's engagement announcement had taken place at the ball; she does not want her son's engagement "mixed up with that Olenska woman's comings and goings." Throughout dinner, Mrs. Archer and Janey gossip about the rumors that surround Ellen and make snide remarks about her; Janey insults the dress she wore to the opera.

As Mrs. Archer and Janey become increasingly catty, Archer becomes defensive about Ellen. He defends her decision to escape her unhappy marriage to the Count Olenski and defends the heroic secretary who helped her get away. When Janey repeats a rumor that Ellen means to get a divorce, Archer exclaims, "'I hope she will!'"

After dinner, Archer and Sillerton Jackson smoke cigars in the drawing room. Mr. Jackson tells Archer that Ellen was still living with the secretary a year after she left her husband. Archer blushes, but continues to defend Ellen's actions:

"'Women ought to be free - as free as we are,' he declared, making a discovery of which he was too irritated to measure the terrific consequences." Chapter 5, pg. 40

Topic Tracking: Marriage 4

Mr. Jackson sarcastically informs Archer that Count Olenski would agree because he never tried to get Ellen to return to him.

Chapter 6

That evening, after Sillerton Jackson leaves, Archer sits by himself in his study. He gazes at a photograph of May:

"That terrifying product of the social system he belonged to and believed in, the young girl who knew nothing and expected everything, looked back at him like a stranger through May Welland's familiar features; and once more it was borne in on him that marriage was not the safe anchorage he had been taught to think, but a voyage on uncharted seas." Chapter 6, pg. 41

Archer thinks about how Ellen Olenska has stirred up the ideas of marriage that he has always taken for granted, such as the unspoken rule that men must conceal their romantic experience from their innocent wives. Ellen's story challenges him to think about women differently. Suddenly, Archer cannot see why May should not have been allowed to experiment in love, as he had.

These thoughts make Archer uncomfortable. He is annoyed at Ellen for complicating what should be the carefree, happy time of his engagement.

Topic Tracking: Marriage 5

A few days later, the Lovell Mingott family sends out invitations for a dinner to meet the Countess Olenska. They invite the important people in New York society.

Every person refuses the Mingotts' invitation except the Beauforts, Sillerton Jackson and his sister, Sophy Jackson. The rejection of Ellen seems deliberate; the replies all rudely said that they were unable to accept without even offering an excuse.

Topic Tracking: Power 2

Mrs. Lovell Mingott tells May's mother about the insult, and Mrs. Welland tells Archer. Archer is so outraged that he turns to his mother for help. After much thought, she works up the courage to go to her cousins Louisa and Henry van der Luyden - the two people at the very top of New York society.

Chapter 7

Mrs. van der Luyden listens silently to the story. As expected, she makes no decision without first calling on her husband to hear it as well. The van der Luydens listen carefully, because when Archer marries May, an insult to the Lovell Mingott family will be an insult to their own.

Archer thinks that Lawrence Lefferts is behind the dinner rejections. According to Archer, every time Mrs. Lefferts begins to suspect that her husband is having an affair, Lawrence has to show how moral he is. Archer believes that he is making an example of Ellen.

Mr. and Mrs. van der Luyden have a low opinion of Lawrence Lefferts, and are outraged that he is trying to control public opinion on anyone's social position: "It shows what Society has come to." Chapter 7, pg. 51 Mr. van der Luyden believes that if a well-known family decides to stand behind a member, their decision should be considered final.

The van der Luydens hold a silent conversation with their eyes. Finally, Henry van der Luyden turns to Archer and his mother with a solution. Louisa van der Luyden's cousin, the Duke of Austrey, will arrive the following week. The van der Luydens will hold a small dinner in his honor for only the most important people in New York society . . . and they will invite Ellen.

By evening, everyone will know that the van der Luydens, who almost never mingle with people, have accepted Ellen into the inner circle of New York society.

Topic Tracking: Power 3

Chapter 8

On the night of the van der Luydens' dinner, Archer watches Ellen enter the room. Although New York society generally agreed that she had "'lost her looks,'" Archer rejects that opinion:

"But there was about her the mysterious authority of beauty, a sureness in the carriage of the head, the movement of the eyes, which, without being in the least theatrical, struck him as highly trained and full of a conscious power." Chapter 8, pg. 55-56

The dinner is as formal as can be. Ellen, however, ignores the unspoken social customs expected at such important occasions. After the meal, she talks to the Duke for a while, and then suddenly gets up and leaves him to sit next to Archer. Ellen says that she finds the Duke dull. This last remark pleases Archer; he is excited to find a person whom not only finds this important duke dull, but who is willing to express her opinion.

As they talk, May enters with her mother, and is immediately surrounded by a swarm of guests. Since his fiancée is busy, Ellen urges Archer to stay with her a little longer. When she lightly touches his knee with her fan of feathers, "it thrilled him like a caress." Archer readily agrees, without even realizing the unspoken social rule that he is breaking by talking intimately with her on the sofa.

Mr. van der Luyden comes up to them with a guest who wants to meet Ellen. Archer suddenly realizes that his host disapproves, and quickly offers his seat. As he leaves, Ellen tells him that she expects him to visit the following evening.

Chapter 9

Archer arrives at Countess Olenska's house at 5:30 the following evening. He wonders briefly if this visit is acceptable - after all, he hasn't even told May about it. Then he remembers that May, at the opera, had asked him to be kind to her cousin; he decides that May wouldn't care if he visited Ellen without her knowledge. Archer is curious about why Ellen summoned him.

