

The Golden Bowl — Volume 2 eBook

The Golden Bowl — Volume 2 by Henry James

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PART FIFTH

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After the little party was again constituted at Fawns—which had taken, for completeness, some ten days—Maggie naturally felt herself still more possessed, in spirit, of everything that had last happened in London. There was a phrase that came back to her from old American years: she was having, by that idiom, the time of her life—she knew it by the perpetual throb of this sense of possession, which was almost too violent either to recognise or to hide. It was as if she had come out—that was her most general consciousness; out of a dark tunnel, a dense wood, or even simply a smoky room, and had thereby, at least, for going on, the advantage of air in her lungs. It was as if she were somehow at last gathering in the fruits of patience; she had either been really more patient than she had known at the time, or had been so for longer: the change brought about by itself as great a difference of view as the shift of an inch in the position of a telescope. It was her telescope in fact that had gained in range—just as her danger lay in her exposing herself to the observation by the more charmed, and therefore the more reckless, use of this optical resource. Not under any provocation to produce it in public was her unremitted rule; but the difficulties of duplicity had not shrunk, while the need of it had doubled. Humbugging, which she had so practised with her father, had been a comparatively simple matter on the basis of mere doubt; but the ground to be covered was now greatly larger, and she felt not unlike some young woman of the theatre who, engaged for a minor part in the play and having mastered her cues with anxious effort, should find herself suddenly promoted to leading lady and expected to appear in every act of the five. She had made much to her husband, that last night, of her “knowing”; but it was exactly this quantity she now knew that, from the moment she could only dissimulate it, added to her responsibility and made of the latter all a mere question of having something precious and precarious in charge. There was no one to help her with it—not even Fanny Assingham now; this good friend’s presence having become, inevitably, with that climax of their last interview in Portland Place, a severely simplified function. She had her use, oh yes, a thousand times; but it could only consist henceforth in her quite conspicuously touching at no point whatever—assuredly, at least with Maggie—the matter they had discussed. She was there, inordinately, as a value, but as a value only for the clear negation of everything. She was their general sign, precisely, of unimpaired beatitude—and she was to live up to that somewhat arduous character, poor thing, as she might. She might privately lapse from it, if she must, with Amerigo or with Charlotte—only not, of course, ever, so much as for the wink of an eye, with the master of the house. Such lapses would be her

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own affair, which Maggie at present could take no thought of. She treated her young friend meanwhile, it was to be said, to no betrayal of such wavering; so that from the moment of her alighting at the door with the Colonel everything went on between them at concert pitch. What had she done, that last evening in Maggie's room, but bring the husband and wife more together than, as would seem, they had ever been? Therefore what indiscretion should she not show by attempting to go behind the grand appearance of her success?—which would be to court a doubt of her beneficent work. She knew accordingly nothing but harmony and diffused, restlessly, nothing but peace—an extravagant, expressive, aggressive peace, not incongruous, after all, with the solid calm of the place; a kind of helmetted, trident-shaking pax Britannica.

The peace, it must be added, had become, as the days elapsed, a peace quite generally animated and peopled—thanks to that fact of the presence of “company” in which Maggie's ability to preserve an appearance had learned, from so far back, to find its best resource. It was not inconspicuous, it was in fact striking, that this resource, just now, seemed to meet in the highest degree every one's need: quite as if every one were, by the multiplication of human objects in the scene, by the creation, by the confusion, of fictive issues, hopeful of escaping somebody else's notice. It had reached the point, in truth, that the collective bosom might have been taken to heave with the knowledge of the descent upon adjacent shores, for a short period, of Mrs. Rance and the Lutches, still united, and still so divided, for conquest: the sense of the party showed at least, oddly enough, as favourable to the fancy of the quaint turn that some near “week-end” might derive from their reappearance. This measured for Maggie the ground they had all travelled together since that unforgotten afternoon of the none so distant year, that determinant September Sunday when, sitting with her father in the park, as in commemoration of the climax both of their old order and of their old danger, she had proposed to him that they should “call in” Charlotte,—call her in as a specialist might be summoned to an invalid's chair. Wasn't it a sign of something rather portentous, their being ready to be beholden, as for a diversion, to the once despised Kitty and Dotty? That had already had its application, in truth, to her invocation of the Castledeans and several other members, again, of the historic Matcham week, made before she left town, and made, always consistently, with an idea—since she was never henceforth to approach these people without an idea, and since that lurid element of their intercourse grew and grew for her with each occasion. The flame with which it burned afresh during these particular days, the way it held up the torch to anything, to everything, that *might* have occurred as the climax of revels springing from traditions so vivified—this

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by itself justified her private motive and reconsecrated her diplomacy. She had already produced by the aid of these people something of the effect she sought—that of being “good” for whatever her companions were good for, and of not asking either of them to give up anyone or anything for her sake. There was moreover, frankly, a sharpness of point in it that she enjoyed; it gave an accent to the truth she wished to illustrate—the truth that the surface of her recent life, thick-sown with the flower of earnest endeavour, with every form of the unruffled and the undoubting, suffered no symptom anywhere to peep out. It was as if, under her pressure, neither party could get rid of the complicity, as it might be figured, of the other; as if, in a word, she saw Amerigo and Charlotte committed, for fear of betrayals on their own side, to a kind of wan consistency on the subject of Lady Castledean’s “set,” and this latter group, by the same stroke, compelled to assist at attestations the extent and bearing of which they rather failed to grasp and which left them indeed, in spite of hereditary high spirits, a trifle bewildered and even a trifle scared.

They made, none the less, at Fawns, for number, for movement, for sound—they played their parts during a crisis that must have hovered for them, in the long passages of the old house, after the fashion of the established ghost, felt, through the dark hours as a constant possibility, rather than have menaced them in the form of a daylight bore, one of the perceived outsiders who are liable to be met in the drawing-room or to be sat next to at dinner. If the Princess, moreover, had failed of her occult use for so much of the machinery of diversion, she would still have had a sense not other than sympathetic for the advantage now extracted from it by Fanny Assingham’s bruised philosophy. This good friend’s relation to it was actually the revanche, she sufficiently indicated, of her obscured lustre at Matcham, where she had known her way about so much less than most of the others. She knew it at Fawns, through the pathless wild of the right tone, positively better than any one, Maggie could note for her; and her revenge had the magnanimity of a brave pointing out of it to every one else, a wonderful irresistible, conscious, almost compassionate patronage. Here was a house, she triumphantly caused it to be noted, in which she so bristled with values that some of them might serve, by her amused willingness to share, for such of the temporarily vague, among her fellow-guests, such of the dimly disconcerted, as had lost the key to their own. It may have been partly through the effect of this especial strain of community with her old friend that Maggie found herself, one evening, moved to take up again their dropped directness of reference. They had remained downstairs together late; the other women of the party had filed, singly or in couples, up the “grand” staircase on which, from the equally grand hall, these retreats and advances

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could always be pleasantly observed; the men had apparently taken their way to the smoking-room; while the Princess, in possession thus of a rare reach of view, had lingered as if to enjoy it. Then she saw that Mrs. Assingham was remaining a little—and as for the appreciation of her enjoyment; upon which they stood looking at each other across the cleared prospect until the elder woman, only vaguely expressive and tentative now, came nearer. It was like the act of asking if there were anything she could yet do, and that question was answered by her immediately feeling, on this closer view, as she had felt when presenting herself in Portland Place after Maggie's last sharp summons. Their understanding was taken up by these new snatched moments where that occasion had left it.

"He has never told her that I know. Of that I'm at last satisfied." And then as Mrs. Assingham opened wide eyes: "I've been in the dark since we came down, not understanding what he has been doing or intending—not making out what can have passed between them. But within a day or two I've begun to suspect, and this evening, for reasons—oh, too many to tell you!—I've been sure, since it explains. *Nothing* has passed between them—that's what has happened. It explains," the Princess repeated with energy; "it explains, it explains!" She spoke in a manner that her auditor was afterwards to describe to the Colonel, oddly enough, as that of the quietest excitement; she had turned back to the chimney-place, where, in honour of a damp day and a chill night, the piled logs had turned to flame and sunk to embers; and the evident intensity of her vision for the fact she imparted made Fanny Assingham wait upon her words. It explained, this striking fact, more indeed than her companion, though conscious of fairly gaping with good-will, could swallow at once. The Princess, however, as for indulgence and confidence, quickly filled up the measure. "He hasn't let her know that I know—and, clearly, doesn't mean to. He has made up his mind; he'll say nothing about it. Therefore, as she's quite unable to arrive at the knowledge by herself, she has no idea how much I'm really in possession. She believes," said Maggie, "and, so far as her own conviction goes, she knows, that I'm not in possession of anything. And that, somehow, for my own help seems to me immense."

"Immense, my dear!" Mrs. Assingham applaudively murmured, though not quite, even as yet, seeing all the way. "He's keeping quiet then on purpose?"

"On purpose." Maggie's lighted eyes, at least, looked further than they had ever looked. "He'll *never* tell her now."

Fanny wondered; she cast about her; most of all she admired her little friend, in whom this announcement was evidently animated by an heroic lucidity. She stood there, in her full uniform, like some small erect commander of a siege, an anxious captain who has suddenly got news, replete with importance for him, of agitation, of division within the place. This importance breathed upon her comrade. "So you're all right?"

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"Oh, *all* right's a good deal to say. But I seem at least to see, as I haven't before, where I am with it."

Fanny bountifully brooded; there was a point left vague. "And you have it from him?—your husband himself has told you?"

"'Told' me—?"

"Why, what you speak of. It isn't of an assurance received from him then that you do speak?"

At which Maggie had continued to stare. "Dear me, no. Do you suppose I've asked him for an assurance?"

"Ah, you haven't?" Her companion smiled. "That's what I supposed you *might* mean. Then, darling, what *have* you—?"

"Asked him for? I've asked him for nothing."

But this, in turn, made Fanny stare. "Then nothing, that evening of the Embassy dinner, passed between you?"

"On the contrary, everything passed."

"Everything—?"

"Everything. I told him what I knew—and I told him how I knew it."

Mrs. Assingham waited. "And that was all?"

"Wasn't it quite enough?"

"Oh, love," she bridled, "that's for you to have judged!"

"Then I *have* judged," said Maggie—"I did judge. I made sure he understood—then I let him alone."

Mrs. Assingham wondered. "But he didn't explain—?"

"Explain? Thank God, no!" Maggie threw back her head as with horror at the thought, then the next moment added: "And I didn't, either."

The decency of pride in it shed a cold little light—yet as from heights at the base of which her companion rather panted. "But if he neither denies nor confesses—?"

“He does what’s a thousand times better—he lets it alone. He does,” Maggie went on, “as he would do; as I see now that I was sure he would. He lets me alone.”

Fanny Assingham turned it over. “Then how do you know so where, as you say, you ‘are’?”

“Why, just *by* that. I put him in possession of the difference; the difference made, about me, by the fact that I hadn’t been, after all—though with a wonderful chance, I admitted, helping me—too stupid to have arrived at knowledge. He had to see that I’m changed for him—quite changed from the idea of me that he had so long been going on with. It became a question then of his really taking in the change—and what I now see is that he is doing so.”

Fanny followed as she could. “Which he shows by letting you, as you say, alone?”

Maggie looked at her a minute. “And by letting her.”

Mrs. Assingham did what she might to embrace it—checked a little, however, by a thought that was the nearest approach she could have, in this almost too large air, to an inspiration. “Ah, but does Charlotte let *him*?”

“Oh, that’s another affair—with which I’ve practically nothing to do. I dare say, however, she doesn’t.” And the Princess had a more distant gaze for the image evoked by the question. “I don’t in fact well see how she *can*. But the point for me is that he understands.”

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"Yes," Fanny Assingham cooed, "understands—?"

"Well, what I want. I want a happiness without a hole in it big enough for you to poke in your finger."

"A brilliant, perfect surface—to begin with at least. I see."

"The golden bowl—as it was to have been." And Maggie dwelt musingly on this obscured figure. "The bowl with all our happiness in it. The bowl without the crack."

For Mrs. Assingham too the image had its force, and the precious object shone before her again, reconstituted, plausible, presentable. But wasn't there still a piece missing? "Yet if he lets you alone and you only let him—?"

"Mayn't our doing so, you mean, be noticed?—mayn't it give us away? Well, we hope not—we try not—we take such care. We alone know what's between us—we and you; and haven't you precisely been struck, since you've been here," Maggie asked, "with our making so good a show?"

Her friend hesitated. "To your father?"

But it made her hesitate too; she wouldn't speak of her father directly. "To everyone. To her—now that you understand."

It held poor Fanny again in wonder. "To Charlotte—yes: if there's so much beneath it, for you, and if it's all such a plan. That makes it hang together it makes *you* hang together." She fairly exhaled her admiration. "You're like nobody else—you're extraordinary."

Maggie met it with appreciation, but with a reserve. "No, I'm not extraordinary—but I *am*, for every one, quiet."

"Well, that's just what is extraordinary. 'Quiet' is more than *I* am, and you leave me far behind." With which, again, for an instant, Mrs. Assingham frankly brooded. "'Now that I understand,' you say—but there's one thing I don't understand." And the next minute, while her companion waited, she had mentioned it. "How can Charlotte, after all, not have pressed him, not have attacked him about it? How can she not have asked him—asked him on his honour, I mean—if you know?"

"How can she 'not'? Why, of course," said the Princess limpidly, "she *must*!"

"Well then—?"

“Well then, you think, he must have told her? Why, exactly what I mean,” said Maggie, “is that he will have done nothing of the sort; will, as I say, have maintained the contrary.”

Fanny Assingham weighed it. “Under her direct appeal for the truth?”

“Under her direct appeal for the truth.”

“Her appeal to his honour?”

“Her appeal to his honour. That’s my point.”

Fanny Assingham braved it. “For the truth as from him to her?”

“From him to any one.”

Mrs. Assingham’s face lighted. “He’ll simply, he’ll insistentlly have lied?”

Maggie brought it out roundly. “He’ll simply, he’ll insistentlly have lied.”

It held again her companion, who next, however, with a single movement, throwing herself on her neck, overflowed. “Oh, if you knew how you help me!”

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Maggie had liked her to understand, so far as this was possible; but had not been slow to see afterwards how the possibility was limited, when one came to think, by mysteries she was not to sound. This inability in her was indeed not remarkable, inasmuch as the Princess herself, as we have seen, was only now in a position to boast of touching bottom. Maggie lived, inwardly, in a consciousness that she could but partly open even to so good a friend, and her own visitation of the fuller expanse of which was, for that matter, still going on. They had been duskier still, however, these recesses of her imagination—that, no doubt, was what might at present be said for them. She had looked into them, on the eve of her leaving town, almost without penetration: she had made out in those hours, and also, of a truth, during the days which immediately followed, little more than the strangeness of a relation having for its chief mark—whether to be prolonged or not—the absence of any “intimate” result of the crisis she had invited her husband to recognise. They had dealt with this crisis again, face to face, very briefly, the morning after the scene in her room—but with the odd consequence of her having appeared merely to leave it on his hands. He had received it from her as he might have received a bunch of keys or a list of commissions—attentive to her instructions about them, but only putting them, for the time, very carefully and safely, into his pocket. The instructions had seemed, from day to day, to make so little difference for his behaviour—that is for his speech or his silence; to produce, as yet, so little of the fruit of action. He had taken from her, on the spot, in a word, before going to dress for dinner, all she then had to give—after which, on the morrow, he had asked her for more, a good deal as if she might have renewed her supply during the night; but he had had at his command for this latter purpose an air of extraordinary detachment and discretion, an air amounting really to an appeal which, if she could have brought herself to describe it vulgarly, she would have described as cool, just as he himself would have described it in any one else as “cheeky”; a suggestion that she should trust him on the particular ground since she didn’t on the general. Neither his speech nor his silence struck her as signifying more, or less, under this pressure, than they had seemed to signify for weeks past; yet if her sense hadn’t been absolutely closed to the possibility in him of any thought of wounding her, she might have taken his undisturbed manner, the perfection of his appearance of having recovered himself, for one of those intentions of high impertinence by the aid of which great people, les grands seigneurs, persons of her husband’s class and type, always know how to re-establish a violated order.

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It was her one purely good fortune that she could feel thus sure impertinence—to *her* at any rate—was not among the arts on which he proposed to throw himself; for though he had, in so almost mystifying a manner, replied to nothing, denied nothing, explained nothing, apologised for nothing, he had somehow conveyed to her that this was not because of any determination to treat her case as not “worth” it. There had been consideration, on both occasions, in the way he had listened to her—even though at the same time there had been extreme reserve; a reserve indeed, it was also to be remembered, qualified by the fact that, on their second and shorter interview, in Portland Place, and quite at the end of this passage, she had imagined him positively proposing to her a temporary accommodation. It had been but the matter of something in the depths of the eyes he finally fixed upon her, and she had found in it, the more she kept it before her, the tacitly-offered sketch of a working arrangement. “Leave me my reserve; don’t question it—it’s all I have, just now, don’t you see? so that, if you’ll make me the concession of letting me alone with it for as long a time as I require, I promise you something or other, grown under cover of it, even though I don’t yet quite make out what, as a return for your patience.” She had turned away from him with some such unspoken words as that in her ear, and indeed she had to represent to herself that she had spiritually heard them, had to listen to them still again, to explain her particular patience in face of his particular failure. He hadn’t so much as pretended to meet for an instant the question raised by her of her accepted ignorance of the point in time, the period before their own marriage, from which his intimacy with Charlotte dated. As an ignorance in which he and Charlotte had been personally interested—and to the pitch of consummately protecting, for years, each other’s interest—as a condition so imposed upon her the fact of its having ceased might have made it, on the spot, the first article of his defence. He had vouchsafed it, however, nothing better than his longest stare of postponed consideration. That tribute he had coldly paid it, and Maggie might herself have been stupefied, truly, had she not had something to hold on by, at her own present ability, even provisional, to make terms with a chapter of history into which she could but a week before not have dipped without a mortal chill. At the rate at which she was living she was getting used hour by hour to these extensions of view; and when she asked herself, at Fawns, to what single observation of her own, in London, the Prince had had an affirmation to oppose, she but just failed to focus the small strained wife of the moments in question as some panting dancer of a difficult step who had capered, before the footlights of an empty theatre, to a spectator lounging in a box.

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Her best comprehension of Amerigo's success in not committing himself was in her recall, meanwhile, of the inquiries he had made of her on their only return to the subject, and which he had in fact explicitly provoked their return in order to make. He had had it over with her again, the so distinctly remarkable incident of her interview at home with the little Bloomsbury shopman. This anecdote, for him, had, not altogether surprisingly, required some straighter telling, and the Prince's attitude in presence of it had represented once more his nearest approach to a cross-examination. The difficulty in respect to the little man had been for the question of his motive—his motive in writing, first, in the spirit of retraction, to a lady with whom he had made a most advantageous bargain, and in then coming to see her so that his apology should be personal. Maggie had felt her explanation weak; but there were the facts, and she could give no other. Left alone, after the transaction, with the knowledge that his visitor designed the object bought of him as a birthday-gift to her father—for Maggie confessed freely to having chattered to him almost as to a friend—the vendor of the golden bowl had acted on a scruple rare enough in vendors of any class, and almost unprecedented in the thrifty children of Israel. He hadn't liked what he had done, and what he had above all made such a "good thing" of having done; at the thought of his purchaser's good faith and charming presence, opposed to that flaw in her acquisition which would make it, verily, as an offering to a loved parent, a thing of sinister meaning and evil effect, he had known conscientious, he had known superstitious visitings, had given way to a whim all the more remarkable to his own commercial mind, no doubt, from its never having troubled him in other connexions. She had recognised the oddity of her adventure and left it to show for what it was. She had not been unconscious, on the other hand, that if it hadn't touched Amerigo so nearly he would have found in it matter for some amused reflection. He had uttered an extraordinary sound, something between a laugh and a howl, on her saying, as she had made a point of doing: "Oh, most certainly, he *told* me his reason was because he 'liked' me"—though she remained in doubt of whether that inarticulate comment had been provoked most by the familiarities she had offered or by those that, so pictured, she had had to endure. That the partner of her bargain had yearned to see her again, that he had plainly jumped at a pretext for it, this also she had frankly expressed herself to the Prince as having, in no snubbing, no scandalised, but rather in a positively appreciative and indebted spirit, not delayed to make out. He had wished, ever so seriously, to return her a part of her money, and she had wholly declined to receive it; and then he had uttered his hope that she had not, at all events, already devoted the crystal cup to the beautiful purpose she had, so kindly and so fortunately,

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named to him. It wasn't a thing for a present to a person she was fond of, for she wouldn't wish to give a present that would bring ill luck. That had come to him—so that he couldn't rest, and he should feel better now that he had told her. His having led her to act in ignorance was what he should have been ashamed of; and, if she would pardon, gracious lady as she was, all the liberties he had taken, she might make of the bowl any use in life but that one.

It was after this that the most extraordinary incident of all, of course, had occurred—his pointing to the two photographs with the remark that those were persons he knew, and that, more wonderful still, he had made acquaintance with them, years before, precisely over the same article. The lady, on that occasion, had taken up the fancy of presenting it to the gentleman, and the gentleman, guessing and dodging ever so cleverly, had declared that he wouldn't for the world receive an object under such suspicion. He himself, the little man had confessed, wouldn't have minded—about *them*; but he had never forgotten either their talk or their faces, the impression altogether made by them, and, if she really wished to know, now, what had perhaps most moved him, it was the thought that she should ignorantly have gone in for a thing not good enough for other buyers. He had been immensely struck—that was another point—with this accident of their turning out, after so long, friends of hers too: they had disappeared, and this was the only light he had ever had upon them. He had flushed up, quite red, with his recognition, with all his responsibility—had declared that the connexion must have had, mysteriously, something to do with the impulse he had obeyed. And Maggie had made, to her husband, while he again stood before her, no secret of the shock, for herself, so suddenly and violently received. She had done her best, even while taking it full in the face, not to give herself away; but she wouldn't answer—no, she wouldn't—for what she might, in her agitation, have made her informant think. He might think what he would—there had been three or four minutes during which, while she asked him question upon question, she had doubtless too little cared. And he had spoken, for his remembrance, as fully as she could have wished; he had spoken, oh, delightedly, for the “terms” on which his other visitors had appeared to be with each other, and in fact for that conviction of the nature and degree of their intimacy under which, in spite of precautions, they hadn't been able to help leaving him. He had observed and judged and not forgotten; he had been sure they were great people, but no, ah no, distinctly, hadn't “liked” them as he liked the Signora Principessa. Certainly—she had created no vagueness about that—he had been in possession of her name and address, for sending her both her cup and her account. But the others he had only, always, wondered about—he had been sure they would never come back. And

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as to the time of their visit, he could place it, positively, to a day—by reason of a transaction of importance, recorded in his books, that had occurred but a few hours later. He had left her, in short, definitely rejoicing that he had been able to make up to her for not having been quite “square” over their little business by rendering her, so unexpectedly, the service of this information. His joy, moreover, was—as much as Amerigo would!—a matter of the personal interest with which her kindness, gentleness, grace, her charming presence and easy humanity and familiarity, had inspired him. All of which, while, in thought, Maggie went over it again and again —oh, over any imputable rashness of her own immediate passion and pain, as well as over the rest of the straight little story she had, after all, to tell—might very conceivably make a long sum for the Prince to puzzle out.