Ellen is not at home. Her maid, Nastasia, opens the door and ushers Archer into a sitting room filled with all sorts of eccentric and exotic items. As Archer looks at the room, he imagines the rest of his life with May in the house they will own:

"The young man felt that his fate was sealed: for the rest of his life he would go up every evening between the cast-iron railings of that greenish-yellow doorstep, and pass through a Pompeian vestibule into a hall with a wainscoting of varnished yellow wood. But beyond that his imagination could not travel." Chapter 9, pg. 63

Topic Tracking: Marriage 6

Archer waits for a long time, wondering why Ellen even bothered to invite him if she wasn't going to show up.

Finally, he hears a noise in the street, and looks out to see Julius Beaufort helping Ellen down from a carriage. Ellen enters her drawing-room alone. She shows no surprise at seeing Archer waiting there.

Their conversation covers many topics. Archer learns of Ellen's frustrations with New York: frustrations with the unspoken rules about what is proper and what is not, frustrations with the complicated, powerful web of society. Ellen allows him to see New York society through new eyes. She believes that the reason for the van der Luydens powerful influence is that they rarely associate with people. Archer, with surprise, realizes that she has uncovered the secret of the two people he has always held in awe.

Topic Tracking: Power 4

Ellen eventually reveals to Archer her unbearable loneliness. When she begins to cry, he moves quickly to comfort her and hold her hand.

At this intimate moment, Nastasia pokes her head into the room to announce the arrival of the Duke of St. Austrey and his friend Mrs. Struthers. Ellen quickly resumes the role of the good hostess. Archer, feeling left out, excuses himself and wanders out into the streets.

Once he leaves Ellen's house, his thoughts turn again to May. Archer realizes that he had forgotten to send his fiancée her daily bouquet of lilies-of-the-valley. When he stops off at the flower shop to order them, a bouquet of yellow roses catches his attention. At first, he thinks that he will send them to May. "He had never seen any as sun-golden



before, and his first impulse was to send them to May. But they did not look like her - there was something too rich, too strong, in their fiery beauty." Chapter 9, pg. 69

Almost without thinking, he orders a box of the yellow roses, addresses an envelope to Ellen, and slips his name card into it. Just as he is about to leave, he takes back his card, leaving only the empty envelope.

Chapter 10

The next day, Archer and May go for a walk in Central Park (even though it's Sunday, when nice girls should be in church.)

Archer tells May that he sent yellow roses to Ellen. May is delighted by his thoughtfulness. She mentions that Ellen also received flowers from Henry van der Luyden and Julius Beaufort; this annoys Archer. He wants to tell May that he visited Ellen the night before, but since Ellen had not mentioned anything to May, he remains silent.

Mrs. Welland has finally convinced the wavering May that a long engagement would be considered best in the eyes of society. Archer still wants to be married right away. He tries to convince May that they can be "different," but she has been raised to conform to society. Even as Archer insistently urges May to consider an earlier wedding, she responds with the shallow remarks that society has taught her. As they talk, Archer feels frustrated with May. He knows that when they are married, he will have the responsibility to open May's eyes. The responsibility scares him: "What if, when he had bidden May Welland to open (her eyes), they could only look out blankly at blankness?" Chapter 10, pg. 71

Topic Tracking: Power 5

The following afternoon, Archer sits smoking in his study. He is in a terrible mood. After his conversation with May, he has begun to dread the future that looms before him: "a haunting horror of doing the same thing every day at the same hour besieged his brain." Chapter 10, pg. 72

Janey enters the study to tell him that their mother is angry. Sophy Jackson just informed them that Ellen went to Mrs. Lemuel Struther's party with the Duke of St. Austrey and Julius Beaufort. Janey and her mother are horrified that Ellen, who is soon to become family, went to the party of a socially inferior woman in the company of two married men. Archer is frustrated with their concern. As he argues with his mother in the drawing-room, Henry van der Luyden enters. He, too, has heard the story. Much to the relief of Mrs. Archer and Janey, Mr. van der Luyden tells them that he will pay a visit to Ellen and gently explain how New York society feels about certain things.

Chapter 11

Two weeks pass. Ellen has faded in Archer's memory; May is more on his mind.

One afternoon, as he sits at his desk in the office of Letterblair, Lamson, and Low, attorneys-at-law (where he half-heartedly practices law, as expected of a man of his station), the head of the firm summons him to a meeting.

Mr. Letterblair tells him that the Countess Olenska wishes to divorce her husband. The Mingott family has asked that Archer be involved in this situation, since he will soon be a part of their family. They fear that the scandal of Ellen's divorce will affect their social position. Archer wants no part of this. In the end, though, he obeys his boss. He agrees to read the papers and talk to Ellen. Mr. Letterblair is pleased with his decision, and invites him to dinner the next night.

As Archer walks home that evening, he thinks about his upcoming meeting with Ellen. He realizes that talking to her is the right thing to do because it would be better for her to tell him her secrets than to tell someone less compassionate than himself. Archer, for the first time, realizes how shallow his principles had been. He thinks about his affair with Mrs. Rushworth, a vain, foolish, married woman. Archer begins to guess that love problems in Europe, such as Ellen's, are more complicated than what New York is used to.

Ellen agrees to see him the following evening. During dinner, Mr. Letterblair and Archer discuss the case. Mr. Letterblair agrees (along with the Mingott family) that Ellen is wrong to request the divorce. Archer, who had gone to dinner sharing this view, now disagrees with Mr. Letterblair and the Mingotts. Mr. Letterblair wants Archer to use his influence to convince Ellen to withdraw her divorce request. Archer and Mr. Letterblair finally come to an agreement: Archer will not give his opinion until he hears what Ellen has to say. Mr. Letterblair approves of his caution.