There were meanwhile, after the Castledleans and those invited to meet them had gone, and before Mrs. Rance and the Lutches had come, three or four days during which she was to learn the full extent of her need not to be penetrable; and then it was indeed that she felt all the force, and threw herself upon all the help, of the truth she had confided, several nights earlier, to Fanny Assingham. She had known it in advance, had warned herself of it while the house was full: Charlotte had designs upon her of a nature best known to herself, and was only waiting for the better opportunity of their finding themselves less companioned. This consciousness had been exactly at the bottom of Maggie’s wish to multiply their spectators; there were moments for her, positively, moments of planned postponement, of evasion scarcely less disguised than studied, during which she turned over with anxiety the different ways—there being two or three possible ones—in which her young stepmother might, at need, seek to work upon her. Amerigo’s not having “told” her of his passage with his wife gave, for Maggie, altogether a new aspect to Charlotte’s consciousness and condition—an aspect with which, for apprehension, for wonder, and even, at moments, inconsequently enough, for something like compassion, the Princess had now to reckon. She asked herself—for she was capable of that—what he had *meant* by keeping the sharer of his guilt in the dark about a matter touching her otherwise so nearly; what he had meant, that is, for this unmistakably mystified personage herself. Maggie could imagine what he had meant for her—all sorts of thinkable things, whether things of mere “form” or things of sincerity, things of pity or things of prudence: he had meant, for instance, in all probability, primarily, to conjure away any such appearance of a changed relation between the two women as his father-in-law might notice and follow up. It would have been open to him however, given the pitch of their intimacy, to avert this danger by some more conceivable course with Charlotte;

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since an earnest warning, in fact, the full freedom of alarm, that of his insisting to her on the peril of suspicion incurred, and on the importance accordingly of outward peace at any price, would have been the course really most conceivable. Instead of warning and advising he had reassured and deceived her; so that our young woman, who had been, from far back, by the habit, if her nature, as much on her guard against sacrificing others as if she felt the great trap of life mainly to be set for one's doing so, now found herself attaching her fancy to that side of the situation of the exposed pair which involved, for themselves at least, the sacrifice of the least fortunate.

She never, at present, thought of what Amerigo might be intending, without the reflection, by the same stroke, that, whatever this quantity, he was leaving still more to her own ingenuity. He was helping her, when the thing came to the test, only by the polished, possibly almost too polished surface his manner to his wife wore for an admiring world; and that, surely, was entitled to scarcely more than the praise of negative diplomacy. He was keeping his manner right, as she had related to Mrs. Assingham; the case would have been beyond calculation, truly, if, on top of everything, he had allowed it to go wrong. She had hours of exaltation indeed when the meaning of all this pressed in upon her as a tacit vow from him to abide without question by whatever she should be able to achieve or think fit to prescribe. Then it was that, even while holding her breath for the awe of it, she truly felt almost able enough for anything. It was as if she had passed, in a time incredibly short, from being nothing for him to being all; it was as if, rightly noted, every turn of his head, every tone of his voice, in these days, might mean that there was but one way in which a proud man reduced to abjection could hold himself. During those of Maggie's vigils in which that view loomed largest, the image of her husband that it thus presented to her gave out a beauty for the revelation of which she struck herself as paying, if anything, all too little. To make sure of it—to make sure of the beauty shining out of the humility, and of the humility lurking in all the pride of his presence—she would have gone the length of paying more yet, of paying with difficulties and anxieties compared to which those actually before her might have been as superficial as headaches or rainy days.

The point at which these exaltations dropped, however, was the point at which it was apt to come over her that if her complications had been greater the question of paying would have been limited still less to the liabilities of her own pocket. The complications were verily great enough, whether for ingenuities or sublimities, so long as she had to come back to it so often that Charlotte, all the while, could only be struggling with secrets sharper than her own. It was odd how that certainty again and again determined

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and coloured her wonderments of detail; the question, for instance, of *how* Amerigo, in snatched opportunities of conference, put the haunted creature off with false explanations, met her particular challenges and evaded—if that was what he did do!—her particular demands. Even the conviction that Charlotte was but awaiting some chance really to test her trouble upon her lover's wife left Maggie's sense meanwhile open as to the sight of gilt wires and bruised wings, the spacious but suspended cage, the home of eternal unrest, of pacings, beatings, shakings, all so vain, into which the baffled consciousness helplessly resolved itself. The cage was the deluded condition, and Maggie, as having known delusion—rather!—understood the nature of cages. She walked round Charlotte's—cautiously and in a very wide circle; and when, inevitably, they had to communicate she felt herself, comparatively, outside, on the breast of nature, and saw her companion's face as that of a prisoner looking through bars. So it was that through bars, bars richly gilt, but firmly, though discreetly, planted, Charlotte finally struck her as making a grim attempt; from which, at first, the Princess drew back as instinctively as if the door of the cage had suddenly been opened from within.

XXXVI

They had been alone that evening—alone as a party of six, and four of them, after dinner, under suggestion not to be resisted, sat down to “bridge” in the smoking-room. They had passed together to that apartment, on rising from table, Charlotte and Mrs. Assingham alike indulgent, always, to tobacco, and in fact practising an emulation which, as Fanny said, would, for herself, had the Colonel not issued an interdict based on the fear of her stealing his cigars, have stopped only at the short pipe. Here cards had with inevitable promptness asserted their rule, the game forming itself, as had often happened before, of Mr. Verver with Mrs. Assingham for partner and of the Prince with Mrs. Verver. The Colonel, who had then asked of Maggie license to relieve his mind of a couple of letters for the earliest post out on the morrow, was addressing himself to this task at the other end of the room, and the Princess herself had welcomed the comparatively hushed hour—for the bridge-players were serious and silent—much in the mood of a tired actress who has the good fortune to be “off,” while her mates are on, almost long enough for a nap on the property sofa in the wing. Maggie's nap, had she been able to snatch forty winks, would have been of the spirit rather than of the sense; yet as she subsided, near a lamp, with the last salmon-coloured French periodical, she was to fail, for refreshment, even of that sip of independence.

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There was no question for her, as she found, of closing her eyes and getting away; they strayed back to life, in the stillness, over the top of her Review; she could lend herself to none of those refinements of the higher criticism with which its pages bristled; she was there, where her companions were, there again and more than ever there; it was as if, of a sudden, they had been made, in their personal intensity and their rare complexity of relation, freshly importunate to her. It was the first evening there had been no one else. Mrs. Rance and the Lutches were due the next day; but meanwhile the facts of the situation were upright for her round the green cloth and the silver flambeaux; the fact of her father's wife's lover facing his mistress; the fact of her father sitting, all unsounded and unblinking, between them; the fact of Charlotte keeping it up, keeping up everything, across the table, with her husband beside her; the fact of Fanny Assingham, wonderful creature, placed opposite to the three and knowing more about each, probably, when one came to think, than either of them knew of either. Erect above all for her was the sharp-edged fact of the relation of the whole group, individually and collectively, to herself—herself so speciously eliminated for the hour, but presumably more present to the attention of each than the next card to be played.

Yes, under that imputation, to her sense, they sat—the imputation of wondering, beneath and behind all their apparently straight play, if she weren't really watching them from her corner and consciously, as might be said, holding them in her hand. She was asking herself at last how they could bear it—for, though cards were as nought to her and she could follow no move, so that she was always, on such occasions, out of the party, they struck her as conforming alike, in the matter of gravity and propriety, to the stiff standard of the house. Her father, she knew, was a high adept, one of the greatest—she had been ever, in her stupidity, his small, his sole despair; Amerigo excelled easily, as he understood and practised every art that could beguile large leisure; Mrs. Assingham and Charlotte, moreover, were accounted as “good” as members of a sex incapable of the nobler consistency could be. Therefore, evidently, they were not, all so up to their usual form, merely passing it off, whether for her or for themselves; and the amount of enjoyed, or at least achieved, security represented by so complete a conquest of appearances was what acted on her nerves, precisely, with a kind of provocative force. She found herself, for five minutes, thrilling with the idea of the prodigious effect that, just as she sat there near them, she had at her command; with the sense that if she were but different—oh, ever so different!—all this high decorum would hang by a hair. There reigned for her, absolutely, during these vertiginous moments, that fascination of the monstrous, that temptation of the horribly possible, which we so often trace by its breaking out suddenly, lest it should go further, in unexplained retreats and reactions.

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After it had been thus vividly before her for a little that, springing up under her wrong and making them all start, stare and turn pale, she might sound out their doom in a single sentence, a sentence easy to choose among several of the lurid—after she had faced that blinding light and felt it turn to blackness, she rose from her place, laying aside her magazine, and moved slowly round the room, passing near the card-players and pausing an instant behind the chairs in turn. Silent and discreet, she bent a vague mild face upon them, as if to signify that, little as she followed their doings, she wished them well; and she took from each, across the table, in the common solemnity, an upward recognition which she was to carry away with her on her moving out to the terrace, a few minutes later. Her father and her husband, Mrs. Assingham and Charlotte, had done nothing but meet her eyes; yet the difference in these demonstrations made each a separate passage—which was all the more wonderful since, with the secret behind every face, they had alike tried to look at her *through* it and in denial of it.

It all left her, as she wandered off, with the strangest of impressions—the sense, forced upon her as never yet, of an appeal, a positive confidence, from the four pairs of eyes, that was deeper than any negation, and that seemed to speak, on the part of each, of some relation to be contrived by her, a relation with herself, which would spare the individual the danger, the actual present strain, of the relation with the others. They thus tacitly put it upon her to be disposed of, the whole complexity of their peril, and she promptly saw why because she was there, and there just as she was, to lift it off them and take it; to charge herself with it as the scapegoat of old, of whom she had once seen a terrible picture, had been charged with the sins of the people and had gone forth into the desert to sink under his burden and die. That indeed wasn't *their* design and their interest, that she should sink under hers; it wouldn't be their feeling that she should do anything but live, live on somehow for their benefit, and even as much as possible in their company, to keep proving to them that they had truly escaped and that she was still there to simplify. This idea of her simplifying, and of their combined struggle, dim as yet but steadily growing, toward the perception of her adopting it from them, clung to her while she hovered on the terrace, where the summer night was so soft that she scarce needed the light shawl she had picked up. Several of the long windows of the occupied rooms stood open to it, and the light came out in vague shafts and fell upon the old smooth stones. The hour was moonless and starless and the air heavy and still—which was why, in her evening dress, she need fear no chill and could get away, in the outer darkness, from that provocation of opportunity which had assaulted her, within, on her sofa, as a beast might have leaped at her throat.

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Nothing in fact was stranger than the way in which, when she had remained there a little, her companions, watched by her through one of the windows, actually struck her as almost consciously and gratefully safer. They might have been—really charming as they showed in the beautiful room, and Charlotte certainly, as always, magnificently handsome and supremely distinguished—they might have been figures rehearsing some play of which she herself was the author; they might even, for the happy appearance they continued to present, have been such figures as would, by the strong note of character in each, fill any author with the certitude of success, especially of their own histrionic. They might in short have represented any mystery they would; the point being predominantly that the key to the mystery, the key that could wind and unwind it without a snap of the spring, was there in her pocket—or rather, no doubt, clasped at this crisis in her hand and pressed, as she walked back and forth, to her breast. She walked to the end and far out of the light; she returned and saw the others still where she had left them; she passed round the house and looked into the drawing-room, lighted also, but empty now, and seeming to speak the more, in its own voice, of all the possibilities she controlled. Spacious and splendid, like a stage again awaiting a drama, it was a scene she might people, by the press of her spring, either with serenities and dignities and decencies, or with terrors and shames and ruins, things as ugly as those formless fragments of her golden bowl she was trying so hard to pick up.

She continued to walk and continued to pause; she stopped afresh for the look into the smoking-room, and by this time—it was as if the recognition had of itself arrested her—she saw as in a picture, with the temptation she had fled from quite extinct, why it was she had been able to give herself so little, from the first, to the vulgar heat of her wrong. She might fairly, as she watched them, have missed it as a lost thing; have yearned for it, for the straight vindictive view, the rights of resentment, the rages of jealousy, the protests of passion, as for something she had been cheated of not least: a range of feelings which for many women would have meant so much, but which for *her* husband's wife, for *her* father's daughter, figured nothing nearer to experience than a wild eastern caravan, looming into view with crude colours in the sun, fierce pipes in the air, high spears against the sky, all a thrill, a natural joy to mingle with, but turning off short before it reached her and plunging into other defiles. She saw at all events why horror itself had almost failed her; the horror that, foreshadowed in advance, would, by her thought, have made everything that was unaccustomed in her cry out with pain; the horror of finding evil seated, all at its ease, where she had only dreamed of good; the horror of the thing *hideously* behind, behind so much trusted, so much

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pretended, nobleness, cleverness, tenderness. It was the first sharp falsity she had known in her life, to touch at all, or be touched by; it had met her like some bad-faced stranger surprised in one of the thick-carpeted corridors of a house of quiet on a Sunday afternoon; and yet, yes, amazingly, she had been able to look at terror and disgust only to know that she must put away from her the bitter-sweet of their freshness. The sight, from the window, of the group so constituted, *told* her why, told her how, named to her, as with hard lips, named straight *at* her, so that she must take it full in the face, that other possible relation to the whole fact which alone would bear upon her irresistibly. It was extraordinary: they positively brought home to her that to feel about them in any of the immediate, inevitable, assuaging ways, the ways usually open to innocence outraged and generosity betrayed, would have been to give them up, and that giving them up was, marvellously, not to be thought of. She had never, from the first hour of her state of acquired conviction, given them up so little as now; though she was, no doubt, as the consequence of a step taken a few minutes later, to invoke the conception of doing that, if might be, even less. She had resumed her walk—stopping here and there, while she rested on the cool smooth stone balustrade, to draw it out; in the course of which, after a little, she passed again the lights of the empty drawing-room and paused again for what she saw and felt there.

It was not at once, however, that this became quite concrete; that was the effect of her presently making out that Charlotte was in the room, launched and erect there, in the middle, and looking about her; that she had evidently just come round to it, from her card-table, by one of the passages—with the expectation, to all appearance, of joining her stepdaughter. She had pulled up at seeing the great room empty—Maggie not having passed out, on leaving the group, in a manner to be observed. So definite a quest of her, with the bridge-party interrupted or altered for it, was an impression that fairly assailed the Princess, and to which something of attitude and aspect, of the air of arrested pursuit and purpose, in Charlotte, together with the suggestion of her next vague movements, quickly added its meaning. This meaning was that she had decided, that she had been infinitely conscious of Maggie's presence before, that she knew that she would at last find her alone, and that she wanted her, for some reason, enough to have presumably called on Bob Assingham for aid. He had taken her chair and let her go, and the arrangement was for Maggie a signal proof of her earnestness; of the energy, in fact, that, though superficially commonplace in a situation in which people weren't supposed to be watching each other, was what affected our young woman, on the spot, as a breaking of bars. The splendid shining supple creature was out of the cage, was at

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large; and the question now almost grotesquely rose of whether she mightn't by some art, just where she was and before she could go further, be hemmed in and secured. It would have been for a moment, in this case, a matter of quickly closing the windows and giving the alarm—with poor Maggie's sense that, though she couldn't know what she wanted of her, it was enough for trepidation that, at these firm hands, anything should be to say nothing of the sequel of a flight taken again along the terrace, even under the shame of the confessed feebleness of such evasions on the part of an outraged wife. It was to this feebleness, none the less, that the outraged wife had presently resorted; the most that could be said for her being, as she felt while she finally stopped short, at a distance, that she could at any rate resist her abjection sufficiently not to sneak into the house by another way and safely reach her room. She had literally caught herself in the act of dodging and ducking, and it told her there, vividly, in a single word, what she had all along been most afraid of.

She had been afraid of the particular passage with Charlotte that would determine her father's wife to take him into her confidence as she couldn't possibly as yet have done, to prepare for him a statement of her wrong, to lay before him the infamy of what she was apparently suspected of. This, should she have made up her mind to do it, would rest on a calculation the thought of which evoked, strangely, other possibilities and visions. It would show her as sufficiently believing in her grasp of her husband to be able to assure herself that, with his daughter thrown on the defensive, with Maggie's cause and Maggie's word, in fine, against her own, it wasn't Maggie's that would most certainly carry the day. Such a glimpse of her conceivable idea, which would be founded on reasons all her own, reasons of experience and assurance, impenetrable to others, but intimately familiar to herself—such a glimpse opened out wide as soon as it had come into view; for if so much as this was still firm ground between the elder pair, if the beauty of appearances had been so consistently preserved, it was only the golden bowl as Maggie herself knew it that had been broken. The breakage stood not for any wrought discomposure among the triumphant three—it stood merely for the dire deformity of her attitude toward them. She was unable at the minute, of course, fully to measure the difference thus involved for her, and it remained inevitably an agitating image, the way it might be held over her that if she didn't, of her own prudence, satisfy Charlotte as to the reference, in her mocking spirit, of so much of the unuttered and unutterable, of the constantly and unmistakably implied, her father would be invited without further ceremony to recommend her to do so. But *any* confidence, *any* latent operating insolence, that Mrs. Verver should, thanks to her large native resources,

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continue to be possessed of and to hold in reserve, glimmered suddenly as a possible working light and seemed to offer, for meeting her, a new basis and something like a new system. Maggie felt, truly, a rare contraction of the heart on making out, the next instant, what the new system would probably have to be—and she had practically done that before perceiving that the thing she feared had already taken place. Charlotte, extending her search, appeared now to define herself vaguely in the distance; of this, after an instant, the Princess was sure, though the darkness was thick, for the projected clearness of the smoking-room windows had presently contributed its help. Her friend came slowly into that circle—having also, for herself, by this time, not indistinguishably discovered that Maggie was on the terrace. Maggie, from the end, saw her stop before one of the windows to look at the group within, and then saw her come nearer and pause again, still with a considerable length of the place between them.

Yes, Charlotte had seen she was watching her from afar, and had stopped now to put her further attention to the test. Her face was fixed on her, through the night; she was the creature who had escaped by force from her cage, yet there was in her whole motion assuredly, even as so dimly discerned, a kind of portentous intelligent stillness. She had escaped with an intention, but with an intention the more definite that it could so accord with quiet measures. The two women, at all events, only hovered there, for these first minutes, face to face over their interval and exchanging no sign; the intensity of their mutual look might have pierced the night, and Maggie was at last to start with the scared sense of having thus yielded to doubt, to dread, to hesitation, for a time that, with no other proof needed, would have completely given her away. How long had she stood staring?— a single minute or five? Long enough, in any case, to have felt herself absolutely take from her visitor something that the latter threw upon her, irresistibly, by this effect of silence, by this effect of waiting and watching, by this effect, unmistakably, of timing her indecision and her fear. If then, scared and hanging back, she had, as was so evident, sacrificed all past pretences, it would have been with the instant knowledge of an immense advantage gained that Charlotte finally saw her come on. Maggie came on with her heart in her hands; she came on with the definite prevision, throbbing like the tick of a watch, of a doom impossibly sharp and hard, but to which, after looking at it with her eyes wide open, she had none the less bowed her head. By the time she was at her companion's side, for that matter, by the time Charlotte had, without a motion, without a word, simply let her approach and stand there, her head was already on the block, so that the consciousness that everything had now gone blurred all perception of whether or no the axe had fallen. Oh, the "advantage," it was perfectly enough, in truth, with Mrs. Verver; for what was Maggie's own sense but that of having been thrown over on her back, with her neck, from the first, half broken and her helpless face staring up? That position only could account for the positive grimace of weakness and pain produced there by Charlotte's dignity.

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"I've come to join you—I thought you would be here."

"Oh yes, I'm here," Maggie heard herself return a little flatly. "It's too close in-doors."

"Very—but close even here." Charlotte was still and grave—she had even uttered her remark about the temperature with an expressive weight that verged upon solemnity; so that Maggie, reduced to looking vaguely about at the sky, could only feel her not fail of her purpose. "The air's heavy as if with thunder—I think there'll be a storm." She made the suggestion to carry off an awkwardness—which was a part, always, of her companion's gain; but the awkwardness didn't diminish in the silence that followed. Charlotte had said nothing in reply; her brow was dark as with a fixed expression, and her high elegance, her handsome head and long, straight neck testified, through the dusk, to their inveterate completeness and noble erectness. It was as if what she had come out to do had already begun, and when, as a consequence, Maggie had said helplessly, "Don't you want something? won't you have my shawl?" everything might have crumbled away in the comparative poverty of the tribute. Mrs. Verver's rejection of it had the brevity of a sign that they hadn't closed in for idle words, just as her dim, serious face, uninterruptedly presented until they moved again, might have represented the success with which she watched all her message penetrate. They presently went back the way she had come, but she stopped Maggie again within range of the smoking-room window and made her stand where the party at cards would be before her. Side by side, for three minutes, they fixed this picture of quiet harmonies, the positive charm of it and, as might have been said, the full significance—which, as was now brought home to Maggie, could be no more, after all, than a matter of interpretation, differing always for a different interpreter. As she herself had hovered in sight of it a quarter-of-an-hour before, it would have been a thing for her to show Charlotte—to show in righteous irony, in reproach too stern for anything but silence. But now it was she who was being shown it, and shown it by Charlotte, and she saw quickly enough that, as Charlotte showed it, so she must at present submissively seem to take it.

The others were absorbed and unconscious, either silent over their game or dropping remarks unheard on the terrace; and it was to her father's quiet face, discernibly expressive of nothing that was in his daughter's mind, that our young woman's attention was most directly given. His wife and his daughter were both closely watching him, and to which of them, could he have been notified of this, would his raised eyes first, all impulsively, have responded; in which of them would he have felt it most important to destroy—for *his* clutch at the equilibrium—any germ of uneasiness? Not yet, since his marriage, had Maggie so sharply and so formidably known her old possession of him as

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a thing divided and contested. She was looking at him by Charlotte's leave and under Charlotte's direction; quite in fact as if the particular way she should look at him were prescribed to her; quite, even, as if she had been defied to look at him in any other. It came home to her too that the challenge wasn't, as might be said, in his interest and for his protection, but, pressingly, insistently, in Charlotte's, for that of *her* security at any price. She might verily, by this dumb demonstration, have been naming to Maggie the price, naming it as a question for Maggie herself, a sum of money that she, properly, was to find. She must remain safe and Maggie must pay—what she was to pay with being her own affair.

Straighter than ever, thus, the Princess again felt it all put upon her, and there was a minute, just a supreme instant, during which there burned in her a wild wish that her father would only look up. It throbbed for these seconds as a yearning appeal to him—she would chance it, that is, if he would but just raise his eyes and catch them, across the larger space, standing in the outer dark together. Then he might be affected by the sight, taking them as they were; he might make some sign—she scarce knew what—that would save her; save her from being the one, this way, to pay all. He might somehow show a preference—distinguishing between them; might, out of pity for her, signal to her that this extremity of her effort for him was more than he asked. That represented Maggie's one little lapse from consistency—the sole small deflection in the whole course of her scheme. It had come to nothing the next minute, for the dear man's eyes had never moved, and Charlotte's hand, promptly passed into her arm, had already, had very firmly drawn her on—quite, for that matter, as from some sudden, some equal perception on her part too of the more ways than one in which their impression could appeal. They retraced their steps along the rest of the terrace, turning the corner of the house, and presently came abreast of the other windows, those of the pompous drawing-room, still lighted and still empty. Here Charlotte again paused, and it was again as if she were pointing out what Maggie had observed for herself, the very look the place had of being vivid in its stillness, of having, with all its great objects as ordered and balanced as for a formal reception, been appointed for some high transaction, some real affair of state. In presence of this opportunity she faced her companion once more; she traced in her the effect of everything she had already communicated; she signified, with the same success, that the terrace and the sullen night would bear too meagre witness to the completion of her idea. Soon enough then, within the room, under the old lustres of Venice and the eyes of the several great portraits, more or less contemporary with these, that awaited on the walls of Fawns their final far migration—soon enough Maggie found herself staring, and at first all too gaspingly, at the grand total to which each separate demand Mrs. Verver had hitherto made upon her, however she had made it, now amounted.

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"I've been wanting—and longer than you'd perhaps believe—to put a question to you for which no opportunity has seemed to me yet quite so good as this. It would have been easier perhaps if you had struck me as in the least disposed ever to give me one. I have to take it now, you see, as I find it." They stood in the centre of the immense room, and Maggie could feel that the scene of life her imagination had made of it twenty minutes before was by this time sufficiently peopled. These few straight words filled it to its uttermost reaches, and nothing was now absent from her consciousness, either, of the part she was called upon to play in it. Charlotte had marched straight in, dragging her rich train; she rose there beautiful and free, with her whole aspect and action attuned to the firmness of her speech. Maggie had kept the shawl she had taken out with her, and, clutching it tight in her nervousness, drew it round her as if huddling in it for shelter, covering herself with it for humility. She looked out as from under an improvised hood—the sole headgear of some poor woman at somebody's proud door; she waited even like the poor woman; she met her friend's eyes with recognitions she couldn't suppress. She might sound it as she could—"What question then?"—everything in her, from head to foot, crowded it upon Charlotte that she knew. She knew too well—that she was showing; so that successful vagueness, to save some scrap of her dignity from the imminence of her defeat, was already a lost cause, and the one thing left was if possible, at any cost, even that of stupid inconsequence, to try to look as if she weren't afraid. If she could but appear at all not afraid she might appear a little not ashamed—that is not ashamed to be afraid, which was the kind of shame that could be fastened on her, it being fear all the while that moved her. Her challenge, at any rate, her wonder, her terror—the blank, blurred surface, whatever it was that she presented became a mixture that ceased to signify; for to the accumulated advantage by which Charlotte was at present sustained her next words themselves had little to add.

"Have you any ground of complaint of me? Is there any wrong you consider I've done you? I feel at last that I've a right to ask you."

Their eyes had to meet on it, and to meet long; Maggie's avoided at least the disgrace of looking away. "What makes you want to ask it?"

"My natural desire to know. You've done that, for so long, little justice."

Maggie waited a moment. "For so long? You mean you've thought—?"

"I mean, my dear, that I've seen. I've seen, week after week, that *you* seemed to be thinking—of something that perplexed or worried you. Is it anything for which I'm in any degree responsible?"

Maggie summoned all her powers. "What in the world *should* it be?"

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“Ah, that’s not for me to imagine, and I should be very sorry to have to try to say! I’m aware of no point whatever at which I may have failed you,” said Charlotte; “nor of any at which I may have failed any one in whom I can suppose you sufficiently interested to care. If I’ve been guilty of some fault I’ve committed it all unconsciously, and am only anxious to hear from you honestly about it. But if I’ve been mistaken as to what I speak of—the difference, more and more marked, as I’ve thought, in all your manner to me—why, obviously, so much the better. No form of correction received from you could give me greater satisfaction.”

She spoke, it struck her companion, with rising, with extraordinary ease; as if hearing herself say it all, besides seeing the way it was listened to, helped her from point to point. She saw she was right—that this was the tone for her to take and the thing for her to do, the thing as to which she was probably feeling that she had in advance, in her delays and uncertainties, much exaggerated the difficulty. The difficulty was small, and it grew smaller as her adversary continued to shrink; she was not only doing as she wanted, but had by this time effectively done it and hung it up. All of which but deepened Maggie’s sense of the sharp and simple need, now, of seeing her through to the end. “If you’ve been mistaken, you say?”—and the Princess but barely faltered. “You *have* been mistaken.”

Charlotte looked at her splendidly hard. “You’re perfectly sure it’s *all* my mistake?”

“All I can say is that you’ve received a false impression.”

“Ah then—so much the better! From the moment I *had* received it I knew I must sooner or later speak of it—for that, you see, is, systematically, my way. And now,” Charlotte added, “you make me glad I’ve spoken. I thank you very much.”

It was strange how for Maggie too, with this, the difficulty seemed to sink. Her companion’s acceptance of her denial was like a general pledge not to keep things any worse for her than they essentially had to be; it positively helped her to build up her falsehood—to which, accordingly, she contributed another block. “I’ve affected you evidently—quite accidentally—in some way of which I’ve been all unaware. I’ve *not* felt at any time that you’ve wronged me.”

“How could I come within a mile,” Charlotte inquired, “of such a possibility?”

Maggie, with her eyes on her more easily now, made no attempt to say; she said, after a little, something more to the present point. “I accuse you—I accuse you of nothing.”

“Ah, that’s lucky!”

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Charlotte had brought this out with the richness, almost, of gaiety; and Maggie, to go on, had to think, with her own intensity, of Amerigo—to think how he, on his side, had had to go through with his lie to her, how it was for his wife he had done so, and how his doing so had given her the clue and set her the example. He must have had his own difficulty about it, and she was not, after all, falling below him. It was in fact as if, thanks to her hovering image of him confronted with this admirable creature even as she was confronted, there glowed upon her from afar, yet straight and strong, a deep explanatory light which covered the last inch of the ground. He had given her something to conform to, and she hadn't unintelligently turned on him, "gone back on" him, as he would have said, by not conforming. They were together thus, he and she, close, close together—whereas Charlotte, though rising there radiantly before her, was really off in some darkness of space that would steep her in solitude and harass her with care. The heart of the Princess swelled, accordingly, even in her abasement; she had kept in tune with the right, and something, certainly, something that might be like a rare flower snatched from an impossible ledge, would, and possibly soon, come of it for her. The right, the right—yes, it took this extraordinary form of her humbugging, as she had called it, to the end. It was only a question of not, by a hair's breadth, deflecting into the truth. So, supremely, was she braced. "You must take it from me that your anxiety rests quite on a misconception. You must take it from me that I've never at any moment fancied I could suffer by you." And, marvellously, she kept it up—not only kept it up, but improved on it. "You must take it from me that I've never thought of you but as beautiful, wonderful and good. Which is all, I think, that you can possibly ask."

Charlotte held her a moment longer: she needed—not then to have appeared only tactless—the last word. "It's much more, my dear, than I dreamed of asking. I only wanted your denial."

"Well then, you have it."

"Upon your honour?"

"Upon my honour:"

And she made a point even, our young woman, of not turning away. Her grip of her shawl had loosened—she had let it fall behind her; but she stood there for anything more and till the weight should be lifted. With which she saw soon enough what more was to come. She saw it in Charlotte's face, and felt it make between them, in the air, a chill that completed the coldness of their conscious perjury. "Will you kiss me on it then?"

She couldn't say yes, but she didn't say no; what availed her still, however, was to measure, in her passivity, how much too far Charlotte had come to retreat. But there was something different also, something for which, while her cheek received the prodigious kiss, she had her opportunity—the sight of the others, who, having risen from

their cards to join the absent members of their party, had reached the open door at the end of the room and stopped short, evidently, in presence of the demonstration that awaited them. Her husband and her father were in front, and Charlotte's embrace of her—which wasn't to be distinguished, for them, either, she felt, from her embrace of Charlotte—took on with their arrival a high publicity.

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Her father had asked her, three days later, in an interval of calm, how she was affected, in the light of their reappearance and of their now perhaps richer fruition, by Dotty and Kitty, and by the once formidable Mrs. Rance; and the consequence of this inquiry had been, for the pair, just such another stroll together, away from the rest of the party and off into the park, as had asserted its need to them on the occasion of the previous visit of these anciently more agitating friends—that of their long talk, on a sequestered bench beneath one of the great trees, when the particular question had come up for them the then purblind discussion of which, at their enjoyed leisure, Maggie had formed the habit of regarding as the “first beginning” of their present situation. The whirligig of time had thus brought round for them again, on their finding themselves face to face while the others were gathering for tea on the terrace, the same odd impulse quietly to “slope”—so Adam Verver himself, as they went, familiarly expressed it—that had acted, in its way, of old; acted for the distant autumn afternoon and for the sharpness of their since so outlived crisis. It might have been funny to them now that the presence of Mrs. Rance and the Lutches—and with symptoms, too, at that time less developed—had once, for their anxiety and their prudence, constituted a crisis; it might have been funny that these ladies could ever have figured, to their imagination, as a symbol of dangers vivid enough to precipitate the need of a remedy. This amount of entertainment and assistance they were indeed disposed to extract from their actual impressions; they had been finding it, for months past, by Maggie’s view, a resource and a relief to talk, with an approach to intensity, when they met, of all the people they weren’t really thinking of and didn’t really care about, the people with whom their existence had begun almost to swarm; and they closed in at present round the spectres of their past, as they permitted themselves to describe the three ladies, with a better imitation of enjoying their theme than they had been able to achieve, certainly, during the stay, for instance, of the Castledeans. The Castledeans were a new joke, comparatively, and they had had—always to Maggie’s view—to teach themselves the way of it; whereas the Detroit, the Providence party, rebounding so from Providence, from Detroit, was an old and ample one, of which the most could be made and as to which a humorous insistence could be guarded.

Sharp and sudden, moreover, this afternoon, had been their well-nigh confessed desire just to rest together, a little, as from some strain long felt but never named; to rest, as who should say, shoulder to shoulder and hand in hand, each pair of eyes so yearningly—and indeed what could it be but so wearily?—closed as to render the collapse safe from detection by the other pair. It was positively as if, in short, the inward felicity of their being once more,

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perhaps only for half-an-hour, simply daughter and father had glimmered out for them, and they had picked up the pretext that would make it easiest. They were husband and wife—oh, so immensely!—as regards other persons; but after they had dropped again on their old bench, conscious that the party on the terrace, augmented, as in the past, by neighbours, would do beautifully without them, it was wonderfully like their having got together into some boat and paddled off from the shore where husbands and wives, luxuriant complications, made the air too tropical. In the boat they were father and daughter, and poor Dotty and Kitty supplied abundantly, for their situation, the oars or the sail. Why, into the bargain, for that matter—this came to Maggie—couldn't they always live, so far as they lived together, in a boat? She felt in her face, with the question, the breath of a possibility that soothed her; they needed only *know* each other, henceforth, in the unmarried relation. That other sweet evening, in the same place, he had been as unmarried as possible—which had kept down, so to speak, the quantity of change in their state. Well then, that other sweet evening was what the present sweet evening would resemble; with the quite calculable effect of an exquisite inward refreshment. They *had*, after all, whatever happened, always and ever each other; each other—that was the hidden treasure and the saving truth—to do exactly what they would with: a provision full of possibilities. Who could tell, as yet, what, thanks to it, they wouldn't have done before the end?

They had meanwhile been tracing together, in the golden air that, toward six o'clock of a July afternoon, hung about the massed Kentish woods, several features of the social evolution of her old playmates, still beckoned on, it would seem, by unattainable ideals, still falling back, beyond the sea, to their native seats, for renewals of the moral, financial, conversational—one scarce knew what to call it—outfit, and again and for ever reappearing like a tribe of Wandering Jewesses. Our couple had finally exhausted, however, the study of these annals, and Maggie was to take up, after a drop, a different matter, or one at least with which the immediate connection was not at first apparent. "Were you amused at me just now—when I wondered what other people could wish to struggle for? Did you think me," she asked with some earnestness—"well, fatuous?"

"'Fatuous'?"—he seemed at a loss.

"I mean sublime in *our* happiness—as if looking down from a height. Or, rather, sublime in our general position—that's what I mean." She spoke as from the habit of her anxious conscience something that disposed her frequently to assure herself, for her human commerce, of the state of the "books" of the spirit. "Because I don't at all want," she explained, "to be blinded, or made 'sniffy,' by any sense of a social situation." Her father listened to this declaration as if the precautions

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of her general mercy could still, as they betrayed themselves, have surprises for him—to say nothing of a charm of delicacy and beauty; he might have been wishing to see how far she could go and where she would, all touchingly to him, arrive. But she waited a little—as if made nervous, precisely, by feeling him depend too much on what she said. They were avoiding the serious, standing off, anxiously, from the real, and they fell, again and again, as if to disguise their precaution itself, into the tone of the time that came back to them from their other talk, when they had shared together this same refuge. “Don’t you remember,” she went on, “how, when they were here before, I broke it to you that I wasn’t so very sure we, ourselves had the thing itself?”

He did his best to do so. “Had, you mean a social situation?”

“Yes—after Fanny Assingham had first broken it to me that, at the rate we were going, we should never have one.”

“Which was what put us on Charlotte?” Oh yes, they had had it over quite often enough for him easily to remember.

Maggie had another pause—taking it from him that he now could both affirm and admit without wincing that they had been, at their critical moment, “put on” Charlotte. It was as if this recognition had been threshed out between them as fundamental to the honest view of their success. “Well,” she continued, “I recall how I felt, about Kitty and Dotty, that even if we had already then been more ‘placed,’ or whatever you may call what we are now, it still wouldn’t have been an excuse for wondering why others couldn’t obligingly leave me more exalted by having, themselves, smaller ideas. For those,” she said, “were the feelings we used to have.”

“Oh yes,” he responded philosophically—“I remember the feelings we used to have.”

Maggie appeared to wish to plead for them a little, in tender retrospect—as if they had been also respectable. “It was bad enough, I thought, to have no sympathy in your heart when you *had* a position. But it was worse to be sublime about it—as I was so afraid, as I’m in fact still afraid of being—when it wasn’t even there to support one.” And she put forth again the earnestness she might have been taking herself as having outlived; became for it—which was doubtless too often even now her danger—almost sententious. “One must always, whether or no, have some imagination of the states of others—of what they may feel deprived of. However,” she added, “Kitty and Dotty couldn’t imagine we were deprived of anything. And now, and now—!” But she stopped as for indulgence to their wonder and envy.

“And now they see, still more, that we can have got everything, and kept everything, and yet not be proud.”

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"No, we're not proud," she answered after a moment. "I'm not sure that we're quite proud enough." Yet she changed the next instant that subject too. She could only do so, however, by harking back—as if it had been a fascination. She might have been wishing, under this renewed, this still more suggestive visitation, to keep him with her for remounting the stream of time and dipping again, for the softness of the water, into the contracted basin of the past. "We talked about it—we talked about it; you don't remember so well as I. You too didn't know—and it was beautiful of you; like Kitty and Dotty you too thought we had a position, and were surprised when I thought we ought to have told them we weren't doing for them what they supposed. In fact," Maggie pursued, "we're not doing it now. We're not, you see, really introducing them. I mean not to the people they want."

"Then what do you call the people with whom they're now having tea?"

It made her quite spring round. "That's just what you asked me the other time—one of the days there was somebody. And I told you I didn't call anybody anything."

"I remember—that such people, the people we made so welcome, didn't 'count'; that Fanny Assingham knew they didn't." She had awakened, his daughter, the echo; and on the bench there, as before, he nodded his head amusedly, he kept nervously shaking his foot. "Yes, they were only good enough—the people who came—for *us*. I remember," he said again: "that was the way it all happened."

"That was the way—that was the way. And you asked me," Maggie added, "if I didn't think we ought to tell them. Tell Mrs. Rance, in particular, I mean, that we had been entertaining her up to then under false pretences."

"Precisely—but you said she wouldn't have understood."

"To which you replied that in that case you were like her. *You* didn't understand."

"No, no—but I remember how, about our having, in our benighted innocence, no position, you quite crushed me with your explanation."

"Well then," said Maggie with every appearance of delight, "I'll crush you again. I told you that you by yourself had one—there was no doubt of that. You were different from me—you had the same one you always had."

"And *then* I asked you," her father concurred, "why in that case you hadn't the same."

"Then indeed you did." He had brought her face round to him before, and this held it, covering him with its kindled brightness, the result of the attested truth of their being able thus, in talk, to live again together. "What I replied was that I had lost my position by my marriage. *That* one—I know how I saw it—would never come back. I had done something *to* it—I didn't quite know what; given it away, somehow, and yet not, as then

appeared, really got my return. I had been assured—always by dear Fanny—that I *could* get it, only I must wake up. So I was trying, you see, to wake up—trying very hard.”

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"Yes—and to a certain extent you succeeded; as also in waking me. But you made much," he said, "of your difficulty." To which he added: "It's the only case I remember, Mag, of you ever making *anything* of a difficulty."

She kept her eyes on him a moment. "That I was so happy as I was?"

"That you were so happy as you were."

"Well, you admitted"—Maggie kept it up—"that that was a good difficulty. You confessed that our life did seem to be beautiful."

He thought a moment. "Yes—I may very well have confessed it, for so it did seem to me." But he guarded himself with his dim, his easier smile. "What do you want to put on me now?"

"Only that we used to wonder—that we were wondering then—if our life wasn't perhaps a little selfish." This also for a time, much at his leisure, Adam Verver retrospectively fixed. "Because Fanny Assingham thought so?"

"Oh no; she never thought, she couldn't think, if she would, anything of that sort. She only thinks people are sometimes fools," Maggie developed; "she doesn't seem to think so much about their being wrong—wrong, that is, in the sense of being wicked. She doesn't," the Princess further adventured, "quite so much mind their being wicked."

"I see—I see." And yet it might have been for his daughter that he didn't so very vividly see. "Then she only thought *us* fools?"

"Oh no—I don't say that. I'm speaking of our being selfish."

"And that comes under the head of the wickedness Fanny condones?"

"Oh, I don't say she *condones*—!" A scruple in Maggie raised its crest. "Besides, I'm speaking of what was."

Her father showed, however, after a little, that he had not been reached by this discrimination; his thoughts were resting for the moment where they had settled. "Look here, Mag," he said reflectively—"I ain't selfish. I'll be blowed if I'm selfish."

Well, Maggie, if he *would* talk of that, could also pronounce. "Then, father, *I* am."

"Oh shucks!" said Adam Verver, to whom the vernacular, in moments of deepest sincerity, could thus come back. "I'll believe it," he presently added, "when Amerigo complains of you."

“Ah, it’s just he who’s my selfishness. I’m selfish, so to speak, *for* him. I mean,” she continued, “that he’s my motive—in everything.”

Well, her father could, from experience, fancy what she meant. “But hasn’t a girl a right to be selfish about her husband?”

“What I *don’t* mean,” she observed without answering, “is that I’m jealous of him. But that’s his merit—it’s not mine.”

Her father again seemed amused at her. “You *could* be—otherwise?”

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“Oh, how can I talk,” she asked, “of otherwise? It *isn't*, luckily for me, otherwise. If everything were different”—she further presented her thought—“of course everything *would* be.” And then again, as if that were but half: “My idea is this, that when you only love a little you’re naturally not jealous—or are only jealous also a little, so that it doesn’t matter. But when you love in a deeper and intenser way, then you are, in the same proportion, jealous; your jealousy has intensity and, no doubt, ferocity. When, however, you love in the most abysmal and unutterable way of all—why then you’re beyond everything, and nothing can pull you down.”

Mr. Verver listened as if he had nothing, on these high lines, to oppose. “And that’s the way *you* love?”

For a minute she failed to speak, but at last she answered: “It wasn’t to talk about that. I do *feel*, however, beyond everything—and as a consequence of that, I dare say,” she added with a turn to gaiety, “seem often not to know quite *where* I am.”

The mere fine pulse of passion in it, the suggestion as of a creature consciously floating and shining in a warm summer sea, some element of dazzling sapphire and silver, a creature cradled upon depths, buoyant among dangers, in which fear or folly, or sinking otherwise than in play, was impossible—something of all this might have been making once more present to him, with his discreet, his half shy assent to it, her probable enjoyment of a rapture that he, in his day, had presumably convinced no great number of persons either of his giving or of his receiving. He sat awhile as if he knew himself hushed, almost admonished, and not for the first time; yet it was an effect that might have brought before him rather what she had gained than what he had missed.

Besides, who but himself really knew what he, after all, hadn’t, or even had, gained? The beauty of her condition was keeping him, at any rate, as he might feel, in sight of the sea, where, though his personal dips were over, the whole thing could shine at him, and the air and the splash and the play become for him too a sensation. That couldn’t be fixed upon him as missing; since if it wasn’t personally floating, if it wasn’t even sitting in the sand, it could yet pass very well for breathing the bliss, in a communicated irresistible way—for tasting the balm. It could pass, further, for knowing—for knowing that without him nothing might have been: which would have been missing least of all.

“I guess I’ve never been jealous,” he finally remarked. And it said more to her, he had occasion next to perceive, than he was intending; for it made her, as by the pressure of a spring, give him a look that seemed to tell of things she couldn’t speak.

But she at last tried for one of them. “Oh, it’s you, father, who are what I call beyond everything. Nothing can pull *you* down.”

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He returned the look as with the sociability of their easy communion, though inevitably throwing in this time a shade of solemnity. He might have been seeing things to say, and others, whether of a type presumptuous or not, doubtless better kept back. So he settled on the merely obvious. "Well then, we make a pair. We're all right."

"Oh, we're all right!" A declaration launched not only with all her discriminating emphasis, but confirmed by her rising with decision and standing there as if the object of their small excursion required accordingly no further pursuit. At this juncture, however—with the act of their crossing the bar, to get, as might be, into port—there occurred the only approach to a betrayal of their having had to beat against the wind. Her father kept his place, and it was as if she had got over first and were pausing for her consort to follow. If they were all right; they were all right; yet he seemed to hesitate and wait for some word beyond. His eyes met her own, suggestively, and it was only after she had contented herself with simply smiling at him, smiling ever so fixedly, that he spoke, for the remaining importance of it, from the bench; where he leaned back, raising his face to her, his legs thrust out a trifle wearily and his hands grasping either side of the seat. They had beaten against the wind, and she was still fresh; they had beaten against the wind, and he, as at the best the more battered vessel, perhaps just vaguely drooped. But the effect of their silence was that she appeared to beckon him on, and he might have been fairly alongside of her when, at the end of another minute, he found their word. "The only thing is that, as for ever putting up again with your pretending that you're selfish—!"

At this she helped him out with it. "You won't take it from me?"

"I won't take it from you."

"Well, of course you won't, for that's your way. It doesn't matter, and it only proves—! But it doesn't matter, either, what it proves. I'm at this very moment," she declared, "frozen stiff with selfishness."

He faced her awhile longer in the same way; it was, strangely, as if, by this sudden arrest, by their having, in their acceptance of the unsaid, or at least their reference to it, practically given up pretending—it was as if they were "in" for it, for something they had been ineffably avoiding, but the dread of which was itself, in a manner, a seduction, just as any confession of the dread was by so much an allusion. Then she seemed to see him let himself go. "When a person's of the nature you speak of there are always other persons to suffer. But you've just been describing to me what you'd take, if you had once a good chance, from your husband."

"Oh, I'm not talking about my husband!"

"Then whom, *are* you talking about?"

Both the retort and the rejoinder had come quicker than anything previously exchanged, and they were followed, on Maggie's part, by a momentary drop. But she was not to fall away, and while her companion kept his eyes on her, while she wondered if he weren't expecting her to name his wife then, with high hypocrisy, as paying for his daughter's bliss, she produced something that she felt to be much better. "I'm talking about *you*."

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"Do you mean I've been your victim?"

"Of course you've been my victim. What have you done, ever done, that hasn't been *for me*?"

"Many things; more than I can tell you—things you've only to think of for yourself. What do you make of all that I've done for myself?"

"Yourself'?—" She brightened out with derision.

"What do you make of what I've done for American City?"

It took her but a moment to say. "I'm not talking of you as a public character—I'm talking of you on your personal side."

"Well, American City—if 'personalities' can do it—has given me a pretty personal side. What do you make," he went on, "of what I've done for my reputation?"