Topic Tracking: Marriage 7

Chapter 12

At Ellen's house, Archer finds Julius Beaufort trying to persuade the Countess to stay in the city rather than to vacation at Skuytercliff, the van der Luydens' country home, as she had planned. Beaufort tells Ellen about the wonderful events he has planned for her and the fascinating people she will meet if she stays. Ellen seems enthusiastic, but refuses to give him an immediate answer, saying that she needs to think it over before making a decision. Beaufort finally leaves, and Archer, to his relief, can now talk to Ellen alone.

Ellen has no idea why he wishes to speak to her. When Archer tells her that Mr. Letterblair sent him, she reacts with pleasure; she thinks that Archer, rather than Letterblair, will be handling her divorce. Archer, though, quickly tells her that he is here only to talk about it.

As they talk, Archer learns more about her desire to escape the painful past. In his heart he sympathizes with her, but also realizes he is caught in a difficult position. Archer must show Ellen how the Mingotts, the Wellands, the van der Luydens, and all the other people of New York society would view a divorced woman. Ellen has no desire to hurt her family. She reluctantly agrees that it would be unfair to them.

They sit in silence for a long time. Finally, Ellen tells Archer that she will do as he wishes. She will not go through with the divorce.

Topic Tracking: Marriage 8

Topic Tracking: Power 6

Archer, surprised by her sudden agreement, kisses her cold hands. He leaves the apartment thinking of the things he should have said, yet never did.

Chapter 13

Archer watches a play called *The Shaughraun*. The scene in which the two lovers say good-bye powerfully reminds him of his meeting with Ellen over a week earlier, but he doesn't know why. Neither he nor Ellen spoke about romance or love, and Archer left their meeting convinced that, true to rumor, she had had an affair with the secretary who helped her escape the unhappy marriage.

Archer sees Ellen seated in a box with the Beauforts, Lawrence Lefferts, and some other men. Mrs. Beaufort catches his eye, and invites him to the box; it would be rude to refuse, even though Archer has been trying to avoid Ellen since their meeting. Yet when he reaches the box, he takes a seat behind her.

Ellen looks at the lovers on the stage and asks Archer, "Do you think . . . he will send her a bunch of yellow roses tomorrow morning?" Her question surprises Archer. After their last meeting, he had sent her another batch of yellow roses, again without his name card. Ellen has apparently figured out that Archer has sent her roses after each of his visits.

Ellen tells Archer that she has withdrawn the divorce, as he had advised, and that she is grateful to him. Archer, embarrassed that she is bringing up the subject, leaves the theatre feeling confused. The day before, Archer received a letter from May from St. Augustine, Florida, where she vacations with her family. In the letter, May asked him to be kind to Ellen. Archer, at first, is amused by his wife's candor. After all, Ellen seems able to take care of herself, and both Henry van der Luyden and Julius Beaufort are looking out for her. Yet Archer cannot shake the feeling that Ellen is lonely and unhappy.

Chapter 14

In the theatre's lobby, Archer runs into his friend Ned Winsett. Winsett, a journalist, is one of the only people with whom Archer feels that he can have deep, meaningful conversation. The two men are of different social stations (the New York society of Archer's world looks down upon journalists like Winsett), yet they respect and enjoy each other's company.

Tonight, Winsett asks Archer about the exotic woman in the Beaufort's box. He knows her by sight; Winsett and Ellen are neighbors in the unfashionable district where artists, writers, and other eccentric people live. When Archer tells him that Ellen is a Countess, Winsett is surprised. He can't figure out why a countess would bother to interact with the common people of his neighborhood.

Archer and Winsett have a good, challenging conversation, but it only reveals to Archer how their different social positions prevent them from truly understanding one another.

"A gentleman simply stayed at home and abstained. But you couldn't make a man like Winsett see that; and that was why the New York of literary clubs and exotic restaurants, though a first shake made it seem more of a kaleidoscope, turned out, in the end, to be a smaller box, with a more monotonous pattern, than the assembled atoms of Fifth Avenue." Chapter 14, pg. 104

The next morning, Archer looks all over the city for yellow roses to send to Ellen. He sends a note to her, asking if she will allow him to visit that afternoon. No reply comes, and Archer is hurt and embarrassed.

Three days later, Ellen finally replies. She writes that she left for Skuytercliff with the van der Luydens the day after the play to think in a quiet place, and that she wishes that Archer were there.

Topic Tracking: Places 4

The note surprises Archer. He wonders what Ellen is running away from, and is disappointed to learn that she is gone. He remembers that the family of Reggie Chivers had invited him to their house on the Hudson River, only a few miles from Skuytercliff. Although he had refused the invitation the day before, Archer changes his mind.

Chapter 15

When Archer visits Skuytercliff, the butler tells him that the Countess Olenska is out; she has driven to church with Mrs. van der Luyden. Archer decides to drive towards town, hoping that he'll run into Ellen on the road.

He soon sees Ellen approaching the house. She looks vivid and cheerful. As they walk, Archer tries to ask Ellen what she's afraid of, and why she felt that she had to run away. She is in a good mood, and playfully resists his questions.

They come across a little cottage on the van der Luydens' property called the Patroon's house. Ellen invites Archer to come in for a talk. Archer tries again to ask why she wrote that she was unhappy. Ellen is silent for a long moment. Archer imagines with excitement that she is coming up behind him to hug him. As he waits, though, he sees Julius Beaufort coming up the path.

Archer bursts out laughing. Ellen reaches for his hand and moves to the window to see what he finds so funny. When she sees Beaufort, she shrinks back, still holding on to Archer's hand. Archer rudely asks if Beaufort is the reason for her fear. Ellen replies that she didn't know he was here. Archer drops her hand, and calls out to Beaufort that Ellen was expecting him.