"Your reputation *there*? You've given it up to them, the awful people, for less than nothing; you've given it up to them to tear to pieces, to make their horrible vulgar jokes against you with."

"Ah, my dear, I don't care for their horrible vulgar jokes," Adam Verver almost artlessly urged.

"Then there, exactly, you are!" she triumphed. "Everything that touches you, everything that surrounds you, goes on—by your splendid indifference and your incredible permission—at your expense."

Just as he had been sitting he looked at her an instant longer; then he slowly rose, while his hands stole into his pockets, and stood there before her. "Of course, my dear, *you* go on at my expense: it has never been my idea," he smiled, "that you should work for your living. I wouldn't have liked to see it." With which, for a little again, they remained face to face. "Say therefore I *have* had the feelings of a father. How have they made me a victim?"

"Because I sacrifice you."

"But to what in the world?"

At this it hung before her that she should have had as never yet her opportunity to say, and it held her for a minute as in a vise, her impression of his now, with his strained smile, which touched her to deepest depths, sounding her in his secret unrest. This was the moment, in the whole process of their mutual vigilance, in which it decidedly most hung by a hair that their thin wall might be pierced by the lightest wrong touch. It



shook between them, this transparency, with their very breath; it was an exquisite tissue, but stretched on a frame, and would give way the next instant if either so much as breathed too hard. She held her breath, for she knew by his eyes, the light at the heart of which he couldn't blind, that he was, by his intention, making sure—sure whether or no her certainty was like his. The intensity of his dependence on it at that moment—this itself was what absolutely convinced her so that, as if perched up before him on her vertiginous point and in the very glare of his observation, she balanced for thirty seconds, she almost rocked: she might have been for the time, in all her conscious person, the very form of the equilibrium they were, in their

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different ways, equally trying to save. And they were saving it—yes, they were, or at least she was: that was still the workable issue, she could say, as she felt her dizziness drop. She held herself hard; the thing was to be done, once for all, by her acting, now, where she stood. So much was crowded into so short a space that she knew already she was keeping her head. She had kept it by the warning of his eyes; she shouldn't lose it again; she knew how and why, and if she had turned cold this was precisely what helped her. He had said to himself "She'll break down and name Amerigo; she'll say it's to him she's sacrificing me; and it's by what that will give me—with so many other things too—that my suspicion will be clinched." He was watching her lips, spying for the symptoms of the sound; whereby these symptoms had only to fail and he would have got nothing that she didn't measure out to him as she gave it. She had presently in fact so recovered herself that she seemed to know she could more easily have made him name his wife than he have made her name her husband. It was there before her that if she should so much as force him just *not* consciously to avoid saying "Charlotte, Charlotte" he would have given himself away. But to be sure of this was enough for her, and she saw more clearly with each lapsing instant what they were both doing. He was doing what he had steadily been coming to; he was practically *offering* himself, pressing himself upon her, as a sacrifice—he had read his way so into her best possibility; and where had she already, for weeks and days past, planted her feet if not on her acceptance of the offer? Cold indeed, colder and colder she turned, as she felt herself suffer this close personal vision of his attitude still not to make her weaken. That was her very certitude, the intensity of his pressure; for if something dreadful hadn't happened there wouldn't, for either of them, be these dreadful things to do. She had meanwhile, as well, the immense advantage that she could have named Charlotte without exposing herself—as, for that matter, she was the next minute showing him.

"Why, I sacrifice you, simply, to everything and to every one. I take the consequences of your marriage as perfectly natural."

He threw back his head a little, settling with one hand his eyeglass. "What do you call, my dear, the consequences?"

"Your life as your marriage has made it."

"Well, hasn't it made it exactly what we wanted?" She just hesitated, then felt herself steady—oh, beyond what she had dreamed. "Exactly what *I* wanted—yes."

His eyes, through his straightened glasses, were still on hers, and he might, with his intenser fixed smile, have been knowing she was, for herself, rightly inspired. "What do you make then of what I wanted?"

“I don’t make anything, any more than of what you’ve got. That’s exactly the point. I don’t put myself out to do so—I never have; I take from you all I can get, all you’ve provided for me, and I leave you to make of your own side of the matter what you can. There you are—the rest is your own affair. I don’t even pretend to concern myself—!”

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"To concern yourself—?" He watched her as she faintly faltered, looking about her now so as not to keep always meeting his face.

"With what may have *really* become of you. It's as if we had agreed from the first not to go into that—such an arrangement being of course charming for *me*. You can't say, you know, that I haven't stuck to it."

He didn't say so then—even with the opportunity given him of her stopping once more to catch her breath. He said instead: "Oh, my dear—oh, oh!"

But it made no difference, know as she might what a past—still so recent and yet so distant—it alluded to; she repeated her denial, warning him off, on her side, from spoiling the truth of her contention. "I never went into anything, and you see I don't; I've continued to adore you—but what's that, from a decent daughter to such a father? what but a question of convenient arrangement, our having two houses, three houses, instead of one (you would have arranged for fifty if I had wished!) and my making it easy for you to see the child? You don't claim, I suppose, that my natural course, once you had set up for yourself, would have been to ship you back to American City?"

These were direct inquiries, they quite rang out, in the soft, wooded air; so that Adam Verver, for a minute, appeared to meet them with reflection. She saw reflection, however, quickly enough show him what to do with them. "Do you know, Mag, what you make me wish when you talk that way?" And he waited again, while she further got from him the sense of something that had been behind, deeply in the shade, coming cautiously to the front and just feeling its way before presenting itself. "You regularly make me wish that I had shipped back to American City. When you go on as you do—" But he really had to hold himself to say it.

"Well, when I go on—?"

"Why, you make me quite want to ship back myself. You make me quite feel as if American City would be the best place for us."

It made her all too finely vibrate. "For 'us'—?"

"For me and Charlotte. Do you know that if we should ship, it would serve you quite right?" With which he smiled—oh he smiled! "And if you say much more we *will* ship."

Ah, then it was that the cup of her conviction, full to the brim, overflowed at a touch! *There* was his idea, the clearness of which for an instant almost dazzled her. It was a blur of light, in the midst of which she saw Charlotte like some object marked, by contrast, in blackness, saw her waver in the field of vision, saw her removed, transported, doomed. And he had named Charlotte, named her again, and she had *made* him—which was all she had needed more: it was as if she had held a blank letter

to the fire and the writing had come out still larger than she hoped. The recognition of it took her some seconds, but she might when she spoke have been folding up these precious lines and

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restoring them to her pocket. "Well, I shall be as much as ever then the cause of what you do. I haven't the least doubt of your being up to that if you should think I might get anything out of it; even the little pleasure," she laughed, "of having said, as you call it, 'more.' Let my enjoyment of this therefore, at any price, continue to represent for you what I call sacrificing you."

She had drawn a long breath; she had made him do it *all* for her, and had lighted the way to it without his naming her husband. That silence had been as distinct as the sharp, the inevitable sound, and something now, in him, followed it up, a sudden air as of confessing at last fully to where she was and of begging the particular question. "Don't you think then I can take care of myself?"

"Ah, it's exactly what I've gone upon. If it wasn't for that—!"

But she broke off, and they remained only another moment face to face. "I'll let you know, my dear, the day I feel you've begun to sacrifice me."

"'Begun'?" she extravagantly echoed.

"Well, it will be, for me, the day you've ceased to believe in me."

With which, his glasses still fixed on her, his hands in his pockets, his hat pushed back, his legs a little apart, he seemed to plant or to square himself for a kind of assurance it had occurred to him he might as well treat her to, in default of other things, before they changed their subject. It had the effect, for her, of a reminder—a reminder of all he was, of all he had done, of all, above and beyond his being her perfect little father, she might take him as representing, take him as having, quite eminently, in the eyes of two hemispheres, been capable of, and as therefore wishing, not—was it?—illegitimately, to call her attention to. The "successful," beneficent person, the beautiful, bountiful, original, dauntlessly wilful great citizen, the consummate collector and infallible high authority he had been and still was—these things struck her, on the spot, as making up for him, in a wonderful way, a character she must take into account in dealing with him either for pity or for envy. He positively, under the impression, seemed to loom larger than life for her, so that she saw him during these moments in a light of recognition which had had its brightness for her at many an hour of the past, but which had never been so intense and so almost admonitory. His very quietness was part of it now, as always part of everything, of his success, his originality, his modesty, his exquisite public perversity, his inscrutable, incalculable energy; and this quality perhaps it might be—all the more too as the result, for the present occasion, of an admirable, traceable effort—that placed him in her eyes as no precious a work of art probably had ever been placed in his own. There was a long moment, absolutely, during which her impression rose and rose, even as that of the typical charmed

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gazer, in the still museum, before the named and dated object, the pride of the catalogue, that time has polished and consecrated. Extraordinary, in particular, was the number of the different ways in which he thus affected her as showing. He was strong—that was the great thing. He was sure—sure for himself, always, whatever his idea: the expression of that in him had somehow never appeared more identical with his proved taste for the rare and the true. But what stood out beyond everything was that he was always, marvellously, young—which couldn't but crown, at this juncture, his whole appeal to her imagination. Before she knew it she was lifted aloft by the consciousness that he was simply a great and deep and high little man, and that to love him with tenderness was not to be distinguished, a whit, from loving him with pride. It came to her, all strangely, as a sudden, an immense relief. The sense that he wasn't a failure, and could never be, purged their predicament of every meanness—made it as if they had really emerged, in their transmuted union, to smile almost without pain. It was like a new confidence, and after another instant she knew even still better why. Wasn't it because now, also, on his side, he was thinking of her as his daughter, was *trying* her, during these mute seconds, as the child of his blood? Oh then, if she wasn't with her little conscious passion, the child of any weakness, what was she but strong enough too? It swelled in her, fairly; it raised her higher, higher: she wasn't in that case a failure either—hadn't been, but the contrary; his strength was her strength, her pride was his, and they were decent and competent together. This was all in the answer she finally made him.

"I believe in you more than any one."

"Than any one at all?"

She hesitated, for all it might mean; but there was—oh a thousand times!—no doubt of it. "Than any one at all." She kept nothing of it back now, met his eyes over it, let him have the whole of it; after which she went on: "And that's the way, I think, you believe in me."

He looked at her a minute longer, but his tone at last was right. "About the way—yes."

"Well then—?" She spoke as for the end and for other matters— for anything, everything, else there might be. They would never return to it.

"Well then—!" His hands came out, and while her own took them he drew her to his breast and held her. He held her hard and kept her long, and she let herself go; but it was an embrace that, august and almost stern, produced, for all its intimacy, no revulsion and broke into no inconsequence of tears.

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Maggie was to feel, after this passage, how they had both been helped through it by the influence of that accident of her having been caught, a few nights before, in the familiar embrace of her father's wife. His return to the saloon had chanced to coincide exactly with this demonstration, missed moreover neither by her husband nor by the Assinghams, who, their card-party suspended, had quitted the billiard-room with him. She had been conscious enough at the time of what such an impression, received by the others, might, in that extended state, do for her case; and none the less that, as no one had appeared to wish to be the first to make a remark about it, it had taken on perceptibly the special shade of consecration conferred by unanimities of silence. The effect, she might have considered, had been almost awkward—the promptitude of her separation from Charlotte, as if they had been discovered in some absurdity, on her becoming aware of spectators. The spectators, on the other hand—that was the appearance—mightn't have supposed them, in the existing relation, addicted to mutual endearments; and yet, hesitating with a fine scruple between sympathy and hilarity, must have felt that almost any spoken or laughed comment could be kept from sounding vulgar only by sounding, beyond any permitted measure, intelligent. They had evidently looked, the two young wives, like a pair of women “making up” effusively, as women were supposed to do, especially when approved fools, after a broil; but taking note of the reconciliation would imply, on her father's part, on Amerigo's, and on Fanny Assingham's, some proportionate vision of the grounds of their difference. There had been something, there had been but too much, in the incident, for each observer; yet there was nothing any one could have said without seeming essentially to say: “See, see, the dear things—their quarrel's blissfully over!” “Our quarrel? What quarrel?” the dear things themselves would necessarily, in that case, have demanded; and the wits of the others would thus have been called upon for some agility of exercise. No one had been equal to the flight of producing, off-hand, a fictive reason for any estrangement—to take, that is, the place of the true, which had so long, for the finer sensibility, pervaded the air; and every one, accordingly, not to be inconveniently challenged, was pretending, immediately after, to have remarked nothing that any one else hadn't.

Maggie's own measure had remained, all the same, full of the reflection caught from the total inference; which had acted, virtually, by enabling every one present—and oh Charlotte not least!—to draw a long breath. The message of the little scene had been different for each, but it had been this, markedly, all round, that it reinforced—reinforced even immensely—the general effort, carried on from week to week and of late distinctly more successful, to look and talk and move as if nothing in life were

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the matter. Supremely, however, while this glass was held up to her, had Maggie's sense turned to the quality of the success constituted, on the spot, for Charlotte. Most of all, if she was guessing how her father must have secretly started, how her husband must have secretly wondered, how Fanny Assingham must have secretly, in a flash, seen daylight for herself—most of all had she tasted, by communication, of the high profit involved for her companion. She *felt*, in all her pulses, Charlotte feel it, and how publicity had been required, absolutely, to crown her own abasement. It was the added touch, and now nothing was wanting—which, to do her stepmother justice, Mrs. Verver had appeared but to desire, from that evening, to show, with the last vividness, that she recognised. Maggie lived over again the minutes in question—had found herself repeatedly doing so; to the degree that the whole evening hung together, to her aftersense, as a thing appointed by some occult power that had dealt with her, that had for instance—animated the four with just the right restlessness too, had decreed and directed and exactly timed it in them, making their game of bridge—however abysmal a face it had worn for her—give way, precisely, to their common unavowed impulse to find out, to emulate Charlotte's impatience; a preoccupation, this latter, attached detectedly to the member of the party who was roaming in her queerness and was, for all their simulated blindness, not roaming unnoted.

If Mrs. Verver meanwhile, then, had struck her as determined in a certain direction by the last felicity into which that night had flowered, our young woman was yet not to fail of appreciating the truth that she had not been put at ease, after all, with absolute permanence. Maggie had seen her, unmistakably, desire to rise to the occasion and be magnificent—seen her decide that the right way for this would be to prove that the reassurance she had extorted there, under the high, cool lustre of the saloon, a twinkle of crystal and silver, had not only poured oil upon the troubled waters of their question, but had fairly drenched their whole intercourse with that lubricant. She had exceeded the limit of discretion in this insistence on her capacity to repay in proportion a service she acknowledged as handsome. “Why handsome?” Maggie would have been free to ask; since if she had been veracious the service assuredly would not have been huge. It would in that case have come up vividly, and for each of them alike, that the truth, on the Princess's lips, presented no difficulty. If the latter's mood, in fact, could have turned itself at all to private gaiety it might have failed to resist the diversion of seeing so clever a creature so beguiled. Charlotte's theory of a generous manner was manifestly to express that her stepdaughter's word, wiping out, as she might have said, everything, had restored them to the serenity of a relation without a cloud. It had been, in short, in this light,

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ideally conclusive, so that no ghost of anything it referred to could ever walk again. What was the ecstasy of that, however, but in itself a trifle compromising?—as truly, within the week, Maggie had occasion to suspect her friend of beginning, and rather abruptly, to remember. Convinced as she was of the example already given her by her husband, and in relation to which her profession of trust in his mistress had been an act of conformity exquisitely calculated, her imagination yet sought in the hidden play of his influence the explanation of any change of surface, any difference of expression or intention. There had been, through life, as we know, few quarters in which the Princess's fancy could let itself loose; but it shook off restraint when it plunged into the figured void of the detail of that relation. This was a realm it could people with images—again and again with fresh ones; they swarmed there like the strange combinations that lurked in the woods at twilight; they loomed into the definite and faded into the vague, their main present sign for her being, however, that they were always, that they were duskily, agitated. Her earlier vision of a state of bliss made insecure by the very intensity of the bliss—this had dropped from her; she had ceased to see, as she lost herself, the pair of operatic, of high Wagnerian lovers (she found, deep within her, these comparisons) interlocked in their wood of enchantment, a green glade as romantic as one's dream of an old German forest. The picture was veiled, on the contrary, with the dimness of trouble; behind which she felt, indistinguishable, the procession of forms that had lost, all so pitifully, their precious confidence. Therefore, though there was in these days, for her, with Amerigo, little enough even of the imitation, from day to day, of unembarrassed references—as she had foreseen, for that matter, from the first, that there would be—her active conception of his accessibility to their companion's own private and unextinguished right to break ground was not much less active than before. So it was that her inner sense, in spite of everything, represented him as still pulling wires and controlling currents, or rather indeed as muffling the whole possibility, keeping it down and down, leading his accomplice continually on to some new turn of the road. As regards herself Maggie had become more conscious from week to week of his ingenuities of intention to make up to her for their forfeiture, in so dire a degree, of any reality of frankness—a privation that had left on his lips perhaps a little of the same thirst with which she fairly felt her own distorted, the torment of the lost pilgrim who listens in desert sands for the possible, the impossible, splash of water. It was just this hampered state in him, none the less, that she kept before her when she wished most to find grounds of dignity for the hard little passion which nothing he had done could smother. There were hours enough, lonely hours,

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in which she let dignity go; then there were others when, clinging with her winged concentration to some deep cell of her heart, she stored away her hived tenderness as if she had gathered it all from flowers. He was walking ostensibly beside her, but in fact given over, without a break, to the grey medium in which he helplessly groped; a perception on her part which was a perpetual pang and which might last what it would—for ever if need be—but which, if relieved at all, must be relieved by his act alone. She herself could do nothing more for it; she had done the utmost possible. It was meantime not the easier to bear for this aspect under which Charlotte was presented as depending on him for guidance, taking it from him even in doses of bitterness, and yet lost with him in devious depths. Nothing was thus more sharply to be inferred than that he had promptly enough warned her, on hearing from her of the precious assurance received from his wife, that she must take care her satisfaction didn't betray something of her danger. Maggie had a day of still waiting, after allowing him time to learn how unreservedly she had lied for him—of waiting as for the light of she scarce knew what slow-shining reflection of this knowledge in his personal attitude. What retarded evolution, she asked herself in these hours, mightn't poor Charlotte all unwittingly have precipitated? She was thus poor Charlotte again for Maggie even while Maggie's own head was bowed, and the reason for this kept coming back to our young woman in the conception of what would secretly have passed. She saw her, face to face with the Prince, take from him the chill of his stiffest admonition, with the possibilities of deeper difficulty that it represented for each. She heard her ask, irritated and sombre, what tone, in God's name—since her bravery didn't suit him—she was then to adopt; and, by way of a fantastic flight of divination, she heard Amerigo reply, in a voice of which every fine note, familiar and admirable, came home to her, that one must really manage such prudences a little for one's self. It was positive in the Princess that, for this, she breathed Charlotte's cold air—turned away from him in it with her, turned with her, in growing compassion, this way and that, hovered behind her while she felt her ask herself where then she should rest. Marvellous the manner in which, under such imaginations, Maggie thus circled and lingered—quite as if she were, materially, following her unseen, counting every step she helplessly wasted, noting every hindrance that brought her to a pause.

A few days of this, accordingly, had wrought a change in that apprehension of the instant beatitude of triumph—of triumph magnanimous and serene—with which the upshot of the night-scene on the terrace had condemned our young woman to make terms. She had had, as we know, her vision of the gilt bars bent, of the door of the cage forced open from within and the creature imprisoned roaming at large—a movement,

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on the creature's part, that was to have even, for the short interval, its impressive beauty, but of which the limit, and in yet another direction, had loomed straight into view during her last talk under the great trees with her father. It was when she saw his wife's face ruefully attached to the quarter to which, in the course of their session, he had so significantly addressed his own—it was then that Maggie could watch for its turning pale, it was then she seemed to know what she had meant by thinking of her, in she shadow of his most ominous reference, as "doomed." If, as I say, her attention now, day after day, so circled and hovered, it found itself arrested for certain passages during which she absolutely looked with Charlotte's grave eyes. What she unfailingly made out through them was the figure of a little quiet gentleman who mostly wore, as he moved, alone, across the field of vision, a straw hat, a white waistcoat and a blue necktie, keeping a cigar in his teeth and his hands in his pockets, and who, oftener than not, presented a somewhat meditative back while he slowly measured the perspectives of the park and broodingly counted (it might have appeared) his steps. There were hours of intensity, for a week or two, when it was for all the world as if she had guardedly tracked her stepmother, in the great house, from room to room and from window to window, only to see her, here and there and everywhere, *try* her uneasy outlook, question her issue and her fate. Something, unmistakably, had come up for her that had never come up before; it represented a new complication and had begotten a new anxiety—things, these, that she carried about with her done up in the napkin of her lover's accepted rebuke, while she vainly hunted for some corner where she might put them safely down. The disguised solemnity, the prolonged futility of her search might have been grotesque to a more ironic eye; but Maggie's provision of irony, which we have taken for naturally small, had never been so scant as now, and there were moments while she watched with her, thus unseen, when the mere effect of being near her was to feel her own heart in her throat, was to be almost moved to saying to her: "Hold on tight, my poor dear—without *too much* terror—and it will all come out somehow."

Even to that indeed, she could reflect, Charlotte might have replied that it was easy to say; even to that no great meaning could attach so long as the little meditative man in the straw hat kept coming into view with his indescribable air of weaving his spell, weaving it off there by himself. In whatever quarter of the horizon the appearances were scanned he was to be noticed as absorbed in this occupation; and Maggie was to become aware of two or three extraordinary occasions of receiving from him the hint that he measured the impression he produced. It was not really till after their recent long talk in the park that she knew how deeply, how quite exhaustively, they

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had then communicated—so that they were to remain together, for the time, in consequence, quite in the form of a couple of sociable drinkers who sit back from the table over which they have been resting their elbows, over which they have emptied to the last drop their respective charged cups. The cups were still there on the table, but turned upside down; and nothing was left for the companions but to confirm by placid silences the fact that the wine had been good. They had parted, positively, as if, on either side, primed with it—primed for whatever was to be; and everything between them, as the month waned, added its touch of truth to this similitude. Nothing, truly, was at present between them save that they were looking at each other in infinite trust; it fairly wanted no more words, and when they met, during the deep summer days, met even without witnesses, when they kissed at morning and evening, or on any of the other occasions of contact that they had always so freely celebrated, a pair of birds of the upper air could scarce have appeared less to invite each other to sit down and worry afresh. So it was that in the house itself, where more of his waiting treasures than ever were provisionally ranged, she sometimes only looked at him—from end to end of the great gallery, the pride of the house, for instance—as if, in one of the halls of a museum, she had been an earnest young woman with a Baedeker and he a vague gentleman to whom even Baedekers were unknown. He had ever, of course, had his way of walking about to review his possessions and verify their condition; but this was a pastime to which he now struck her as almost extravagantly addicted, and when she passed near him and he turned to give her a smile she caught—or so she fancied—the greater depth of his small, perpetual hum of contemplation. It was as if he were singing to himself, sotto voce, as he went—and it was also, on occasion, quite ineffably, as if Charlotte, hovering, watching, listening, on her side too, kept sufficiently within earshot to make it out as song, and yet, for some reason connected with the very manner of it, stood off and didn't dare.

One of the attentions she had from immediately after her marriage most freely paid him was that of her interest in his rarities, her appreciation of his taste, her native passion for beautiful objects and her grateful desire not to miss anything he could teach her about them. Maggie had in due course seen her begin to “work” this fortunately natural source of sympathy for all it was worth. She took possession of the mound throughout its extent; she abounded, to odd excess, one might have remarked, in the assumption of its being for her, with her husband, *all* the ground, the finest, clearest air and most breathable medium common to them. It had been given to Maggie to wonder if she didn't, in these intensities of approbation, too much shut him up to his province; but this was a complaint he

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had never made his daughter, and Charlotte must at least have had for her that, thanks to her admirable instinct, her range of perception marching with his own and never falling behind, she had probably not so much as once treated him to a rasping mistake or a revealing stupidity. Maggie, wonderfully, in the summer days, felt it forced upon her that that was one way, after all, of being a genial wife; and it was never so much forced upon her as at these odd moments of her encountering the sposi, as Amerigo called them, under the coved ceilings of Fawns while, so together, yet at the same time so separate, they were making their daily round. Charlotte hung behind, with emphasised attention; she stopped when her husband stopped, but at the distance of a case or two, or of whatever other succession of objects; and the likeness of their connection would not have been wrongly figured if he had been thought of as holding in one of his pocketed hands the end of a long silken halter looped round her beautiful neck. He didn't twitch it, yet it was there; he didn't drag her, but she came; and those indications that I have described the Princess as finding extraordinary in him were two or three mute facial intimations which his wife's presence didn't prevent his addressing his daughter—nor prevent his daughter, as she passed, it was doubtless to be added, from flushing a little at the receipt of. They amounted perhaps only to a wordless, wordless smile, but the smile was the soft shake of the twisted silken rope, and Maggie's translation of it, held in her breast till she got well away, came out only, as if it might have been overheard, when some door was closed behind her. "Yes, you see—I lead her now by the neck, I lead her to her doom, and she doesn't so much as know what it is, though she has a fear in her heart which, if you had the chances to apply your ear there that I, as a husband, have, you would hear thump and thump and thump. She thinks it *may* be, her doom, the awful place over there—awful for *her*; but she's afraid to ask, don't you see? just as she's afraid of not asking; just as she's afraid of so many other things that she sees multiplied round her now as portents and betrayals. She'll know, however—when she does know."

Charlotte's one opportunity, meanwhile, for the air of confidence she had formerly worn so well and that agreed so with her firm and charming type, was the presence of visitors, never, as the season advanced, wholly intermitted—rather, in fact, so constant, with all the people who turned up for luncheon and for tea and to see the house, now replete, now famous, that Maggie grew to think again of this large element of "company" as of a kind of renewed water-supply for the tank in which, like a party of panting goldfish, they kept afloat. It helped them, unmistakably, with each other, weakening the emphasis of so many of the silences of which their intimate intercourse would otherwise have consisted. Beautiful and wonderful

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for her, even, at times, was the effect of these interventions—their effect above all in bringing home to each the possible heroism of perfunctory things. They learned fairly to live in the perfunctory; they remained in it as many hours of the day as might be; it took on finally the likeness of some spacious central chamber in a haunted house, a great overarched and overglazed rotunda, where gaiety might reign, but the doors of which opened into sinister circular passages. Here they turned up for each other, as they said, with the blank faces that denied any uneasiness felt in the approach; here they closed numerous doors carefully behind them—all save the door that connected the place, as by a straight tented corridor, with the outer world, and, encouraging thus the irruption of society, imitated the aperture through which the bedizened performers of the circus are poured into the ring. The great part Mrs. Verver had socially played came luckily, Maggie could make out, to her assistance; she had “personal friends”—Charlotte’s personal friends had ever been, in London, at the two houses, one of the most convenient pleasantries—who actually tempered, at this crisis, her aspect of isolation; and it wouldn’t have been hard to guess that her best moments were those in which she suffered no fear of becoming a bore to restrain her appeal to their curiosity. Their curiosity might be vague, but their clever hostess was distinct, and she marched them about, sparing them nothing, as if she counted, each day, on a harvest of half crowns. Maggie met her again, in the gallery, at the oddest hours, with the party she was entertaining; heard her draw out the lesson, insist upon the interest, snub, even, the particular presumption and smile for the general bewilderment—inevitable features, these latter, of almost any occasion—in a manner that made our young woman, herself incurably dazzled, marvel afresh at the mystery by which a creature who could be in some connexions so earnestly right could be in others so perversely wrong. When her father, vaguely circulating, was attended by his wife, it was always Charlotte who seemed to bring up the rear; but he hung in the background when she did cicerone, and it was then perhaps that, moving mildly and modestly to and fro on the skirts of the exhibition, his appearance of weaving his spell was, for the initiated conscience, least to be resisted. Brilliant women turned to him in vague emotion, but his response scarce committed him more than if he had been the person employed to see that, after the invading wave was spent, the cabinets were all locked and the symmetries all restored.

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There was a morning when, during the hour before luncheon and shortly after the arrival of a neighbourly contingent— neighbourly from ten miles off—whom Mrs. Verver had taken in charge, Maggie paused on the threshold of the gallery through which she had been about to pass, faltered there for the very impression of his face as it met her from an opposite door. Charlotte, half-way down the vista, held together, as if by something almost austere in the grace of her authority, the semi-scared (now that they were there!) knot of her visitors, who, since they had announced themselves by telegram as yearning to inquire and admire, saw themselves restricted to this consistency. Her voice, high and clear and a little hard, reached her husband and her step-daughter while she thus placed beyond doubt her cheerful submission to duty. Her words, addressed to the largest publicity, rang for some minutes through the place, every one as quiet to listen as if it had been a church ablaze with tapers and she were taking her part in some hymn of praise. Fanny Assingham looked rapt in devotion—Fanny Assingham who forsook this other friend as little as she forsook either her host or the Princess or the Prince or the Principino; she supported her, in slow revolutions, in murmurous attestations of presence, at all such times, and Maggie, advancing after a first hesitation, was not to fail of noting her solemn, inscrutable attitude, her eyes attentively lifted, so that she might escape being provoked to betray an impression. She betrayed one, however, as Maggie approached, dropping her gaze to the latter's level long enough to seem to adventure, marvellously, on a mute appeal. "You understand, don't you, that if she didn't do this there would be no knowing what she might do?" This light Mrs. Assingham richly launched while her younger friend, unresistingly moved, became uncertain again, and then, not too much to show it—or, rather, positively to conceal it, and to conceal something more as well—turned short round to one of the windows and awkwardly, pointlessly waited. "The largest of the three pieces has the rare peculiarity that the garlands, looped round it, which, as you see, are the finest possible vieux Saxe, are not of the same origin or period, or even, wonderful as they are, of a taste quite so perfect. They have been put on at a later time, by a process of which there are very few examples, and none so important as this, which is really quite unique—so that, though the whole thing is a little baroque, its value as a specimen is, I believe, almost inestimable."

So the high voice quavered, aiming truly at effects far over the heads of gaping neighbours; so the speaker, piling it up, sticking at nothing, as less interested judges might have said, seemed to justify the faith with which she was honoured. Maggie meanwhile, at the window, knew the strangest thing to be happening: she had turned suddenly to crying, or was at least on the point of it—the lighted square before

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her all blurred and dim. The high voice went on; its quaver was doubtless for conscious ears only, but there were verily thirty seconds during which it sounded, for our young woman, like the shriek of a soul in pain. Kept up a minute longer it would break and collapse—so that Maggie felt herself, the next thing, turn with a start to her father. “Can’t she be stopped? Hasn’t she done it *enough*?”—some such question as that she let herself ask him to suppose in her. Then it was that, across half the gallery—for he had not moved from where she had first seen him—he struck her as confessing, with strange tears in his own eyes, to sharp identity of emotion. “Poor thing, poor thing”—it reached straight—“*Isn’t* she, for one’s credit, on the swagger?” After which, as, held thus together they had still another strained minute, the shame, the pity, the better knowledge, the smothered protest, the divined anguish even, so overcame him that, blushing to his eyes, he turned short away. The affair but of a few muffled moments, this snatched communion yet lifted Maggie as on air—so much, for deep guesses on her own side too, it gave her to think of. There was, honestly, an awful mixture in things, and it was not closed to her aftersense of such passages—we have already indeed, in other cases, seen it open—that the deepest depth of all, in a perceived penalty, was that you couldn’t be sure some of your compunctions and contortions wouldn’t show for ridiculous. Amerigo, that morning, for instance, had been as absent as he at this juncture appeared to desire he should mainly be noted as being; he had gone to London for the day and the night—a necessity that now frequently rose for him and that he had more than once suffered to operate during the presence of guests, successions of pretty women, the theory of his fond interest in whom had been publicly cultivated. It had never occurred to his wife to pronounce him ingenuous, but there came at last a high dim August dawn when she couldn’t sleep and when, creeping restlessly about and breathing at her window the coolness of wooded acres, she found the faint flush of the east march with the perception of that other almost equal prodigy. It rosily coloured her vision that—even such as he was, yes—her husband could on occasion sin by excess of candour. He wouldn’t otherwise have given as his reason for going up to Portland Place in the August days that he was arranging books there. He had bought a great many of late, and he had had others, a large number, sent from Rome—wonders of old print in which her father had been interested. But when her imagination tracked him to the dusty town, to the house where drawn blinds and pale shrouds, where a caretaker and a kitchenmaid were alone in possession, it wasn’t to see him, in his shirtsleeves, unpacking battered boxes.

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She saw him, in truth, less easily beguiled—saw him wander, in the closed dusky rooms, from place to place, or else, for long periods, recline on deep sofas and stare before him through the smoke of ceaseless cigarettes. She made him out as liking better than anything in the world just now to be alone with his thoughts. Being herself connected with his thoughts, she continued to believe, more than she had ever been, it was thereby a good deal as if he were alone with *her*. She made him out as resting so from that constant strain of the perfunctory to which he was exposed at Fawns; and she was accessible to the impression of the almost beggared aspect of this alternative. It was like his doing penance in sordid ways—being sent to prison or being kept without money; it wouldn't have taken much to make her think of him as really kept without food. He might have broken away, might easily have started to travel; he had a right—thought wonderful Maggie now—to so many more freedoms than he took! His secret was of course that at Fawns he all the while winced, was all the while in presences in respect to which he had thrown himself back, with a hard pressure, on whatever mysteries of pride, whatever inward springs familiar to the man of the world, he could keep from snapping. Maggie, for some reason, had that morning, while she watched the sunrise, taken an extraordinary measure of the ground on which he would have *had* to snatch at pretexts for absence. It all came to her there—he got off to escape from a sound. The sound was in her own ears still—that of Charlotte's high coerced quaver before the cabinets in the hushed gallery; the voice by which she herself had been pierced the day before as by that of a creature in anguish and by which, while she sought refuge at the blurred window, the tears had been forced into her eyes. Her comprehension soared so high that the wonder for her became really his not feeling the need of wider intervals and thicker walls. Before *that* admiration she also meditated; consider as she might now, she kept reading not less into what he omitted than into what he performed a beauty of intention that touched her fairly the more by being obscure. It was like hanging over a garden in the dark; nothing was to be made of the confusion of growing things, but one felt they were folded flowers, and their vague sweetness made the whole air their medium. He had to turn away, but he wasn't at least a coward; he would wait on the spot for the issue of what he had done on the spot. She sank to her knees with her arm on the ledge of her window-seat, where she blinded her eyes from the full glare of seeing that his idea could only be to wait, whatever might come, at her side. It was to her buried face that she thus, for a long time, felt him draw nearest; though after a while, when the strange wail of the gallery began to repeat its inevitable echo, she was conscious of how that brought out his pale hard grimace.

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The resemblance had not been present to her on first coming out into the hot, still brightness of the Sunday afternoon—only the second Sunday, of all the summer, when the party of six, the party of seven including the Principino, had practically been without accessions or invasions; but within sight of Charlotte, seated far away, very much where she had expected to find her, the Princess fell to wondering if her friend wouldn't be affected quite as she herself had been, that night on the terrace, under Mrs. Verver's perceptive pursuit. The relation, to-day, had turned itself round; Charlotte was seeing her come, through patches of lingering noon, quite as she had watched Charlotte menace her through the starless dark; and there was a moment, that of her waiting a little as they thus met across the distance, when the interval was bridged by a recognition not less soundless, and to all appearance not less charged with strange meanings, than that of the other occasion. The point, however, was that they had changed places; Maggie had from her window, seen her stepmother leave the house—at so unlikely an hour, three o'clock of a canicular August, for a ramble in garden or grove—and had thereupon felt her impulse determined with the same sharpness that had made the spring of her companion's three weeks before. It was the hottest day of the season, and the shaded siesta, for people all at their ease, would certainly rather have been prescribed; but our young woman had perhaps not yet felt it so fully brought home that such refinements of repose, among them, constituted the empty chair at the feast. This was the more distinct as the feast, literally, in the great bedimmed dining-room, the cool, ceremonious semblance of luncheon, had just been taking place without Mrs. Verver. She had been represented but by the plea of a bad headache, not reported to the rest of the company by her husband, but offered directly to Mr. Verver himself, on their having assembled, by her maid, deputed for the effect and solemnly producing it.

Maggie had sat down, with the others, to viands artfully iced, to the slow circulation of precious tinkling jugs, to marked reserves of reference in many directions—poor Fanny Assingham herself scarce thrusting her nose out of the padded hollow into which she had withdrawn. A consensus of languor, which might almost have been taken for a community of dread, ruled the scene—relieved only by the fitful experiments of Father Mitchell, good holy, hungry man, a trusted and overworked London friend and adviser, who had taken, for a week or two, the light neighbouring service, local rites flourishing under Maggie's munificence, and was enjoying, as a convenience, all the bounties of the house. *He* conversed undiscouraged, Father Mitchell— conversed mainly with the indefinite, wandering smile of the entertainers, and the Princess's power to feel him on the whole a blessing for these occasions was not impaired by what was awkward in her consciousness

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of having, from the first of her trouble, really found her way without his guidance. She asked herself at times if he suspected how more than subtly, how perversely, she had dispensed with him, and she balanced between visions of all he must privately have guessed and certitudes that he had guessed nothing whatever. He might nevertheless have been so urbanely filling up gaps, at present, for the very reason that his instinct, sharper than the expression of his face, had sufficiently served him—made him aware of the thin ice, figuratively speaking, and of prolongations of tension, round about him, mostly foreign to the circles in which luxury was akin to virtue. Some day in some happier season, she would confess to him that she hadn't confessed, though taking so much on her conscience; but just now she was carrying in her weak, stiffened hand a glass filled to the brim, as to which she had recorded a vow that no drop should overflow. She feared the very breath of a better wisdom, the jostle of the higher light, of heavenly help itself; and, in addition, however that might be, she drew breath this afternoon, as never yet, in an element heavy to oppression. Something grave had happened, somehow and somewhere, and she had, God knew, her choice of suppositions: her heart stood still when she wondered above all if the cord mightn't at last have snapped between her husband and her father. She shut her eyes for dismay at the possibility of such a passage—there moved before them the procession of ugly forms it might have taken. "Find out for yourself!" she had thrown to Amerigo, for her last word, on the question of who else "knew," that night of the breaking of the Bowl; and she flattered herself that she hadn't since then helped him, in her clear consistency, by an inch. It was what she had given him, all these weeks, to be busy with, and she had again and again lain awake for the obsession of this sense of his uncertainty ruthlessly and endlessly playing with his dignity. She had handed him over to an ignorance that couldn't even try to become indifferent and that yet wouldn't project itself, either, into the cleared air of conviction. In proportion as he was generous it had bitten into his spirit, and more than once she had said to herself that to break the spell she had cast upon him and that the polished old ivory of her father's inattackable surface made so absolute, he would suddenly commit some mistake or some violence, smash some windowpane for air, fail even of one of his blest inveteracies of taste. In that way, fatally, he would have put himself in the wrong—blighting by a single false step the perfection of his outward show.

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These shadows rose and fell for her while Father Mitchell prattled; with other shadows as well, those that hung over Charlotte herself, those that marked her as a prey to equal suspicions—to the idea, in particular, of a change, such a change as she didn't dare to face, in the relations of the two men. Or there were yet other possibilities, as it seemed to Maggie; there were always too many, and all of them things of evil when one's nerves had at last done for one all that nerves could do; had left one in a darkness of prowling dangers that was like the predicament of the night-watcher in a beast-haunted land who has no more means for a fire. She might, with such nerves, have supposed almost anything of any one; anything, almost, of poor Bob Assingham, condemned to eternal observances and solemnly appreciating her father's wine; anything, verily, yes, of the good priest, as he finally sat back with fat folded hands and twiddled his thumbs on his stomach. The good priest looked hard at the decanters, at the different dishes of dessert—he eyed them, half-obliquely, as if *they* might have met him to-day, for conversation, better than any one present. But the Princess had her fancy at last about that too; she was in the midst of a passage, before she knew it, between Father Mitchell and Charlotte—some approach he would have attempted with her, that very morning perhaps, to the circumstance of an apparent detachment, recently noted in her, from any practice of devotion. He would have drawn from this, say, his artless inference—taken it for a sign of some smothered inward trouble and pointed, naturally, the moral that the way out of such straits was not through neglect of the grand remedy. He had possibly prescribed contrition—he had at any rate quickened in her the beat of that false repose to which our young woman's own act had devoted her at her all so deluded instance. The falsity of it had laid traps compared to which the imputation of treachery even accepted might have seemed a path of roses. The acceptance, strangely, would have left her nothing to do—she could have remained, had she liked, all insolently passive; whereas the failure to proceed against her, as it might have been called, left her everything, and all the more that it was wrapped so in confidence. She had to confirm, day after day, the rightness of her cause and the justice and felicity of her exemption—so that wouldn't there have been, fairly, in any explicit concern of Father Mitchell's, depths of practical derision of her success?

The question was provisionally answered, at all events, by the time the party at luncheon had begun to disperse—with Maggie's version of Mrs. Verver sharp to the point of representing her pretext for absence as a positive flight from derision. She met the good priest's eyes before they separated, and priests were really, at the worst, so to speak, such wonderful people that she believed him for an instant on the verge of saying to her, in abysmal softness:

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“Go to Mrs. Verver, my child—you go: you’ll find that you can help her.” This didn’t come, however; nothing came but the renewed twiddle of thumbs over the satisfied stomach and the full flush, the comical candour, of reference to the hand employed at Fawns for mayonnaise of salmon. Nothing came but the receding backs of each of the others—her father’s slightly bent shoulders, in especial, which seemed to weave his spell, by the force of habit, not less patiently than if his wife had been present. Her husband indeed was present to feel anything there might be to feel—which was perhaps exactly why this personage was moved promptly to emulate so definite an example of “sloping.” He had his occupations—books to arrange perhaps even at Fawns; the idea of the siesta, moreover, in all the conditions, had no need to be loudly invoked. Maggie, was, in the event, left alone for a minute with Mrs. Assingham, who, after waiting for safety, appeared to have at heart to make a demonstration. The stage of “talking over” had long passed for them; when they communicated now it was on quite ultimate facts; but Fanny desired to testify to the existence, on her part, of an attention that nothing escaped. She was like the kind lady who, happening to linger at the circus while the rest of the spectators pour grossly through the exits, falls in with the overworked little trapezist girl—the acrobatic support presumably of embarrassed and exacting parents—and gives her, as an obscure and meritorious artist, assurance of benevolent interest. What was clearest, always, in our young woman’s imaginings, was the sense of being herself left, for any occasion, in the breach. She was essentially there to bear the burden, in the last resort, of surrounding omissions and evasions, and it was eminently to that office she had been to-day abandoned—with this one alleviation, as appeared, of Mrs. Assingham’s keeping up with her. Mrs. Assingham suggested that she too was still on the ramparts—though her gallantry proved indeed after a moment to consist not a little of her curiosity. She had looked about and seen their companions beyond earshot.

“Don’t you really want us to go—?”

Maggie found a faint smile. “Do you really want to—?”

It made her friend colour. “Well then—no. But we *would*, you know, at a look from you. We’d pack up and be off—as a sacrifice.”

“Ah, make no sacrifice,” said Maggie. “See me through.”

“That’s it—that’s all I want. I should be too base—! Besides,” Fanny went on, “you’re too splendid.”

“Splendid?”

“Splendid. Also, you know, you *are* all but ‘through.’ You’ve done it,” said Mrs. Assingham. But Maggie only half took it from her.

“What does it strike you that I’ve done?”

“What you wanted. They’re going.”

Maggie continued to look at her. “Is that what I wanted?”

“Oh, it wasn’t for you to say. That was his business.”

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"My father's?" Maggie asked after an hesitation.

"Your father's. He has chosen—and now she knows. She sees it all before her—and she can't speak, or resist, or move a little finger. That's what's the matter with *her*," said Fanny Assingham.

It made a picture, somehow, for the Princess, as they stood there—the picture that the words of others, whatever they might be, always made for her, even when her vision was already charged, better than any words of her own. She saw, round about her, through the chinks of the shutters, the hard glare of nature—saw Charlotte, somewhere in it, virtually at bay, and yet denied the last grace of any protecting truth. She saw her off somewhere all unaided, pale in her silence and taking in her fate. "Has she told you?" she then asked.

Her companion smiled superior. "*I* don't need to be told— either! I see something, thank God, every day." And then as Maggie might appear to be wondering what, for instance: "I see the long miles of ocean and the dreadful great country, State after State—which have never seemed to me so big or so terrible. I see *them* at last, day by day and step by step, at the far end— and I see them never come back. But *never*—simply. I see the extraordinary 'interesting' place—which I've never been to, you know, and you have—and the exact degree in which she will be expected to be interested."

"She *will* be," Maggie presently replied. "Expected?"

"Interested."

For a little, after this, their eyes met on it; at the end of which Fanny said: "She'll be—yes—what she'll *have* to be. And it will be—won't it? for ever and ever." She spoke as abounding in her friend's sense, but it made Maggie still only look at her.

These were large words and large visions—all the more that now, really, they spread and spread. In the midst of them, however, Mrs. Assingham had soon enough continued. "When I talk of 'knowing,' indeed, I don't mean it as you would have a right to do. You know because you see—and I don't see *him*. I don't make him out," she almost crudely confessed.

Maggie again hesitated. "You mean you don't make out Amerigo?"

But Fanny shook her head, and it was quite as if, as an appeal to one's intelligence, the making out of Amerigo had, in spite of everything, long been superseded. Then Maggie measured the reach of her allusion, and how what she next said gave her meaning a richness. No other name was to be spoken, and Mrs. Assingham had taken that, without delay, from her eyes—with a discretion, still, that fell short but by an inch. "You know how he feels."

Maggie at this then slowly matched her headshake. “I know nothing.”

“You know how *you* feel.”

But again she denied it. “I know nothing. If I did—!”

“Well, if you did?” Fanny asked as she faltered.

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She had had enough, however. "I should die," she said as she turned away.

She went to her room, through the quiet house; she roamed there a moment, picking up, pointlessly, a different fan, and then took her way to the shaded apartments in which, at this hour, the Principino would be enjoying his nap. She passed through the first empty room, the day nursery, and paused at an open door. The inner room, large, dim and cool, was equally calm; her boy's ample, antique, historical, royal crib, consecrated, reputedly, by the guarded rest of heirs-apparent, and a gift, early in his career, from his grandfather, ruled the scene from the centre, in the stillness of which she could almost hear the child's soft breathing. The prime protector of his dreams was installed beside him; her father sat there with as little motion—with head thrown back and supported, with eyes apparently closed, with the fine foot that was so apt to betray nervousness at peace upon the other knee, with the unfathomable heart folded in the constant flawless freshness of the white waistcoat that could always receive in its armholes the firm prehensile thumbs. Mrs. Noble had majestically melted, and the whole place signed her temporary abdication; yet the actual situation was regular, and Maggie lingered but to look. She looked over her fan, the top of which was pressed against her face, long enough to wonder if her father really slept or if, aware of her, he only kept consciously quiet. Did his eyes truly fix her between lids partly open, and was she to take this—his forbearance from any question—only as a sign again that everything was left to her? She at all events, for a minute, watched his immobility—then, as if once more renewing her total submission, returned, without a sound, to her own quarters.