On the way back to the city, Archer thinks about Beaufort's surprise visit. Archer knows that Beaufort came out with the desire to have an affair with Ellen. He feels threatened because Beaufort, although vulgar and crude, can give Ellen excitement and access to the community of artists she longs to befriend.

Archer returns home and unpacks a box of books from London. He finds a small book of poetry called "The House of Light":

"He took it up, and found himself plunged in an atmosphere unlike any he had ever breathed in books; so warm, so rich, and yet so ineffably tender, that it gave a new and haunting beauty to the most elementary of human passions. All through the night he pursued through those enchanting pages the vision of a woman who had the face of Ellen Olenska . . . " Chapter 15, pg. 114

The next few days are bleak for Archer. Mrs. Archer and Janey comment on how pale he looks. On the fourth day, he receives a note from Ellen asking him to come the following day so she can explain her situation to him.

Archer reads her note several times. All night, he thinks of the different ways he can answer it. In the morning, he decides that he will not reply. Instead, he packs his suitcase and boards a boat that will take him to St. Augustine, and to May.

Topic Tracking: Places 5

Topic Tracking: Marriage 9

Chapter 16

May is surprised and overjoyed that Archer came to see her. They sit together on a bench under some orange-trees, and he kisses her for only the second time. When she quickly breaks it off, they sit in embarrassed silence. To ease the tension, Archer asks about her life in St. Augustine; she chatters about meaningless things while his mind wanders.

May's parents are also surprised and glad to see him. Mrs. Welland, in particular, is relieved that Archer was able to convince Ellen not to go through with the divorce.

Even though the date of the wedding is set for the following year, Archer's confusion about his feelings for Ellen causes him to push for an earlier date. May, despite her longing to be married, won't be persuaded. She treats Archer's talk of Easter in Europe as a fantasy, and not as a real possibility. Archer, frustrated, keeps trying to get her to agree to an earlier wedding.

When May looks at him again, he sees in her face a maturity and deepness that he has never seen before. May asks if his desire to be married immediately has to do with another woman. Her question takes Archer by surprise; even he is not sure about his own feelings for Ellen. He quickly realizes that May has heard rumors of his earlier affair with Mrs. Rushworth, and perhaps assumes that he is still in love with her. Even when Archer assures her that he is not, May generously offers to release him from their engagement so that he might marry the woman he truly loves.

Archer is momentarily speechless at May's transformation. He assures her, again, of his love only for her, and asks her to consider an earlier wedding. When May lifts her face to be kissed, he sees happy tears in her eyes. The transformation, though, is over:

"But in another moment she seemed to have descended from her womanly eminence to helpless and timorous girlhood . . . at his first word of reassurance, she had dropped back into the usual, as a too adventurous child takes refuge in its mother's arms."

Chapter 16, pg. 123

Topic Tracking: Power 7

Archer is greatly disappointed; May's transformation into a mature woman lasted only for a moment, and quickly disappeared with his assurances of fidelity. He stops pressuring her to change the date of the wedding, and they walk silently back to the Wellands' vacation house.

Chapter 17

The Wellands send Archer home to New York with many messages for Mrs. Manson Mingott. When he pays her a visit, he tells her about his failed attempts to get May to agree to an earlier wedding.

When Mrs. Mingott jokingly asks why he didn't marry Ellen instead, Archer makes a joke in reply. Then Mrs. Mingott comments that Ellen's life is finished; Archer feels scared. To cover up his feelings, he quickly asks Mrs. Mingott if she would use her influence to persuade the Wellands about the wedding date.

Ellen comes into the drawing-room during their conversation. She casually mentions the note that Archer never answered before he went to St. Augustine, but seems completely indifferent about it. As Archer leaves, though, he asks Ellen when he can see her again. She invites him over for the following evening.

When Archer arrives at Ellen's house, he is surprised to find people already there: Ned Winsett, the Marchioness Medora Manson (Ellen's aunt), and Dr Agathon Carver. The Marchioness tells Archer that Ellen is upstairs getting ready for a party. Ned Winsett and Dr Carver leave soon afterward, leaving Archer and the Marchioness alone together.

The Marchioness tells Archer that she comes with a message from Count Olenski, who wishes Ellen to return to him on her own terms. Ellen does not yet know about this. Since Archer had so much success convincing Ellen to forget the divorce, the Marchioness hopes that he will convince her to go back to the Count. Archer is horrified. He tells the Marchioness that he would rather see Ellen dead than sent back to her husband.

Chapter 18

When Ellen enters the drawing-room, she sees an expensive bouquet of flowers, probably from Beaufort. She is angry that someone is treating her like a young girl engaged to be married. In a fit of rage, she tells Nastasia to take the flowers out of her sight and to give them to Ned Winsett's ill wife. Ellen's temper excites Archer, who is unused to such emotional outbursts.

After the Marchioness leaves, the two sit alone together. Conversation soon turns to Count Olenski's letter to the Marchioness. As they talk, Archer realizes that Ellen never loved Beaufort. He tells her of his unsuccessful attempts to convince May to move up the date of their wedding, and also of her surprising, generous offer to release him from the engagement. When Archer finishes the story, Ellen asks him about the other woman who May thinks he loves. Archer, at first, denies that there is another woman . . . then find that he cannot.

Archer sits beside Ellen and takes her hand. At his touch, she moves away from him. When Archer tells Ellen that she is the woman he would have married if it had been possible, Ellen grows angry. It was because of him (Archer) that she gave up the divorce that would have made their union possible; she cared too much about Archer to bring him or his family shame.

Ellen's words weigh down Archer. He realizes too late that the woman he will marry is not the woman he loves.