A strange impulse was sharp in her, but it was not, for her part, the desire to shift the weight. She could as little have slept as she could have slept that morning, days before, when she had watched the first dawn from her window. Turned to the east, this side of her room was now in shade, with the two wings of the casement folded back and the charm she always found in her seemingly perched position—as if her outlook, from above the high terraces, was that of some castle-tower mounted on a rock. When she stood there she hung over, over the gardens and the woods—all of which drowsed below her, at this hour, in the immensity of light. The miles of shade looked hot, the banks of flowers looked dim; the peacocks on the balustrades let their tails hang limp and the smaller birds lurked among the leaves. Nothing therefore would have appeared to stir in the brilliant void if Maggie, at the moment she was about to turn away, had not caught sight of a moving spot, a clear green sunshade in the act of descending a flight of steps. It passed down from the terrace, receding, at a distance, from sight, and carried, naturally, so as to conceal the head

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and back of its bearer; but Maggie had quickly recognised the white dress and the particular motion of this adventurer—had taken in that Charlotte, of all people, had chosen the glare of noon for an exploration of the gardens, and that she could be betaking herself only to some unvisited quarter deep in them, or beyond them, that she had already marked as a superior refuge. The Princess kept her for a few minutes in sight, watched her long enough to feel her, by the mere betrayal of her pace and direction, driven in a kind of flight, and then understood, for herself, why the act of sitting still had become impossible to either of them. There came to her, confusedly, some echo of an ancient fable—some vision of Io goaded by the gadfly or of Ariadne roaming the lone sea-strand. It brought with it all the sense of her own intention and desire; she too might have been, for the hour, some far-off harassed heroine—only with a part to play for which she knew, exactly, no inspiring precedent. She knew but that, all the while—all the while of her sitting there among the others without her—she had wanted to go straight to this detached member of the party and make somehow, for her support, the last demonstration. A pretext was all that was needful, and Maggie after another instant had found one. She had caught a glimpse, before Mrs. Verver disappeared, of her carrying a book—made out, half lost in the folds of her white dress, the dark cover of a volume that was to explain her purpose in case of her being met with surprise, and the mate of which, precisely, now lay on Maggie's table. The book was an old novel that the Princess had a couple of days before mentioned having brought down from Portland Place in the charming original form of its three volumes. Charlotte had hailed, with a specious glitter of interest, the opportunity to read it, and our young woman had, thereupon, on the morrow, directed her maid to carry it to Mrs. Verver's apartments. She was afterwards to observe that this messenger, unintelligent or inadvertent, had removed but one of the volumes, which happened not to be the first. Still possessed, accordingly, of the first while Charlotte, going out, fantastically, at such an hour, to cultivate romance in an arbour, was helplessly armed with the second, Maggie prepared on the spot to sally forth with succour. The right volume, with a parasol, was all she required—in addition, that is, to the bravery of her general idea. She passed again through the house, unchallenged, and emerged upon the terrace, which she followed, hugging the shade, with that consciousness of turning the tables on her friend which we have already noted. But so far as she went, after descending into the open and beginning to explore the grounds, Mrs. Verver had gone still further—with the increase of the oddity, moreover, of her having exchanged the protection of her room for these exposed and shining spaces. It was not, fortunately, however, at last, that by persisting in pursuit one didn't

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arrive at regions of admirable shade: this was the asylum, presumably, that the poor wandering woman had had in view— several wide alleys, in particular, of great length, densely overarched with the climbing rose and the honeysuckle and converging, in separate green vistas, at a sort of umbrageous temple, an ancient rotunda, pillared and statued, niched and roofed, yet with its uncorrected antiquity, like that of everything else at Fawns, conscious hitherto of no violence from the present and no menace from the future. Charlotte had paused there, in her frenzy, or what ever it was to be called; the place was a conceivable retreat, and she was staring before her, from the seat to which she appeared to have sunk, all unwittingly, as Maggie stopped at the beginning of one of the perspectives.

It was a repetition more than ever then of the evening on the terrace; the distance was too great to assure her she had been immediately seen, but the Princess waited, with her intention, as Charlotte on the other occasion had waited—allowing, oh allowing, for the difference of the intention! Maggie was full of the sense of *that*—so full that it made her impatient; whereupon she moved forward a little, placing herself in range of the eyes that had been looking off elsewhere, but that she had suddenly called to recognition. Charlotte had evidently not dreamed of being followed, and instinctively, with her pale stare, she stiffened herself for protest. Maggie could make that out—as well as, further, however, that her second impression of her friend's approach had an instant effect on her attitude. The Princess came nearer, gravely and in silence, but fairly paused again, to give her time for whatever she would. Whatever she would, whatever she could, was what Maggie wanted—wanting above all to make it as easy for her as the case permitted. That was not what Charlotte had wanted the other night, but this never mattered—the great thing was to allow her, was fairly to produce in her, the sense of highly choosing. At first, clearly, she had been frightened; she had not been pursued, it had quickly struck her, without some design on the part of her pursuer, and what might she not be thinking of in addition but the way she had, when herself the pursuer, made her stepdaughter take in her spirit and her purpose? It had sunk into Maggie at the time, that hard insistence, and Mrs. Verver had felt it and seen it and heard it sink; which wonderful remembrance of pressure successfully applied had naturally, till now, remained with her. But her stare was like a projected fear that the buried treasure, so dishonestly come by, for which her companion's still countenance, at the hour and afterwards, had consented to serve as the deep soil, might have worked up again to the surface, to be thrown back upon her hands. Yes, it was positive that during one of these minutes the Princess had the vision of her particular alarm. "It's her lie, it's her

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lie that has mortally disagreed with her; she can keep down no longer her rebellion at it, and she has come to retract it, to disown it and denounce it—to give me full in my face the truth instead.” This, for a concentrated instant, Maggie felt her helplessly gasp—but only to let it bring home the indignity, the pity of her state. She herself could but tentatively hover, place in view the book she carried, look as little dangerous, look as abjectly mild, as possible; remind herself really of people she had read about in stories of the wild west, people who threw up their hands, on certain occasions, as a sign they weren’t carrying revolvers. She could almost have smiled at last, troubled as she yet knew herself, to show how richly she was harmless; she held up her volume, which was so weak a weapon, and while she continued, for consideration, to keep her distance, she explained with as quenched a quaver as possible. “I saw you come out—saw you from my window, and couldn’t bear to think you should find yourself here without the beginning of your book. *This* is the beginning; you’ve got the wrong volume, and I’ve brought you out the right.”

She remained after she had spoken; it was like holding a parley with a possible adversary, and her intense, her exalted little smile asked for formal leave. “May I come nearer now?” she seemed to say—as to which, however, the next minute, she saw Charlotte’s reply lose itself in a strange process, a thing of several sharp stages, which she could stand there and trace. The dread, after a minute, had dropped from her face; though, discernibly enough, she still couldn’t believe in her having, in so strange a fashion, been deliberately made up to. If she had been made up to, at least, it was with an idea—the idea that had struck her at first as necessarily dangerous. That it wasn’t, insistently wasn’t, this shone from Maggie with a force finally not to be resisted; and on that perception, on the immense relief so constituted, everything had by the end of three minutes extraordinarily changed. Maggie had come out to her, really, because she knew her doomed, doomed to a separation that was like a knife in her heart; and in the very sight of her uncontrollable, her blinded physical quest of a peace not to be grasped, something of Mrs. Assingham’s picture of her as thrown, for a grim future, beyond the great sea and the great continent had at first found fulfilment. She had got away, in this fashion—burning behind her, almost, the ships of disguise—to let her horror of what was before her play up without witnesses; and even after Maggie’s approach had presented an innocent front it was still not to be mistaken that she bristled with the signs of her extremity. It was not to be said for them, either, that they were draped at this hour in any of her usual graces; unveiled and all but unashamed, they were tragic to the Princess in spite of the dissimulation that, with the return of comparative confidence, was so promptly

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to operate. How tragic, in essence, the very change made vivid, the instant stiffening of the spring of pride—this for possible defence if not for possible aggression. Pride indeed, the next moment, had become the mantle caught up for protection and perversity; she flung it round her as a denial of any loss of her freedom. To be doomed was, in her situation, to have extravagantly incurred a doom, so that to confess to wretchedness was, by the same stroke, to confess to falsity. She wouldn't confess, she didn't—a thousand times no; she only cast about her, and quite frankly and fiercely, for something else that would give colour to her having burst her bonds. Her eyes expanded, her bosom heaved as she invoked it, and the effect upon Maggie was verily to wish she could only help her to it. She presently got up—which seemed to mean “Oh, stay if you like!” and when she had moved about awhile at random, looking away, looking at anything, at everything but her visitor; when she had spoken of the temperature and declared that she revelled in it; when she had uttered her thanks for the book, which, a little incoherently, with her second volume, she perhaps found less clever than she expected; when she had let Maggie approach sufficiently closer to lay, untouched, the tribute in question on a bench and take up obligingly its superfluous mate: when she had done these things she sat down in another place, more or less visibly in possession of her part. Our young woman was to have passed, in all her adventure, no stranger moments; for she not only now saw her companion fairly agree to take her then for the poor little person she was finding it so easy to appear, but fell, in a secret, responsive ecstasy, to wondering if there were not some supreme abjection with which she might be inspired. Vague, but increasingly brighter, this possibility glimmered on her. It at last hung there adequately plain to Charlotte that she had presented herself once more to (as they said) grovel; and that, truly, made the stage large. It had absolutely, within the time, taken on the dazzling merit of being large for each of them alike.

“I'm glad to see you alone—there's something I've been wanting to say to you. I'm tired,” said Mrs. Verver, “I'm tired—!”

“Tired—?” It had dropped the next thing; it couldn't all come at once; but Maggie had already guessed what it was, and the flush of recognition was in her face.

“Tired of this life—the one we've been leading. You like it, I know, but I've dreamed another dream.” She held up her head now; her lighted eyes more triumphantly rested; she was finding, she was following her way. Maggie, by the same influence, sat in sight of it; there was something she was *saving*, some quantity of which she herself was judge; and it was for a long moment, even with the sacrifice the Princess had come to make, a good deal like watching her, from the solid shore, plunge into uncertain, into possibly treacherous depths. “I see something else,” she went on; “I've an idea that greatly appeals to me—I've had it for a long time. It has come over me that we're wrong. Our real life isn't here.”

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Maggie held her breath. "'Ours'—?"

"My husband's and mine. I'm not speaking for you."

"Oh!" said Maggie, only praying not to be, not even to appear, stupid.

"I'm speaking for ourselves. I'm speaking," Charlotte brought out, "for *him*."

"I see. For my father."

"For your father. For whom else?" They looked at each other hard now, but Maggie's face took refuge in the intensity of her interest. She was not at all even so stupid as to treat her companion's question as requiring an answer; a discretion that her controlled stillness had after an instant justified. "I must risk your thinking me selfish—for of course you know what it involves. Let me admit it—I *am* selfish. I place my husband first."

"Well," said Maggie smiling and smiling, "since that's where I place mine—!"

"You mean you'll have no quarrel with me? So much the better then; for," Charlotte went on with a higher and higher flight, "my plan is completely formed."

Maggie waited—her glimmer had deepened; her chance somehow was at hand. The only danger was her spoiling it; she felt herself skirting an abyss. "What then, may I ask *is* your plan?"

It hung fire but ten seconds; it came out sharp. "To take him home—to his real position. And not to wait."

"Do you mean—a—this season?"

"I mean immediately. And—I may as well tell you now—I mean for my own time. I want," Charlotte said, "to have him at last a little to myself; I want, strange as it may seem to you"—and she gave it all its weight "to *keep* the man I've married. And to do so, I see, I must act."

Maggie, with the effort still to follow the right line, felt herself colour to the eyes. "Immediately?" she thoughtfully echoed.

"As soon as we can get off. The removal of everything is, after all, but a detail. That can always be done; with money, as he spends it, everything can. What I ask for," Charlotte declared, "is the definite break. And I wish it now." With which her head, like her voice rose higher. "Oh," she added, "I know my difficulty!"

Far down below the level of attention, in she could scarce have said what sacred depths, Maggie's inspiration had come, and it had trembled the next moment into sound. "Do you mean *I'm* your difficulty?"

"You and he together—since it's always with you that I've had to see him. But it's a difficulty that I'm facing, if you wish to know; that I've already faced; that I propose to myself to surmount. The struggle with it—none too pleasant—hasn't been for me, as you may imagine, in itself charming; I've felt in it at times, if I must tell you all, too great and too strange, an ugliness. Yet I believe it may succeed."

She had risen, with this, Mrs. Verver, and had moved, for the emphasis of it, a few steps away; while Maggie, motionless at first, but sat and looked at her. "You want to take my father *from* me?"

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The sharp, successful, almost primitive wail in it made Charlotte turn, and this movement attested for the Princess the felicity of her deceit. Something in her throbbed as it had throbbed the night she stood in the drawing-room and denied that she had suffered. She was ready to lie again if her companion would but give her the opening. Then she should know she had done all. Charlotte looked at her hard, as if to compare her face with her note of resentment; and Maggie, feeling this, met it with the signs of an impression that might pass for the impression of defeat. "I want really to possess him," said Mrs. Verver. "I happen also to feel that he's worth it."

Maggie rose as if to receive her. "Oh—worth it!" she wonderfully threw off.

The tone, she instantly saw, again had its effect: Charlotte flamed aloft—might truly have been believing in her passionate parade. "You've thought *you've* known what he's worth?"

"Indeed then, my dear, I believe I have—as I believe I still do."

She had given it, Maggie, straight back, and again it had not missed. Charlotte, for another moment, only looked at her; then broke into the words—Maggie had known they would come—of which she had pressed the spring. "How I see that you loathed our marriage!"

"Do you ask me?" Maggie after an instant demanded.

Charlotte had looked about her, picked up the parasol she had laid on a bench, possessed herself mechanically of one of the volumes of the relegated novel and then, more consciously, flung it down again: she was in presence, visibly, of her last word. She opened her sunshade with a click; she twirled it on her shoulder in her pride. "'Ask' you? Do I need? How I see," she broke out, "that you've worked against me!"

"Oh, oh, oh!" the Princess exclaimed.

Her companion, leaving her, had reached one of the archways, but on this turned round with a flare. "You haven't worked against me?"

Maggie took it and for a moment kept it; held it, with closed eyes, as if it had been some captured fluttering bird pressed by both hands to her breast. Then she opened her eyes to speak. "What does it matter—if I've failed?"

"You recognise then that you've failed?" asked Charlotte from the threshold.

Maggie waited; she looked, as her companion had done a moment before, at the two books on the seat; she put them together and laid them down; then she made up her mind. "I've failed!" she sounded out before Charlotte, having given her time, walked

away. She watched her, splendid and erect, float down the long vista; then she sank upon a seat. Yes, she had done all.

PART SIXTH.

XL

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"I'll do anything you like," she said to her husband on one of the last days of the month, "if our being here, this way at this time, seems to you too absurd, or too uncomfortable, or too impossible. We'll either take leave of them now, without waiting—or we'll come back in time, three days before they start. I'll go abroad with you, if you but say the word; to Switzerland, the Tyrol, the Italian Alps, to whichever of your old high places you would like most to see again—those beautiful ones that used to do you good after Rome and that you so often told me about."

Where they were, in the conditions that prompted this offer, and where it might indeed appear ridiculous that, with the stale London September close at hand, they should content themselves with remaining, was where the desert of Portland Place looked blank as it had never looked, and where a drowsy cabman, scanning the horizon for a fare, could sink to oblivion of the risks of immobility. But Amerigo was of the odd opinion, day after day, that their situation couldn't be bettered; and he even went at no moment through the form of replying that, should their ordeal strike her as exceeding their patience, any step they might take would be for her own relief. This was, no doubt, partly because he stood out so wonderfully, to the end, against admitting, by a weak word at least, that any element of their existence was, or ever had been, an ordeal; no trap of circumstance, no lapse of "form," no accident of irritation, had landed him in that inconsequence. His wife might verily have suggested that he was consequent—consequent with the admirable appearance he had from the first so undertaken, and so continued, to present—rather too rigidly at *her* expense; only, as it happened, she was not the little person to do anything of the sort, and the strange tacit compact actually in operation between them might have been founded on an intelligent comparison, a definite collation positively, of the kinds of patience proper to each. She was seeing him through—he had engaged to come out at the right end if she *would* see him: this understanding, tacitly renewed from week to week, had fairly received, with the procession of the weeks, the consecration of time; but it scarce needed to be insisted on that she was seeing him on *his* terms, not all on hers, or that, in other words, she must allow him his unexplained and uncharted, his one practicably workable way. If that way, by one of the intimate felicities the liability to which was so far from having even yet completely fallen from him, happened handsomely to show him as more bored than boring (with advantages of his own freely to surrender, but none to be persuadedly indebted to others for,) what did such a false face of the matter represent but the fact itself that she was pledged? If she had questioned or challenged or interfered—if she had reserved herself that right—she wouldn't have been pledged; whereas there were still, and evidently would be yet a while, long, tense stretches during which their case might have been hanging, for every eye, on her possible, her impossible defection. She must keep it up to the last, mustn't absent herself for three minutes from her post: only on those lines, assuredly, would she show herself as with him and not against him.

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It was extraordinary how scant a series of signs she had invited him to make of being, of truly having been at any time, “with” his wife: that reflection she was not exempt from as they now, in their suspense, supremely waited—a reflection under the brush of which she recognised her having had, in respect to him as well, to “do all,” to go the whole way over, to move, indefatigably, while he stood as fixed in his place as some statue of one of his forefathers. The meaning of it would seem to be, she reasoned in sequestered hours, that he *had* a place, and that this was an attribute somehow indefeasible, unquenchable, which laid upon others—from the moment they definitely wanted anything of him—the necessity of taking more of the steps that he could, of circling round him, of remembering for his benefit the famous relation of the mountain to Mahomet. It was strange, if one had gone into it, but such a place as Amerigo’s was like something made for him beforehand by innumerable facts, facts largely of the sort known as historical, made by ancestors, examples, traditions, habits; while Maggie’s own had come to show simply as that improvised “post”—a post of the kind spoken of as advanced—with which she was to have found herself connected in the fashion of a settler or a trader in a new country; in the likeness even of some Indian squaw with a papoose on her back and barbarous bead-work to sell. Maggie’s own, in short, would have been sought in vain in the most rudimentary map of the social relations as such. The only geography marking it would be doubtless that of the fundamental passions. The “end” that the Prince was at all events holding out for was represented to expectation by his father-in-law’s announced departure for America with Mrs. Verver; just as that prospective event had originally figured as advising, for discretion, the flight of the younger couple, to say nothing of the withdrawal of whatever other importunate company, before the great upheaval of Fawns. This residence was to be peopled for a month by porters, packers and hammerers, at whose operations it had become peculiarly public—public that is for Portland Place—that Charlotte was to preside in force; operations the quite awful appointed scale and style of which had at no moment loomed so large to Maggie’s mind as one day when the dear Assinghams swam back into her ken besprinkled with sawdust and looking as pale as if they had seen Samson pull down the temple. They had seen at least what she was not seeing, rich dim things under the impression of which they had retired; she having eyes at present but for the clock by which she timed her husband, or for the glass—the image perhaps would be truer—in which he was reflected to her as *he* timed the pair in the country. The accession of their friends from Cadogan Place contributed to all their intermissions, at any rate, a certain effect of resonance; an effect especially marked by the upshot of a prompt exchange of inquiries between Mrs. Assingham and the Princess. It was noted, on the occasion of that anxious lady’s last approach to her young friend at Fawns, that her sympathy had ventured, after much accepted privation, again to become inquisitive, and it had perhaps never so yielded to that need as on this question of the present odd “line” of the distinguished eccentrics.

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"You mean to say really that you're going to stick here?" And then before Maggie could answer: "What on earth will you do with your evenings?"

Maggie waited a moment—Maggie could still tentatively smile. "When people learn we're here—and of course the papers will be full of it!—they'll flock back in their hundreds, from wherever they are, to catch us. You see you and the Colonel have yourselves done it. As for our evenings, they won't, I dare say, be particularly different from anything else that's ours. They won't be different from our mornings or our afternoons—except perhaps that you two dears will sometimes help us to get through them. I've offered to go anywhere," she added; "to take a house if he will. But *this*—just this and nothing else—is Amerigo's idea. He gave it yesterday" she went on, "a name that, as, he said, described and fitted it. So you see"—and the Princess indulged again in her smile that didn't play, but that only, as might have been said, worked—"so you see there's a method in our madness."

It drew Mrs. Assingham's wonder. "And what then is the name?"

"The reduction to its simplest expression of what we *are* doing'—that's what he called it. Therefore as we're doing nothing, we're doing it in the most aggravated way—which is the way he desires." With which Maggie further said: "Of course I understand."

"So do I!" her visitor after a moment breathed. "You've had to vacate the house—that was inevitable. But at least here he doesn't funk."

Our young woman accepted the expression. "He doesn't funk."

It only, however, half contented Fanny, who thoughtfully raised her eyebrows. "He's prodigious; but what is there—as you've 'fixed' it—to dodge? Unless," she pursued, "it's her getting near him; it's—if you'll pardon my vulgarity—her getting *at* him. That," she suggested, "may count with him."

But it found the Princess prepared. "She can get near him here. She can get 'at' him. She can come up."

"*Can* she?" Fanny Assingham questioned.

"*Can't* she?" Maggie returned.

Their eyes, for a minute, intimately met on it; after which the elder woman said: "I mean for seeing him alone."

"So do I," said the Princess.

At which Fanny, for her reasons, couldn't help smiling. "Oh, if it's for *that* he's staying —!"



“He’s staying—I’ve made it out—to take anything that comes or calls upon him. To take,” Maggie went on, “even that.” Then she put it as she had at last put it to herself. “He’s staying for high decency.”

“Decency?” Mrs. Assingham gravely echoed.

“Decency. If she *should* try—!”

“Well—?” Mrs. Assingham urged.

“Well, I hope—!”

“Hope he’ll see her?”

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Maggie hesitated, however; she made no direct reply. "It's useless hoping," she presently said. "She won't. But he ought to." Her friend's expression of a moment before, which had been apologised for as vulgar, prolonged its sharpness to her ear—that of an electric bell under continued pressure. Stated so simply, what was it but dreadful, truly, that the feasibility of Charlotte's "getting at" the man who for so long had loved her should now be in question? Strangest of all things, doubtless, this care of Maggie's as to what might make for it or make against it; stranger still her fairly lapsing at moments into a vague calculation of the conceivability, on her own part, with her husband, of some direct sounding of the subject. Would it be too monstrous, her suddenly breaking out to him as in alarm at the lapse of the weeks: "Wouldn't it really seem that you're bound in honour to do something for her, privately, before they go?" Maggie was capable of weighing the risk of this adventure for her own spirit, capable of sinking to intense little absences, even while conversing, as now, with the person who had most of her confidence, during which she followed up the possibilities. It was true that Mrs. Assingham could at such times somewhat restore the balance—by not wholly failing to guess her thought. Her thought, however, just at present, had more than one face—had a series that it successively presented. These were indeed the possibilities involved in the adventure of her concerning herself for the quantity of compensation that Mrs. Verver might still look to. There was always the possibility that she *was*, after all, sufficiently to get at him—there was in fact that of her having again and again done so. Against this stood nothing but Fanny Assingham's apparent belief in her privation—more mercilessly imposed, or more hopelessly felt, in the actual relation of the parties; over and beyond everything that, from more than three months back, of course, had fostered in the Princess a like conviction. These assumptions might certainly be baseless—inasmuch as there were hours and hours of Amerigo's time that there was no habit, no pretence of his accounting for; inasmuch too as Charlotte, inevitably, had had more than once, to the undisguised knowledge of the pair in Portland Place, been obliged to come up to Eaton Square, whence so many of her personal possessions were in course of removal. She didn't come to Portland Place—didn't even come to ask for luncheon on two separate occasions when it reached the consciousness of the household there that she was spending the day in London. Maggie hated, she scorned, to compare hours and appearances, to weigh the idea of whether there hadn't been moments, during these days, when an assignation, in easy conditions, a snatched interview, in an air the season had so cleared of prying eyes, mightn't perfectly work. But the very reason of this was partly that, haunted with the vision of the poor woman

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carrying off with such bravery as she found to her hand the secret of her not being appeased, she was conscious of scant room for any alternative image. The alternative image would have been that the secret covered up was the secret of appeasement somehow obtained, somehow extorted and cherished; and the difference between the two kinds of hiding was too great to permit of a mistake. Charlotte was hiding neither pride nor joy—she was hiding humiliation; and here it was that the Princess's passion, so powerless for vindictive flights, most inveterately bruised its tenderness against the hard glass of her question.