When Ellen begins to cry, Archer holds her. They kiss for a long moment, and then Ellen pulls away from him. She tells him that their love won't change anything, but Archer disagrees; he is willing to call off the marriage to May. Ellen is more realistic, and she resists Archer's pleas to give in to their love.

Topic Tracking: Marriage 10

At this moment, Nastasia returns with a telegram. Apparently, Mrs. Mingott and Ellen were successful in persuading the Wellands: May writes that her parents have agreed to a wedding after Easter.

Topic Tracking: Power 8

Archer returns home to find a similar telegram from May. He crumples it up, hoping that doing so will take the news away. Then he pulls out his calendar and looks at the dates. He realizes, with a shock, that he is to marry May in only one month.

Chapter 19

The wedding is as perfect and proper as anything New York society could desire. Archer though, is in a daze. At one point, he perks up when he catches a glimpse of someone who reminds him of Ellen. Otherwise, he feels more like an observer than the groom at his own wedding.

After the ceremony, as he and May drive off in their carriage, he chatters lightheartedly even as his emotions are in turmoil.

On their way to Rhinebeck, where Archer's elderly du Lac aunts have given their home as a honeymoon destination, Archer thinks about his new bride and her lack of awareness.

"Perhaps that faculty of unawareness was what gave her eyes their transparency, and her face the look of representing a type rather than a person; as if she might have been chosen to pose for a Civic Virtue or a Greek goddess." Chapter 19, pg. 154

When they arrive at the train station, the van der Luydens' servant is waiting to meet them. He tells Archer and May that a water leak in the du Lacs' house makes it impossible for them to stay there, but informs them that Mr. van der Luyden has offered the Patroon's house on his own property. May is excited by the idea of staying in the little cottage, which Ellen had enthusiastically described to her. Archer is momentarily overwhelmed by the idea of spending his honeymoon in a place that holds so many memories of Ellen, but he pretends to be excited for May's sake . . . and also to convince himself of their luck for the future.

Chapter 20

Archer and May are in England, on their way home from a traditional three months' wedding tour through Europe. Archer has begun to realize the difficulties he will experience in his marriage. Although Ellen had caused him to question New York society's traditional ideas about marriage, he now finds it easier to revert to them:

"There was no use in trying to emancipate a wife who had not the dimmest notion that she was not free; and he had long since discovered that May's only use of the liberty she supposed herself to possess would be to lay it on the altar of her wifely adoration."
Chapter 20, pg. 159

Topic Tracking: Marriage 11

Archer receives a dinner invitation from Mrs. Carfry, an acquaintance of his mother and Janey from an earlier trip through Europe. May is reluctant to go; New York society does not consider it proper to visit friends while traveling, and May worries about what she will wear. Archer eventually convinces her that they must accept the invitation.

Mrs. Carfry's party is small, and May's beauty attracts the attention of the men, all of whom want to put her at ease. At the dinner, Archer meets M. Rivière, the French tutor of Mrs. Carfry's nephew. M. Rivière fascinates Archer, who finds in him the intellectual excitement that he has craved during the past few months with May. Although he is poor, M. Rivière has led an interesting life; he only requires ideas and good conversation to be happy. Toward the end of dinner, he asks Archer if there might be any jobs for him in New York. Archer is surprised; he cannot imagine a place in New York for a person as unusual as M. Rivière.

Archer leaves the dinner feeling refreshed from their conversation. As they drive away, he mentions to May that he would like to invite M. Rivière to dine with him. May cannot imagine why Archer wants to associate with a man she considers common. She is so horrified by the idea, that Archer quickly changes his mind. He suddenly understands the amount of control that May will have over his life.

Topic Tracking: Places 6

Topic Tracking: Power 9

Chapter 21

Archer and May spend their second married summer in Newport, Rhode Island, where all the fashionable people of New York society spend their summers. By this time, Archer has grown more accustomed to married life, and Ellen is a distant memory.

May competes in an archery contest with other young women. Archer watches from the sidelines. As he waits for the contest to begin, the Marchioness Manson comes up to him. When she casually mentions Ellen, Archer feels as though his heart stopped beating. During the year and a half since they last saw each other, Archer had thought little about Ellen, even when her name came up in conversation. This is the first time since his marriage that any mention of Ellen's name has had such a powerful effect on him.

May wins the archery contest. Archer is proud of her, but at the same time finds himself thinking that he still has not opened her eyes to the world, as he had hoped in the days of their engagement.

After the contest, May and Archer visit Mrs. Mingott, who is also vacationing in Newport. Mrs. Mingott calls for Ellen to join them. Archer is caught by surprise; he hadn't known that she would be here. When Ellen doesn't appear, Mrs. Mingott sends Archer down to the shore to find her. Halfway down the bank, he sees a woman standing at the end of the pier.

The woman doesn't turn around; she continues to gaze at the boats on the bay. Archer, as he looks at her, remembers a scene in *The Shaughraun* in which the man kisses the woman's hair-ribbon without her knowing that he is there. He wonders if Ellen knows that he is watching her. He decides that if she doesn't turn around before a passing sailboat crosses the lighthouse, he will go back without speaking to her.

Archer watches the boat move past the lighthouse, and waits a few moments longer. Ellen still does not move, and he turns around and heads back to May and Mrs. Mingott.

Topic Tracking: Places 7

Chapter 22

Emerson Sillerton, an unpopular, eccentric professor, decides to throw a party in honor of the Blenker family, with whom the Marchioness Manson and Ellen are staying while in Newport. No one in the Welland family wants to go, but someone must represent the family. Mrs. Welland, out of a sense of duty, finally agrees to go; Mr. Welland and May decide to take a drive. As a result, Archer finds himself with an afternoon to himself. He tells May that he wants to buy her another horse, and will drive up to a farm to look for one.