Behind the glass lurked the *whole* history of the relation she had so fairly flattened her nose against it to penetrate—the glass Mrs. Verver might, at this stage, have been frantically tapping, from within, by way of supreme, irrepressible entreaty. Maggie had said to herself complacently, after that last passage with her stepmother in the garden of Fawns, that there was nothing left for her to do and that she could thereupon fold her hands. But why wasn't it still left to push further and, from the point of view of personal pride, grovel lower?—why wasn't it still left to offer herself as the bearer of a message reporting to him their friend's anguish and convincing him of her need?

She could thus have translated Mrs. Verver's tap against the glass, as I have called it, into fifty forms; could perhaps have translated it most into the form of a reminder that would pierce deep. "You don't know what it is to have been loved and broken with. You haven't been broken with, because in your *relation* what can there have been, worth speaking of, to break? Ours was everything a relation could be, filled to the brim with the wine of consciousness; and if it was to have no meaning, no better meaning than that such a creature as you could breathe upon it, at your hour, for blight, why was I myself dealt with all for deception? why condemned after a couple of short years to find the golden flame—oh, the golden flame!—a mere handful of black ashes?" Our young woman so yielded, at moments, to what was insidious in these foredoomed ingenuities of her pity, that for minutes together, sometimes, the weight of a new duty seemed to rest upon her—the duty of speaking before separation should constitute its chasm, of pleading for some benefit that might be carried away into exile like the last saved object of price of the emigre, the jewel wrapped in a piece of old silk and negotiable some day in the market of misery.

This imagined service to the woman who could no longer help herself was one of the traps set for Maggie's spirit at every turn of the road; the click of which, catching and holding the divine faculty fast, was followed inevitably by a flutter, by a struggle of wings and even, as we may say, by a scattering of fine feathers. For they promptly enough felt, these yearnings of thought and excursions of sympathy,

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the concussion that couldn't bring them down—the arrest produced by the so remarkably distinct figure that, at Fawns, for the previous weeks, was constantly crossing, in its regular revolution, the further end of any watched perspective. Whoever knew, or whoever didn't, whether or to what extent Charlotte, with natural business in Eaton Square, had shuffled other opportunities under that cloak, it was all matter for the kind of quiet ponderation the little man who so kept his wandering way had made his own. It was part of the very inveteracy of his straw hat and his white waistcoat, of the trick of his hands in his pockets, of the detachment of the attention he fixed on his slow steps from behind his secure pince-nez. The thing that never failed now as an item in the picture was that gleam of the silken noose, his wife's immaterial tether, so marked to Maggie's sense during her last month in the country. Mrs. Verver's straight neck had certainly not slipped it; nor had the other end of the long cord—oh, quite conveniently long!—disengaged its smaller loop from the hooked thumb that, with his fingers closed upon it, her husband kept out of sight. To have recognised, for all its tenuity, the play of this gathered lasso might inevitably be to wonder with what magic it was twisted, to what tension subjected, but could never be to doubt either of its adequacy to its office or of its perfect durability. These reminded states for the Princess were in fact states of renewed gaping. So many things her father knew that she even yet didn't!

All this, at present, with Mrs. Assingham, passed through her in quick vibrations. She had expressed, while the revolution of her thought was incomplete, the idea of what Amerigo "ought," on his side, in the premises, to be capable of, and then had felt her companion's answering stare. But she insisted on what she had meant. "He ought to wish to see her—and I mean in some protected and independent way, as he used to—in case of her being herself able to manage it. That," said Maggie with the courage of her conviction, "he ought to be ready, he ought to be happy, he ought to feel himself sworn—little as it is for the end of such a history!—to take from her. It's as if he wished to get off without taking anything."

Mrs. Assingham deferentially mused. "But for what purpose is it your idea that they should again so intimately meet?"

"For any purpose they like. That's *their* affair."

Fanny Assingham sharply laughed, then irrepressibly fell back to her constant position. "You're splendid—perfectly splendid." To which, as the Princess, shaking an impatient head, wouldn't have it again at all, she subjoined: "Or if you're not it's because you're so sure. I mean sure of *him*."

"Ah, I'm exactly *not* sure of him. If I were sure of him I shouldn't doubt—!" But Maggie cast about her.

“Doubt what?” Fanny pressed as she waited.

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"Well, that he must feel how much less than she he pays—and how that ought to keep her present to him."

This, in its turn, after an instant, Mrs. Assingham could meet with a smile. "Trust him, my dear, to keep her present! But trust him also to keep himself absent. Leave him his own way."

"I'll leave him everything," said Maggie. "Only—you know it's my nature—I *think*."

"It's your nature to think too much," Fanny Assingham a trifle coarsely risked.

This but quickened, however, in the Princess the act she reprobated. "That may be. But if I hadn't thought—!"

"You wouldn't, you mean, have been where you are?"

"Yes, because they, on their side, thought of everything *but* that. They thought of everything but that I might think."

"Or even," her friend too superficially concurred, "that your father might!"

As to this, at all events, Maggie discriminated. "No, that wouldn't have prevented them; for they knew that his first care would be not to make me do so. As it is," Maggie added, "that has had to become his last."

Fanny Assingham took it in deeper—for what it immediately made her give out louder. "*He's* splendid then." She sounded it almost aggressively; it was what she was reduced to—she had positively to place it.

"Ah, that as much as you please!"

Maggie said this and left it, but the tone of it had the next moment determined in her friend a fresh reaction. "You think, both of you, so abysmally and yet so quietly. But it's what will have saved you."

"Oh," Maggie returned, "it's what—from the moment they discovered we could think at all—will have saved *them*. For they're the ones who are saved," she went on. "We're the ones who are lost."

"Lost—?"

"Lost to each other—father and I" And then as her friend appeared to demur, "Oh yes," Maggie quite lucidly declared, "lost to each other much more, really, than Amerigo and Charlotte are; since for them it's just, it's right, it's deserved, while for us it's only sad

and strange and not caused by our fault. But I don't know," she went on, "why I talk about myself, for it's on father it really comes. I let him go," said Maggie.

"You let him, but you don't make him."

"I take it from him," she answered.

"But what else can you do?"

"I take it from him," the Princess repeated. "I do what I knew from the first I *should* do. I get off by giving him up."

"But if he gives you?" Mrs. Assingham presumed to object. "Doesn't it moreover then," she asked, "complete the very purpose with which he married—that of making you and leaving you more free?"

Maggie looked at her long. "Yes—I help him to do that."

Mrs. Assingham hesitated, but at last her bravery flared. "Why not call it then frankly his complete success?"

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"Well," said Maggie, "that's all that's left me to do."

"It's a success," her friend ingeniously developed, "with which you've simply not interfered." And as if to show that she spoke without levity Mrs. Assingham went further. "He has made it a success for *them*—!"

"Ah, there you are!" Maggie responsively mused. "Yes," she said the next moment, "that's why Amerigo stays."

"Let alone it's why Charlotte goes." that Mrs. Assingham, and emboldened, smiled "So he knows—?"

But Maggie hung back. "Amerigo—?" After which, however, she blushed—to her companion's recognition.

"Your father. He knows what *you* know? I mean," Fanny faltered— "well, how much does he know?" Maggie's silence and Maggie's eyes had in fact arrested the push of the question—which, for a decent consistency, she couldn't yet quite abandon. "What I should rather say is does he know how much?" She found it still awkward. "How much, I mean, they did. How far"—she touched it up—"they went."

Maggie had waited, but only with a question. "Do you think he does?"

"Know at least something? Oh, about him I can't think. He's beyond me," said Fanny Assingham.

"Then do you yourself know?"

"How much—?"

"How much."

"How far—?"

"How far."

Fanny had appeared to wish to make sure, but there was something she remembered—remembered in time and even with a smile. "I've told you before that I know absolutely nothing."

"Well—that's what I know," said the Princess.

Her friend again hesitated. "Then nobody knows—? I mean," Mrs. Assingham explained, "how much your father does."



Oh, Maggie showed that she understood. “Nobody.”

“Not—a little—Charlotte?”

“A little?” the Princess echoed. “To know anything would be, for her, to know enough.”

“And she doesn’t know anything?”

“If she did,” Maggie answered, “Amerigo would.”

“And that’s just it—that he doesn’t?”

“That’s just it,” said the Princess profoundly.

On which Mrs. Assingham reflected. “Then how is Charlotte so held?”

“Just by that.”

“By her ignorance?”

“By her ignorance.” Fanny wondered. “A torment—?”

“A torment,” said Maggie with tears in her eyes.

Her companion a moment watched them. But the Prince then—?”

“How is *he* held?” Maggie asked.

“How is *he* held?”

“Oh, I can’t tell you that!” And the Princess again broke off.

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A telegram, in Charlotte's name, arrived early—"We shall come and ask you for tea at five, if convenient to you. Am wiring for the Assinghams to lunch." This document, into which meanings were to be read, Maggie promptly placed before her husband, adding the remark that her father and his wife, who would have come up the previous night or that morning, had evidently gone to an hotel. The Prince was in his "own" room, where he often sat now alone; half-a-dozen open newspapers, the "Figaro" notably, as well as the "Times," were scattered about him; but, with a cigar in his teeth and a visible cloud on his brow, he appeared actually to be engaged in walking to and fro. Never yet, on thus approaching him—for she had done it of late, under one necessity or another, several times—had a particular impression so greeted her; supremely strong, for some reason, as he turned quickly round on her entrance. The reason was partly the look in his face—a suffusion like the flush of fever, which brought back to her Fanny Assingham's charge, recently uttered under that roof, of her "thinking" too impenetrably. The word had remained with her and made her think still more; so that, at first, as she stood there, she felt responsible for provoking on his part an irritation of suspense at which she had not aimed. She had been going about him these three months, she perfectly knew, with a maintained idea—of which she had never spoken to him; but what had at last happened was that his way of looking at her, on occasion, seemed a perception of the presence not of one idea, but of fifty, variously prepared for uses with which he somehow must reckon. She knew herself suddenly, almost strangely, glad to be coming to him, at this hour, with nothing more abstract than a telegram; but even after she had stepped into his prison under her pretext, while her eyes took in his face and then embraced the four walls that enclosed his restlessness, she recognised the virtual identity of his condition with that aspect of Charlotte's situation for which, early in the summer and in all the amplitude of a great residence, she had found, with so little seeking, the similitude of the locked cage. He struck her as caged, the man who couldn't now without an instant effect on her sensibility give an instinctive push to the door she had not completely closed behind her. He had been turning twenty ways, for impatiences all his own, and when she was once shut in with him it was yet again as if she had come to him in his more than monastic cell to offer him light or food. There was a difference none the less, between his captivity and Charlotte's—the difference, as it might be, of his lurking there by his own act and his own choice; the admission of which had indeed virtually been in his starting, on her entrance, as if even this were in its degree an interference. That was what betrayed for her, practically, his fear of her fifty ideas, and what had begun, after a minute, to make her wish to repudiate or explain. It was

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more wonderful than she could have told; it was for all the world as if she was succeeding with him beyond her intention. She had, for these instants, the sense that he exaggerated, that the imputation of purpose had fairly risen too high in him. She had begun, a year ago, by asking herself how she could make him think more of her; but what was it, after all, he was thinking now? He kept his eyes on her telegram; he read it more than once, easy as it was, in spite of its conveyed deprecation, to understand; during which she found herself almost awestruck with yearning, almost on the point of marking somehow what she had marked in the garden at Fawns with Charlotte—that she had truly come unarmed. She didn't bristle with intentions—she scarce knew, as he at this juncture affected her, what had become of the only intention she had come with. She had nothing but her old idea, the old one he knew; she hadn't the ghost of another. Presently in fact, when four or five minutes had elapsed, it was as if she positively, hadn't so much even as that one. He gave her back her paper, asking with it if there were anything in particular she wished him to do.

She stood there with her eyes on him, doubling the telegram together as if it had been a precious thing and yet all the while holding her breath. Of a sudden, somehow, and quite as by the action of their merely having between them these few written words, an extraordinary fact came up. He was with her as if he were hers, hers in a degree and on a scale, with an intensity and an intimacy, that were a new and a strange quantity, that were like the irruption of a tide loosening them where they had stuck and making them feel they floated. What was it that, with the rush of this, just kept her from putting out her hands to him, from catching at him as, in the other time, with the superficial impetus he and Charlotte had privately conspired to impart, she had so often, her breath failing her, known the impulse to catch at her father? She did, however, just yet, nothing inconsequent—though she couldn't immediately have said what saved her; and by the time she had neatly folded her telegram she was doing something merely needful. "I wanted you simply to know—so that you mayn't by accident miss them. For it's the last," said Maggie.

"The last?"

"I take it as their good-bye." And she smiled as she could always smile. "They come in state—to take formal leave. They do everything that's proper. Tomorrow," she said, "they go to Southampton."

"If they do everything that's proper," the Prince presently asked, "why don't they at least come to dine?"

She hesitated, yet she lightly enough provided her answer. "That we must certainly ask them. It will be easy for you. But of course they're immensely taken—!"

He wondered. “So immensely taken that they can’t—that your father can’t—give you his last evening in England?”

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This, for Maggie, was more difficult to meet; yet she was still not without her stop-gap. “That may be what they’ll propose—that we shall go somewhere together, the four of us, for a celebration—except that, to round it thoroughly off, we ought also to have Fanny and the Colonel. They don’t *want* them at tea, she quite sufficiently expresses; they polish them off, poor dears, they get rid of them, beforehand. They want only us together; and if they cut us down to tea,” she continued, “as they cut Fanny and the Colonel down to luncheon, perhaps it’s for the fancy, after all, of their keeping their last night in London for each other.”

She said these things as they came to her; she was unable to keep them back, even though, as she heard herself, she might have been throwing everything to the winds. But wasn’t that the right way— for sharing his last day of captivity with the man one adored? It was every moment more and more for her as if she were waiting with him in his prison—waiting with some gleam of remembrance of how noble captives in the French Revolution, the darkness of the Terror, used to make a feast, or a high discourse, of their last poor resources. If she had broken with everything now, every observance of all the past months, she must simply then take it so—take it that what she had worked for was too near, at last, to let her keep her head. She might have been losing her head verily in her husband’s eyes—since he didn’t know, all the while, that the sudden freedom of her words was but the diverted intensity of her disposition personally to seize him. He didn’t know, either, that this was her manner—now she was with him—of beguiling audaciously the supremacy of suspense. For the people of the French Revolution, assuredly, there wasn’t suspense; the scaffold, for those she was thinking of, was certain—whereas what Charlotte’s telegram announced was, short of some incalculable error, clear liberation. Just the point, however, was in its being clearer to herself than to him; her clearnesses, clearances—those she had so all but abjectly laboured for— threatened to crowd upon her in the form of one of the clusters of angelic heads, the peopled shafts of light beating down through iron bars, that regale, on occasion, precisely, the fevered vision of those who are in chains. She was going to know, she felt, later on—was going to know with compunction, doubtless, on the very morrow, how thumpingly her heart had beaten at this foretaste of their being left together: she should judge at leisure the surrender she was making to the consciousness of complications about to be bodily lifted. She should judge at leisure even that avidity for an issue which was making so little of any complication but the unextinguished presence of the others; and indeed that she was already simplifying so much more than her husband came out for her next in the face with which he listened. He might certainly well be puzzled, in respect to his father-in-law and Mrs. Verver, by her glance at their possible preference for a concentrated evening. “But it isn’t—is it?” he asked—“as if they were leaving each other?”

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“Oh no; it isn’t as if they were leaving each other. They’re only bringing to a close—without knowing when it may open again—a time that has been, naturally, awfully interesting to them.” Yes, she could talk so of their “time”—she was somehow sustained; she was sustained even to affirm more intensely her present possession of her ground. “They have their reasons—many things to think of; how can one tell? But there’s always, also, the chance of his proposing to me that we shall have our last hours together; I mean that he and I shall. He may wish to take me off to dine with him somewhere alone—and to do it in memory of old days. I mean,” the Princess went on, “the real old days; before my grand husband was invented and, much more, before his grand wife was: the wonderful times of his first great interest in what he has since done, his first great plans and opportunities, discoveries and bargains. The way we’ve sat together late, ever so late, in foreign restaurants, which he used to like; the way that, in every city in Europe, we’ve stayed on and on, with our elbows on the table and most of the lights put out, to talk over things he had that day seen or heard of or made his offer for, the things he had secured or refused or lost! There were places he took me to—you wouldn’t believe!—for often he could only have left me with servants. If he should carry me off with him to-night, for old sake’s sake, to the Earl’s Court Exhibition, it will be a little—just a very, very little—like our young adventures.” After which while Amerigo watched her, and in fact quite because of it, she had an inspiration, to which she presently yielded. If he was wondering what she would say next she had found exactly the thing. “In that case he will leave you Charlotte to take care of in our absence. You’ll have to carry her off somewhere for your last evening; unless you may prefer to spend it with her here. I shall then see that you dine, that you have everything, quite beautifully. You’ll be able to do as you like.”

She couldn’t have been sure beforehand, and had really not been; but the most immediate result of this speech was his letting her see that he took it for no cheap extravagance either of irony or of oblivion. Nothing in the world, of a truth, had ever been so sweet to her, as his look of trying to be serious enough to make no mistake about it. She troubled him—which hadn’t been at all her purpose; she mystified him—which she couldn’t help and, comparatively, didn’t mind; then it came over her that he had, after all, a simplicity, very considerable, on which she had never dared to presume. It was a discovery—not like the other discovery she had once made, but giving out a freshness; and she recognised again in the light of it the number of the ideas of which he thought her capable. They were all, apparently, queer for him, but she had at least, with the lapse of the months, created the perception that there might be

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something in them; whereby he stared there, beautiful and sombre, at what she was at present providing him with. There was something of his own in his mind, to which, she was sure, he referred everything for a measure and a meaning; he had never let go of it, from the evening, weeks before, when, in her room, after his encounter with the Bloomsbury cup, she had planted it there by flinging it at him, on the question of her father's view of him, her determined "Find out for yourself!" She had been aware, during the months, that he had been trying to find out, and had been seeking, above all, to avoid the appearance of any evasions of such a form of knowledge as might reach him, with violence or with a penetration more insidious, from any other source. Nothing, however, had reached him; nothing he could at all conveniently reckon with had disengaged itself for him even from the announcement, sufficiently sudden, of the final secession of their companions. Charlotte was in pain, Charlotte was in torment, but he himself had given her reason enough for that; and, in respect to the rest of the whole matter of her obligation to follow her husband, that personage and she, Maggie, had so shuffled away every link between consequence and cause, that the intention remained, like some famous poetic line in a dead language, subject to varieties of interpretation. What renewed the obscurity was her strange image of their common offer to him, her father's and her own, of an opportunity to separate from Mrs. Verver with the due amount of form—and all the more that he was, in so pathetic a way, unable to treat himself to a quarrel with it on the score of taste. Taste, in him, as a touchstone, was now all at sea; for who could say but that one of her fifty ideas, or perhaps forty-nine of them, wouldn't be, exactly, that taste by itself, the taste he had always conformed to, had no importance whatever? If meanwhile, at all events, he felt her as serious, this made the greater reason for her profiting by it as she perhaps might never be able to profit again. She was invoking that reflection at the very moment he brought out, in reply to her last words, a remark which, though perfectly relevant and perfectly just, affected her at first as a high oddity. "They're doing the wisest thing, you know. For if they were ever to go—!" And he looked down at her over his cigar.

If they were ever to go, in short, it was high time, with her father's age, Charlotte's need of initiation, and the general magnitude of the job of their getting settled and seasoned, their learning to "live into" their queer future—it was high time that they should take up their courage. This was eminent sense, but it didn't arrest the Princess, who, the next moment, had found a form for her challenge. "But shan't you then so much as miss her a little? She's wonderful and beautiful, and I feel somehow as if she were dying. Not really, not physically," Maggie went on— "she's so far, naturally, splendid as she is, from having done with life. But dying for us—for you and me; and making us feel it by the very fact of there being so much of her left."

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The Prince smoked hard a minute. "As you say, she's splendid, but there is—there always will be—much of her left. Only, as you also say, for others."

"And yet I think," the Princess returned, "that it isn't as if we had wholly done with her. How can we not always think of her? It's as if her unhappiness had been necessary to us—as if we had needed her, at her own cost, to build us up and start us."

He took it in with consideration, but he met it with a lucid inquiry. "Why do you speak of the unhappiness of your father's wife?"

They exchanged a long look—the time that it took her to find her reply. "Because not to —!"

"Well, not to—?"

"Would make me have to speak of him. And I can't," said Maggie, "speak of him."

"You 'can't'—?"

"I can't." She said it as for definite notice, not to be repeated. "There are too many things," she nevertheless added. "He's too great."

The Prince looked at his cigar-tip, and then as he put back the weed: "Too great for whom?" Upon which as she hesitated, "Not, my dear, too great for you," he declared. "For me—oh, as much as you like."

"Too great for me is what I mean. I know why I think it," Maggie said. "That's enough."

He looked at her yet again as if she but fanned his wonder; he was on the very point, she judged, of asking her why she thought it. But her own eyes maintained their warning, and at the end of a minute he had uttered other words. "What's of importance is that you're his daughter. That at least we've got. And I suppose that, if I may say nothing else, I may say at least that I value it."

"Oh yes, you may say that you value it. I myself make the most of it."

This again he took in, letting it presently put forth for him a striking connection. "She ought to have known you. That's what's present to me. She ought to have understood you better."

"Better than you did?"

"Yes," he gravely maintained, "better than I did. And she didn't really know you at all. She doesn't know you now."

“Ah, yes she does!” said Maggie.

But he shook his head—he knew what he meant. “She not only doesn’t understand you more than I, she understands you ever so much less. Though even I—!”

“Well, even you?” Maggie pressed as he paused. “Even I, even I even yet—!” Again he paused and the silence held them.

But Maggie at last broke it. “If Charlotte doesn’t understand me, it is that I’ve prevented her. I’ve chosen to deceive her and to lie to her.”

The Prince kept his eyes on her. “I know what you’ve chosen to do. But I’ve chosen to do the same.”

“Yes,” said Maggie after an instant—“my choice was made when I had guessed yours. But you mean,” she asked, “that she understands *you*?”

“It presents small difficulty!”

“Are you so sure?” Maggie went on.