His real plan is more complicated. He guesses that the Marchioness will go to the party with the Blenkers, and that Ellen will spend the afternoon with her grandmother. Archer wants to take advantage of the empty Blenker house. He doesn't even want to see Ellen again; he only wants to satisfy his curiosity about the place where she lives, and to imagine her there.

"The longing was with him day and night, an incessant undefinable craving, like the sudden whim of a sick man for food and drink once tasted and long since forgotten. . . He simply felt that if he could carry away the vision of the spot of earth she walked on, and the way the sky and sea enclosed it, the rest of the world might seem less empty." Chapter 22, pg. 180

Archer gazes at the empty house for a long time before walking up to it. In the garden, he spies a pink parasol; he is sure that it belongs to Ellen. As he holds the parasol and kisses its handle, he hears rustling skirts behind him. He is convinced that Ellen approaches.

Instead of Ellen, he finds himself face-to-face with the youngest Miss Blenker, who had to stay home from the party because of a sore throat. She flirts with Archer as she thanks him for finding her missing parasol.

Archer is shaken up, but finds himself talking to Miss Blenker, and manages to ask if she knows where Ellen is. Miss Blenker informs him that Ellen had left immediately for Boston after receiving a telegram. Archer feels his life slipping away from him:

"His whole future seemed suddenly to be unrolled before him; and passing down its endless emptiness he saw the dwindling figure of a man to whom nothing was ever to happen." Chapter 22, pg. 183

He casually mentions to Miss Blenker that he might be in Boston the next day, and she informs him that Ellen is staying at the Parker House. With that information, Archer heads back to Newport.

Chapter 23

The next morning, Archer goes to Boston to find Ellen. The staff at the Parker House tells him that she has gone out. Archer is surprised that she has gone out at such an unconventional time of day.

He finds her sitting dejectedly on a bench in the Boston Common. She tells him about the reason she came to Boston. Count Olenski sent a messenger to offer her money if she will return to Europe as his wife. Ellen had refused the money, but tells him that the messenger insisted on staying in Boston in case she changes her mind.

Archer tries to persuade Ellen to join him on a steamboat ride. He wants to leave with her before the messenger returns. Ellen hesitates, but finally agrees.

Topic Tracking: Places 8

Chapter 24

In a private dining room on the steamboat, Archer and Ellen eat lunch together comfortably. They talk about Ellen's frustrations with the confining, unimaginative New York society that drove her away. She tells him of her time in Washington, where she takes care of her aunt, the Marchioness Manson.

Their conversation eventually turns to the terrible situation that their love for each other has created. When Ellen reminds Archer of May, he becomes angry: "What's the use? You gave me my first glimpse of a real life, and at the same moment you asked me to go on with a sham one." Chapter 24, pg. 194 Ellen bursts into tears, and Archer realizes that she, too, has suffered from his marriage to May.

Ellen promises Archer that she will refuse the Count's offer and stay in America as long as they continue to love each other.

Chapter 25

Archer feels relieved as he says good-bye to Ellen. He believes that they have found a solution that is the perfect balance between protecting their families and being true to their love. Ellen will remain in Washington to be near Archer as long as he does not ask her to live any closer (to protect the reputation of their family).

At the New York train station the next morning, he runs into M. Rivière. Archer invites him to visit the law office. He soon learns that the Frenchman is actually Count Olenski's messenger. Now that his official mission is over and Ellen has refused the Count's offer, M. Rivière gives his own honest opinion. He tells Archer that, at first, he believed that Ellen should return. After seeing her in Boston, though, he knows that she should stay in America.

When M. Rivière tells Archer that he has talked to the Mingott family, and that they all believe Ellen should return to her husband, Archer realizes that they have excluded him from their conversations about Ellen. He guesses that Ellen's family, including May, suspects that he would disagree with them.

M. Rivière begs Archer to do all he can to keep Ellen from returning to her unhappy life with the Count. Before he leaves Archer's office, M. Rivière tells him that he was the secretary who helped Ellen escape from her husband.

Chapter 26

Mrs. Archer and Janey host Thanksgiving dinner; they invite Archer and May, Sillerton, and Sophy Jackson. As they eat, they talk about the changing New York society. May, for instance, now spends Sunday evenings at the home of Mrs. Lemuel Struthers, a woman once considered unfashionable and unpopular. Mrs. Archer reminds her guests that it was Ellen who started the visits to Mrs. Struthers.

May suddenly blushes, and repeats Ellen's name in a negative tone of voice. Archer wonders why May is blushing. Ever since their day in Boston, Ellen has been the center of his thoughts, even though he keeps up the necessary appearances of being a good husband. He had sent a message to Ellen in Washington, asking when they would see each other. "Not yet," she had replied.

The Jacksons, Mrs. Archer, and Janey gossip about Ellen. They wonder how she will survive financially. They all know that Ellen's family disapproves of her decision to refuse the Count's offer and remain in America. The Mingotts are so angry, they are holding back money from her. Archer grows angry during the conversation; he carelessly shows his emotions when he yells at Mr. Jackson.

At home, Archer tells May that he has to go to Washington on business. She listens, and tells him to be sure to see Ellen. As she looks at him, her face says much more. Archer understands that she knows Ellen is his real reason for going.

Topic Tracking: Places 9

Chapter 27

Julius Beaufort is in serious financial trouble. The day after Thanksgiving, Archer and Mr. Letterblair talk about the problem. The fortunes of many members of society, including the Marchioness Manson's, are tied up in his banking business.

A messenger brings Archer a telegram from May. She tells him that Mrs. Manson Mingott had a stroke, and asks him to come immediately. When Archer arrives, Mrs. Welland takes him aside to tell him the story. The night before, Regina Beaufort visited her aunt, Mrs. Mingott, to ask the Mingott family to help her husband through the crisis. Mrs. Mingott refused to lend the money, but the shock of the news was too much for her. Soon afterward, she had a stroke.

Topic Tracking: Power 10

Mrs. Mingott wants to send a telegram to Ellen, asking her to come immediately. Although the family doesn't want to see Ellen, May asks Archer to send the telegram. As he leaves, she tells him that she thinks it a pity that he and Ellen will miss seeing each other. Archer had learned earlier that morning that his business in Washington was postponed, but he had made up his mind to see Ellen anyway. From this comment, he knows that May still expects him to go to Washington, even though Ellen will be in New York while he is down there.

Chapter 28

Beaufort is ruined. He and his wife are dishonored because he had continued to do business even after he knew that his bank would fail. Mrs. Mingott has recovered from her stroke, but she orders that no one is ever to mention the Beauforts to her again.

Ellen sends a telegram announcing that she will arrive the following evening. The Wellands argue about who will have to pick her up from the train station. Archer, to Mrs. Welland's relief, offers to go.

As May drives Archer partway to the train station, she asks him how he can possibly pick up Ellen when he has to catch his own train to Washington. Archer tells her that he has decided to postpone his business trip. May, though, isn't content with his answer; she continues to ask questions. She had seen a note from Mr. Letterblair to her mother describing the upcoming business in Washington, and wonders why Archer is not going to go. Archer feels defensive; he tells her that it's convenient for her family that he decided to stay.

When they say good-bye, May has tears in her eyes.

Chapter 29

Archer meets Ellen at the train station. As they ride back together in May's carriage, they remember how much they love each other. After they talk for just a few minutes, Ellen passionately kisses Archer, then draws away. They sit together silently.

Both Ellen and Archer are confused and frustrated. Now that he sees Ellen in person, Archer wants more than just a brief affair. Ellen is more realistic. She asks if he really wants her to be his mistress since she can't be his wife. Her question startles Archer; he isn't used to hearing the word "mistress" spoken so plainly. He tries to tell her what he dreams about:

"I want - I want somehow to get away with you into a world where words like that - categories like that - won't exist. Where we shall be simply two human beings who love each other, who are the whole of life to each other; and nothing else on earth will matter."

"She drew a deep sigh that ended in another laugh. 'Oh, my dear - where is that country? Have you ever been there? . . . I know so many who've tried to find it; and, believe me, they all got out by mistake at wayside stations: at places like Boulogne, or Pisa, or Monte Carlo - and it wasn't at all different from the old world they'd left, but only rather smaller and dingier and more promiscuous.'" Chapter 29, pg. 230

Topic Tracking: Places 10

Topic Tracking: Marriage 12

Ellen speaks from an experience that Archer has not had. He suddenly stops the carriage and gets out, then sends Ellen and the carriage on to Mrs. Mingotts. As he walks to his own house, Archer realizes that he had been crying.

Chapter 30

That evening, Archer and May sit together in their library. As he looks at his wife, Archer feels trapped by their marriage.

"She had spent her poetry and romance on their short courting: the function was exhausted because the need was past. Now she was simply ripening into a copy of her mother, and mysteriously, by the very process, trying to turn him into a Mr. Welland."
Chapter 30, pg. 234

When Archer opens the window for fresh air to clear his mind, May tells him to shut it: "You'll catch your death!" Archer longs to tell her that he has felt dead for months.

His imagination suddenly runs wild, and it occurs to him that May might die. If she died, he would be free.

A week passes, and Archer hears nothing from Ellen. One day, Mrs. Mingott asks to see him. Archer hopes that he'll have a few moments alone with Ellen, and is disappointed when he learns that she is out visiting the disgraced Regina Beaufort.

Mrs. Mingott has changed her mind about Ellen; she no longer believes that Ellen should return to Count Olenski. The rest of the family, though, firmly believes that Ellen belongs with her husband, and that Mrs. Mingott should continue to cut off her granddaughter's allowance until Ellen comes to her senses.

Mrs. Mingott wants Archer to help convince the rest of the family that Ellen should stay. Ellen, Mrs. Mingott tells him, will not return to Washington. Instead, she will stay in New York to care for her grandmother.

Archer had been prepared to give up the life he knows to follow Ellen to Washington. When he hears the news, he is at first confused and then relieved:

"This was her answer to his final appeal of the other day: if she would not take the extreme step he had urged, she had at last yielded to half-measures. He sank back into the thought with the involuntary relief of a man who has been ready to risk everything, and suddenly tastes the dangerous sweetness of security." Chapter 30, pg. 238

Chapter 31

After Archer leaves Mrs. Mingott, he heads to the Beauforts' home, where he hopes to find Ellen. He catches her as she is leaving, and tells her that he knows of her plan to stay in New York. They arrange to meet the next afternoon at the Art Museum.

At the museum, Archer and Ellen talk about their new situation. Neither knows what to do. They both agree that it's much harder to be so close to each other, almost within reach, but not quite.

Finally, Ellen comes up with a solution; she offers to spend one night with Archer, and then return to her husband to Europe. Archer is torn. He wants to sleep with her, but he knows that he'll lose her. In the end, he agrees, and they arrange to meet in two days.

May comes home late. She tells Archer that she and Ellen had ended up talking for a long time at Mrs. Mingott's home. Although she doesn't tell Archer what they talked about, Archer realizes that May hates Ellen, and that she is trying to overcome her hatred. The maturity that he had seen in her once before (in St. Augustine when she had offered to release him from the engagement) has returned. For a second, Archer almost confesses everything to May. Then the maturity leaves her, and she is once more the shallow wife he knows so well, although she is unusually affectionate.

Chapter 32

The following evening, several members of New York society go to the opera. Archer remembers the night two years earlier when he met Ellen. Many things this evening are the same: the opera is *Faust*, Christine Nilsson sings the lead role, and Archer sits in the men's club box and looks across the room at the Mingott's box. May looks a little older and more tired, but she still reminds Archer of the night of their engagement. As Archer remembers the younger May, he suddenly wants to confess everything and ask her for the freedom she had once offered him in St. Augustine.

Archer tells May that he has a headache, and they leave the opera early. At home, he tries to tell May, but she won't let him. May pretends that Archer's reason for wanting to talk about Ellen is because she hasn't been nice to her cousin.

May casually tells him that any hard feelings she had for her cousin are gone because Ellen will soon leave New York and return to Europe. When he hears this, Archer struggles for control. He doesn't believe it until May shows him a letter. Ellen wrote to May that she had decided to return to Europe, and is planning to leave immediately for Washington to pack her belongings. At the end of the letter, she added that it would be useless for any of her friends to try to change her mind.

Archer laughs crazily, but he manages to ask May why Ellen wrote the letter. May guesses that Ellen decided to write it after their conversation at Mrs. Mingott's the evening before.

Topic Tracking: Places 11

Chapter 33

Ten days have passed since Ellen left for Washington. Mrs. Mingott feels hurt that Ellen won't stay, and believes that she left out of boredom. Archer hasn't heard a word from her, although she returned the key to the place where they were to have met; it arrived at his office in a sealed envelope addressed in her handwriting. Although Ellen will return to Europe, she won't return to the Count. Archer still believes that he will leave New York and follow her to France.

May decides to host a going-away party for Ellen - the first big party that she and Archer will throw as a married couple. All of the important New York society people (except the disgraced Beauforts) are there. Ellen arrives looking pale and tired, but Archer doesn't care; he loves her even more. Archer and Ellen sit next to each other at dinner, but they only talk about unimportant things.

During the dinner, Archer realizes that the guests' gossip about Julius Beaufort's affair is actually a thinly disguised warning for him. He finally understands that New York society believes that he and Ellen were lovers, and that May believes it, too. At the same time, he knows that his family and friends will never say anything to him about it:

"The silent organization which held his little world together was determined to put itself on record as never for a moment having questioned the propriety of Madame Olenska's conduct, or the completeness of Archer's domestic felicity." Chapter 33, pg. 267

Archer helps Ellen into her coat as she gets ready to leave. He says good-bye, then adds, "'but I shall see you soon in Paris.'"

Ellen, though, lets him know that he should drop his plan; she invites him to bring May as well.

After the guests leave, Archer tries again to tell May that he loves Ellen. Again, she stops him. Instead, she tells him that she is pregnant, and that she has been sure of it since just that morning. Mrs. Welland, Mrs. Archer, and Ellen also know. Archer hears all of this in a daze, but he remembers that May's conversation with Ellen had taken place two weeks earlier - before she was certain that she was pregnant. That hadn't mattered to May; she had told Ellen she was pregnant anyway. May won the unspoken battle: "'No; I wasn't sure then - but I told her I was. And you see I was right!' she exclaimed, her blue eyes wet with victory." Chapter 33, pg. 270

Topic Tracking: Power 11

Chapter 34

Twenty-six years later, Archer sits in his library and remembers all the important events that took place in the room. He remembers the night when May told him that she was pregnant, and he remembers his children growing up.

Many things have changed in the years that have passed. May is dead, and their three children, Dallas, Mary, and Bill, are grown. New York society, too, has changed. For instance, Dallas is engaged to Julius Beaufort's daughter, Fanny. Their engagement would have shocked the old society, but now no one remembers Beaufort's financial scandal. Archer, in the years since Ellen left, has been a good father and a good husband; still, he feels an emptiness that never went away.

A telephone call interrupts his thoughts. Dallas invites his father to join him for a vacation in Europe.

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In Paris, Dallas tells him that Ellen expects them both for a visit. Unknown to Archer, Fanny Beaufort had become friends with Ellen during an earlier trip to France. Fanny had made Dallas promise to look up Ellen while in Paris.

The invitation surprises Archer. For years, he had imagined coming to Paris to see Ellen. After a while, the idea of meeting up with her again had faded from his mind; he hadn't expected to see Ellen during this vacation. Archer is even more surprised when he learns that Dallas knows of his love for Ellen. May, it turns out, had once told Dallas of Archer's sacrifice. Archer finally realizes that May knew of his sorrow and emptiness throughout their seemingly-happy marriage.

As Archer and Dallas walk to Ellen's apartment, Archer thinks about their years of separation. He knows that Ellen has lived in a very different world, and he begins to wonder if he should see her:

"During that time he had been living with his youthful memory of her; but she had doubtless had other and more tangible companionship. Perhaps too had kept her memory of him as something apart; but if she had, it must have been like a relic in a small dim chapel, where there was not time to pray every day . . ." Chapter 34, pg. 282

Archer decides to sit outside rather than visit Ellen. Dallas doesn't understand why his father won't go up with him, and he worries about what excuse he will give to Ellen:

"His father smiled again. 'Say I'm old-fashioned: that's enough.'" Chapter 34, pg. 283

Archer looks up at the apartment and tries to see the people in the window. He catches a glimpse of a lady who must be Ellen. Archer realizes that she is more real to him in his memories than if he saw her in person.

He sits for a long time in the growing dark. When a servant closes the shutters to Ellen's window, Archer takes it as a signal. He walks back alone to his hotel.