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"Sure enough. But it doesn't matter." He waited an instant; then looking up through the fumes of his smoke, "She's stupid," he abruptly opined.

"O—oh!" Maggie protested in a long wail.

It had made him in fact quickly change colour. "What I mean is that she's not, as you pronounce her, unhappy." And he recovered, with this, all his logic. "Why is she unhappy if she doesn't know?"

"Doesn't know—?" She tried to make his logic difficult.

"Doesn't know that *you* know."

It came from him in such a way that she was conscious, instantly, of three or four things to answer. But what she said first was: "Do you think that's all it need take?" And before he could reply, "She knows, she knows!" Maggie proclaimed.

"Well then, what?"

But she threw back her head, she turned impatiently away from him. "Oh, I needn't tell you! She knows enough. Besides," she went on, "she doesn't believe us."

It made the Prince stare a little. "Ah, she asks too much!" That drew, however, from his wife another moan of objection, which determined in him a judgment. "She won't let you take her for unhappy."

"Oh, I know better than any one else what she won't let me take her for!"

"Very well," said Amerigo, "you'll see."

"I shall see wonders, I know. I've already seen them, and I'm prepared for them." Maggie recalled—she had memories enough. "It's terrible"—her memories prompted her to speak. "I see it's *always* terrible for women."

The Prince looked down in his gravity. "Everything's terrible, cara, in the heart of man. She's making her life," he said. "She'll make it."

His wife turned back upon him; she had wandered to a table, vaguely setting objects straight. "A little by the way then too, while she's about it, she's making ours." At this he raised his eyes, which met her own, and she held him while she delivered herself of some thing that had been with her these last minutes.

"You spoke just now of Charlotte's not having learned from you that I 'know.' Am I to take from you then that you accept and recognise my knowledge?"

He did the inquiry all the honours—visibly weighed its importance and weighed his response. “You think I might have been showing you that a little more handsomely?”

“It isn’t a question of any beauty,” said Maggie; “it’s only a question of the quantity of truth.”

“Oh, the quantity of truth!” the Prince richly, though ambiguously, murmured.

“That’s a thing by itself, yes. But there are also such things, all the same, as questions of good faith.”

“Of course there are!” the Prince hastened to reply. After which he brought up more slowly: “If ever a man, since the beginning of time, acted in good faith!” But he dropped it, offering it simply for that.

For that then, when it had had time somewhat to settle, like some handful of gold-dust thrown into the air—for that then Maggie showed herself, as deeply and strangely taking it. “I see.” And she even wished this form to be as complete as she could make it. “I see.”

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The completeness, clearly, after an instant, had struck him as divine. “Ah, my dear, my dear, my dear—!” It was all he could say.

She wasn’t talking, however, at large. “You’ve kept up for so long a silence—!”

“Yes, yes, I know what I’ve kept up. But will you do,” he asked, “still one thing more for me?”

It was as if, for an instant, with her new exposure, it had made her turn pale. “Is there even one thing left?”

“Ah, my dear, my dear, my dear!”—it had pressed again in him the fine spring of the unspeakable. There was nothing, however, that the Princess herself couldn’t say. “I’ll do anything, if you’ll tell me what.”

“Then wait.” And his raised Italian hand, with its play of admonitory fingers, had never made gesture more expressive. His voice itself dropped to a tone—! “Wait,” he repeated. “Wait.”

She understood, but it was as if she wished to have it from him. “Till they’ve been here, you mean?”

“Yes, till they’ve gone. Till they’re away.”

She kept it up. “Till they’ve left the country?” She had her eyes on him for clearness; these were the conditions of a promise—so that he put the promise, practically, into his response. “Till we’ve ceased to see them—for as long as God may grant! Till we’re really alone.”

“Oh, if it’s only that—!” When she had drawn from him thus then, as she could feel, the thick breath of the definite—which was the intimate, the immediate, the familiar, as she hadn’t had them for so long—she turned away again, she put her hand on the knob of the door. But her hand rested at first without a grasp; she had another effort to make, the effort of leaving him, of which everything that had just passed between them, his presence, irresistible, overcharged with it, doubled the difficulty. There was something—she couldn’t have told what; it was as if, shut in together, they had come too far—too far for where they were; so that the mere act of her quitting him was like the attempt to recover the lost and gone. She had taken in with her something that, within the ten minutes, and especially within the last three or four, had slipped away from her—which it was vain now, wasn’t it? to try to appear to clutch or to pick up. That consciousness in fact had a pang, and she balanced, intensely, for the lingering moment, almost with a terror of her endless power of surrender. He had only to press, really, for her to yield inch by inch, and she fairly knew at present, while she looked at him through her cloud, that the confession of this precious secret sat there for him to pluck. The sensation, for

the few seconds, was extraordinary; her weakness, her desire, so long as she was yet not saving herself, flowered in her face like a light or a darkness. She sought for some word that would cover this up; she reverted to the question of tea, speaking as if they shouldn't meet sooner. "Then about five. I count on you."

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On him too, however, something had descended; as to which this exactly gave him his chance. “Ah, but I shall see you—! No?” he said, coming nearer.

She had, with her hand still on the knob, her back against the door, so that her retreat, under his approach must be less than a step, and yet she couldn’t for her life, with the other hand, have pushed him away. He was so near now that she could touch him, taste him, smell him, kiss him, hold him; he almost pressed upon her, and the warmth of his face—frowning, smiling, she mightn’t know which; only beautiful and strange—was bent upon her with the largeness with which objects loom in dreams. She closed her eyes to it, and so, the next instant, against her purpose, she had put out her hand, which had met his own and which he held. Then it was that, from behind her closed eyes, the right word came. “Wait!” It was the word of his own distress and entreaty, the word for both of them, all they had left, their plank now on the great sea. Their hands were locked, and thus she said it again. “Wait. Wait.” She kept her eyes shut, but her hand, she knew, helped her meaning—which after a minute she was aware his own had absorbed. He let her go—he turned away with this message, and when she saw him again his back was presented, as he had left her, and his face staring out of the window. She had saved herself and she got off.

XLII

Later on, in the afternoon, before the others arrived, the form of their reunion was at least remarkable: they might, in their great eastward drawing-room, have been comparing notes or nerves in apprehension of some stiff official visit. Maggie’s mind, in its restlessness, even played a little with the prospect; the high cool room, with its afternoon shade, with its old tapestries uncovered, with the perfect polish of its wide floor reflecting the bowls of gathered flowers and the silver and linen of the prepared tea-table, drew from her a remark in which this whole effect was mirrored, as well as something else in the Prince’s movement while he slowly paced and turned. “We’re distinctly bourgeois!” she a trifle grimly threw off, as an echo of their old community; though to a spectator sufficiently detached they might have been quite the privileged pair they were reputed, granted only they were taken as awaiting the visit of Royalty. They might have been ready, on the word passed up in advance, to repair together to the foot of the staircase—the Prince somewhat in front, advancing indeed to the open doors and even going down, for all his princedom, to meet, on the stopping of the chariot, the august emergence. The time was stale, it was to be admitted, for incidents of magnitude; the September hush was in full possession, at the end of the dull day, and a couple of the long windows stood open to the balcony that overhung the desolation—the balcony from which Maggie, in the springtime, had seen Amerigo and Charlotte look down together at the hour of her return from

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the Regent's Park, near by, with her father, the Principino and Miss Bogle. Amerigo now again, in his punctual impatience, went out a couple of times and stood there; after which, as to report that nothing was in sight, he returned to the room with frankly nothing else to do. The Princess pretended to read; he looked at her as he passed; there hovered in her own sense the thought of other occasions when she had cheated appearances of agitation with a book. At last she felt him standing before her, and then she raised her eyes.

"Do you remember how, this morning, when you told me of this event, I asked you if there were anything particular you wished me to do? You spoke of my being at home, but that was a matter of course. You spoke of something else," he went on, while she sat with her book on her knee and her raised eyes; "something that makes me almost wish it may happen. You spoke," he said, "of the possibility of my seeing her alone. Do you know, if that comes," he asked, "the use I shall make of it?" And then as she waited: "The use is all before me."

"Ah, it's your own business now!" said his wife. But it had made her rise.

"I shall make it my own," he answered. "I shall tell her I lied to her."

"Ah no!" she returned.

"And I shall tell her you did."

She shook her head again. "Oh, still less!"

With which therefore they stood at difference, he with his head erect and his happy idea perched, in its eagerness, on his crest. "And how then is she to know?"

"She isn't to know."

"She's only still to think you don't—?"

"And therefore that I'm always a fool? She may think," said Maggie, "what she likes."

"Think it without my protest—?"

The Princess made a movement. "What business is it of yours?"

"Isn't it my right to correct her—?"

Maggie let his question ring—ring long enough for him to hear it himself; only then she took it up. "'Correct' her?"—and it was her own now that really rang. "Aren't you rather

forgetting who she is?" After which, while he quite stared for it, as it was the very first clear majesty he had known her to use, she flung down her book and raised a warning hand. "The carriage. Come!"

The "Come!" had matched, for lucid firmness, the rest of her speech, and, when they were below, in the hall, there was a "Go!" for him, through the open doors and between the ranged servants, that matched even that. He received Royalty, bareheaded, therefore, in the persons of Mr. and Mrs. Verver, as it alighted on the pavement, and Maggie was at the threshold to welcome it to her house. Later on, upstairs again, she even herself felt still more the force of the limit of which she had just reminded him; at tea, in Charlotte's affirmed presence—as Charlotte affirmed it—she drew a long breath of richer relief. It was the strangest, once more, of all impressions; but what she most felt,

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for the half-hour, was that Mr. and Mrs. Verver were making the occasion easy. They were somehow conjoined in it, conjoined for a present effect as Maggie had absolutely never yet seen them; and there occurred, before long, a moment in which Amerigo's look met her own in recognitions that he couldn't suppress. The question of the amount of correction to which Charlotte had laid herself open rose and hovered, for the instant, only to sink, conspicuously, by its own weight; so high a pitch she seemed to give to the unconsciousness of questions, so resplendent a show of serenity she succeeded in making. The shade of the official, in her beauty and security, never for a moment dropped; it was a cool, high refuge, like the deep, arched recess of some coloured and gilded image, in which she sat and smiled and waited, drank her tea, referred to her husband and remembered her mission. Her mission had quite taken form—it was but another name for the interest of her great opportunity—that of representing the arts and the graces to a people languishing, afar off, in ignorance. Maggie had sufficiently intimated to the Prince, ten minutes before, that she needed no showing as to what their friend wouldn't consent to be taken for; but the difficulty now indeed was to choose, for explicit tribute of admiration, between the varieties of her nobler aspects. She carried it off, to put the matter coarsely, with a taste and a discretion that held our young woman's attention, for the first quarter-of-an-hour, to the very point of diverting it from the attitude of her overshadowed, her almost superseded companion. But Adam Verver profited indeed at this time, even with his daughter, by his so marked peculiarity of seeming on no occasion to have an attitude; and so long as they were in the room together she felt him still simply weave his web and play out his long fine cord, knew herself in presence of this tacit process very much as she had known herself at Fawns. He had a way, the dear man, wherever he was, of moving about the room, noiselessly, to see what it might contain; and his manner of now resorting to this habit, acquainted as he already was with the objects in view, expressed with a certain sharpness the intention of leaving his wife to her devices. It did even more than this; it signified, to the apprehension of the Princess, from the moment she more directly took thought of him, almost a special view of these devices, as actually exhibited in their rarity, together with an independent, a settled appreciation of their general handsome adequacy, which scarcely required the accompaniment of his faint contemplative hum.

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Charlotte throned, as who should say, between her hostess and her host, the whole scene having crystallised, as soon as she took her place, to the right quiet lustre; the harmony was not less sustained for being superficial, and the only approach to a break in it was while Amerigo remained standing long enough for his father-in-law, vaguely wondering, to appeal to him, invite or address him, and then, in default of any such word, selected for presentation to the other visitor a plate of petits fours. Maggie watched her husband—if it now could be called watching—offer this refreshment; she noted the consummate way—for “consummate” was the term she privately applied—in which Charlotte cleared her acceptance, cleared her impersonal smile, of any betrayal, any slightest value, of consciousness; and then felt the slow surge of a vision that, at the end of another minute or two, had floated her across the room to where her father stood looking at a picture, an early Florentine sacred subject, that he had given her on her marriage. He might have been, in silence, taking his last leave of it; it was a work for which he entertained, she knew, an unqualified esteem. The tenderness represented for her by his sacrifice of such a treasure had become, to her sense, a part of the whole infusion, of the immortal expression; the beauty of his sentiment looked out at her, always, from the beauty of the rest, as if the frame made positively a window for his spiritual face: she might have said to herself, at this moment, that in leaving the thing behind him, held as in her clasping arms, he was doing the most possible toward leaving her a part of his palpable self. She put her hand over his shoulder, and their eyes were held again, together, by the abiding felicity; they smiled in emulation, vaguely, as if speech failed them through their having passed too far; she would have begun to wonder the next minute if it were reserved to them, for the last stage, to find their contact, like that of old friends reunited too much on the theory of the unchanged, subject to shy lapses.

“It’s all right, eh?”

“Oh, my dear—rather!”

He had applied the question to the great fact of the picture, as she had spoken for the picture in reply, but it was as if their words for an instant afterwards symbolised another truth, so that they looked about at everything else to give them this extension. She had passed her arm into his, and the other objects in the room, the other pictures, the sofas, the chairs, the tables, the cabinets, the “important” pieces, supreme in their way, stood out, round them, consciously, for recognition and applause. Their eyes moved together from piece to piece, taking in the whole nobleness—quite as if for him to measure the wisdom of old ideas. The two noble persons seated, in conversation, at tea, fell thus into the splendid effect and the general harmony: Mrs. Verver and the Prince fairly “placed” themselves, however unwittingly, as high expressions

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of the kind of human furniture required, esthetically, by such a scene. The fusion of their presence with the decorative elements, their contribution to the triumph of selection, was complete and admirable; though, to a lingering view, a view more penetrating than the occasion really demanded, they also might have figured as concrete attestations of a rare power of purchase. There was much indeed in the tone in which Adam Verver spoke again, and who shall say where his thought stopped? “Le compte y est. You’ve got some good things.”

Maggie met it afresh—“Ah, don’t they look well?” Their companions, at the sound of this, gave them, in a spacious intermission of slow talk, an attention, all of gravity, that was like an ampler submission to the general duty of magnificence; sitting as still, to be thus appraised, as a pair of effigies of the contemporary great on one of the platforms of Madame Tussaud. “I’m so glad—for your last look.”

With which, after Maggie—quite in the air—had said it, the note was struck indeed; the note of that strange accepted finality of relation, as from couple to couple, which almost escaped an awkwardness only by not attempting a gloss. Yes, this was the wonder, that the occasion defied insistence precisely because of the vast quantities with which it dealt—so that separation was on a scale beyond any compass of parting. To do such an hour justice would have been in some degree to question its grounds— which was why they remained, in fine, the four of them, in the upper air, united in the firmest abstention from pressure. There was no point, visibly, at which, face to face, either Amerigo or Charlotte had pressed; and how little she herself was in danger of doing so Maggie scarce needed to remember. That her father wouldn’t, by the tip of a toe—of that she was equally conscious: the only thing was that, since he didn’t, she could but hold her breath for what he would do instead. When, at the end of three minutes more, he had said, with an effect of suddenness, “Well, Mag—and the Principino?” it was quite as if that were, by contrast, the hard, the truer voice.

She glanced at the clock. “I ‘ordered’ him for half-past five— which hasn’t yet struck. Trust him, my dear, not to fail you!”

“Oh, I don’t want *him* to fail me!” was Mr. Verver’s reply; yet uttered in so explicitly jocose a relation to the possibilities of failure that even when, just afterwards, he wandered in his impatience to one of the long windows and passed out to the balcony, she asked herself but for a few seconds if reality, should she follow him, would overtake or meet her there. She followed him of necessity—it came, absolutely, so near to his inviting her, by stepping off into temporary detachment, to give the others something of the chance that she and her husband had so fantastically discussed. Beside him then, while they hung over the great dull place, clear and almost coloured now, coloured with the odd, sad, pictured,

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“old-fashioned” look that empty London streets take on in waning afternoons of the summer’s end, she felt once more how impossible such a passage would have been to them, how it would have torn them to pieces, if they had so much as suffered its suppressed relations to peep out of their eyes. This danger would doubtless indeed have been more to be reckoned with if the instinct of each—she could certainly at least answer for her own—had not so successfully acted to trump up other apparent connexions for it, connexions as to which they could pretend to be frank.

“You mustn’t stay on here, you know,” Adam Verver said as a result of his unobstructed outlook. “Fawns is all there for you, of course—to the end of my tenure. But Fawns so dismantled,” he added with mild ruefulness, “Fawns with half its contents, and half its best things, removed, won’t seem to you, I’m afraid, particularly lively.”

“No,” Maggie answered, “we should miss its best things. Its best things, my dear, have certainly been removed. To be back there,” she went on, “to be back there—!” And she paused for the force of her idea.

“Oh, to be back there without anything good—!” But she didn’t hesitate now; she brought her idea forth. “To be back there without Charlotte is more than I think would do.” And as she smiled at him with it, so she saw him the next instant take it— take it in a way that helped her smile to pass all for an allusion to what she didn’t and couldn’t say. This quantity was too clear—that she couldn’t at such an hour be pretending to name to him what it was, as he would have said, “going to be,” at Fawns or anywhere else, to want for *him*. That was now—and in a manner exaltedly, sublimely—out of their compass and their question; so that what was she doing, while they waited for the Principino, while they left the others together and their tension just sensibly threatened, what was she doing but just offer a bold but substantial substitute? Nothing was stranger moreover, under the action of Charlotte’s presence, than the fact of a felt sincerity in her words. She felt her sincerity absolutely sound— she gave it for all it might mean. “Because Charlotte, dear, you know,” she said, “is incomparable.” It took thirty seconds, but she was to know when these were over that she had pronounced one of the happiest words of her life. They had turned from the view of the street; they leaned together against the balcony rail, with the room largely in sight from where they stood, but with the Prince and Mrs. Verver out of range. Nothing he could try, she immediately saw, was to keep his eyes from lighting; not even his taking out his cigarette-case and saying before he said anything else: “May I smoke?” She met it, for encouragement, with her “My dear!” again, and then, while he struck his match, she had just another minute to be nervous—a minute that she made use of, however, not in the least to falter, but to reiterate with a high ring, a ring that might, for all she cared, reach the pair inside: “Father, father—Charlotte’s great!”

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It was not till after he had begun to smoke that he looked at her. "Charlotte's great."

They could close upon it—such a basis as they might immediately feel it make; and so they stood together over it, quite gratefully, each recording to the other's eyes that it was firm under their feet. They had even thus a renewed wait, as for proof of it; much as if he were letting her see, while the minutes lapsed for their concealed companions, that this was finally just why—but just *why*! "You see," he presently added, "how right I was. Right, I mean, to do it for you."

"Ah, rather!" she murmured with her smile. And then, as to be herself ideally right: "I don't see what you would have done without her."

"The point was," he returned quietly, "that I didn't see what you were to do. Yet it was a risk."

"It was a risk," said Maggie—"but I believed in it. At least for myself!" she smiled.

"Well *now*," he smoked, "we see."

"We see."

"I know her better."

"You know her best."

"Oh, but naturally!" On which, as the warranted truth of it hung in the air—the truth warranted, as who should say, exactly by the present opportunity to pronounce, this opportunity created and accepted—she found herself lost, though with a finer thrill than she had perhaps yet known, in the vision of all he might mean. The sense of it in her rose higher, rose with each moment that he invited her thus to see him linger; and when, after a little more, he had said, smoking again and looking up, with head thrown back and hands spread on the balcony rail, at the grey, gaunt front of the house, "She's beautiful, beautiful!" her sensibility reported to her the shade of a new note. It was all she might have wished, for it was, with a kind of speaking competence, the note of possession and control; and yet it conveyed to her as nothing till now had done the reality of their parting. They were parting, in the light of it, absolutely on Charlotte's *value*—the value that was filling the room out of which they had stepped as if to give it play, and with which the Prince, on his side, was perhaps making larger acquaintance. If Maggie had desired, at so late an hour, some last conclusive comfortable category to place him in for dismissal, she might have found it here in its all coming back to his ability to rest upon high values. Somehow, when all was said, and with the memory of her gifts, her variety, her power, so much remained of Charlotte's! What else had she herself meant three minutes before by speaking of her as great? Great for the world that was before her—that he proposed she should be: she was not to be wasted in the

application of his plan. Maggie held to this then—that she wasn't to be wasted. To let his daughter know it he had sought this brief privacy. What a blessing, accordingly, that she could speak her joy in it! His face, meanwhile, at all events, was turned to her, and as she met his eyes again her joy went straight. "It's success, father."

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"It's success. And even this," he added as the Principino, appearing alone, deep within, piped across an instant greeting—"even this isn't altogether failure!"

They went in to receive the boy, upon whose introduction to the room by Miss Bogle Charlotte and the Prince got up—seemingly with an impressiveness that had caused Miss Bogle not to give further effect to her own entrance. She had retired, but the Principino's presence, by itself, sufficiently broke the tension—the subsidence of which, in the great room, ten minutes later, gave to the air something of the quality produced by the cessation of a sustained rattle. Stillness, when the Prince and Princess returned from attending the visitors to their carriage, might have been said to be not so much restored as created; so that whatever next took place in it was foredoomed to remarkable salience. That would have been the case even with so natural, though so futile, a movement as Maggie's going out to the balcony again to follow with her eyes her father's departure. The carriage was out of sight—it had taken her too long solemnly to reascend, and she looked awhile only at the great grey space, on which, as on the room still more, the shadow of dusk had fallen. Here, at first, her husband had not rejoined her; he had come up with the boy, who, clutching his hand, abounded, as usual, in remarks worthy of the family archives; but the two appeared then to have proceeded to report to Miss Bogle. It meant something for the Princess that her husband had thus got their son out of the way, not bringing him back to his mother; but everything now, as she vaguely moved about, struck her as meaning so much that the unheard chorus swelled. Yet *this* above all—her just being there as she was and waiting for him to come in, their freedom to be together there always—was the meaning most disengaged: she stood in the cool twilight and took in, all about her, where it lurked, her reason for what she had done. She knew at last really why—and how she had been inspired and guided, how she had been persistently able, how, to her soul, all the while, it had been for the sake of this end. Here it was, then, the moment, the golden fruit that had shone from afar; only, what were these things, in the fact, for the hand and for the lips, when tested, when tasted—what were they as a reward? Closer than she had ever been to the measure of her course and the full face of her act, she had an instant of the terror that, when there has been suspense, always precedes, on the part of the creature to be paid, the certification of the amount. Amerigo knew it, the amount; he still held it, and the delay in his return, making her heart beat too fast to go on, was like a sudden blinding light on a wild speculation. She had thrown the dice, but his hand was over her cast.

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He opened the door, however, at last—he hadn't been away ten minutes; and then, with her sight of him renewed to intensity, she seemed to have a view of the number. His presence alone, as he paused to look at her, somehow made it the highest, and even before he had spoken she had begun to be paid in full. With that consciousness, in fact, an extraordinary thing occurred; the assurance of her safety so making her terror drop that already, within the minute, it had been changed to concern for his own anxiety, for everything that was deep in his being and everything that was fair in his face. So far as seeing that she was "paid" went, he might have been holding out the money-bag for her to come and take it. But what instantly rose, for her, between the act and her acceptance was the sense that she must strike him as waiting for a confession. This, in turn, charged her with a new horror: if that was her proper payment she would go without money. His acknowledgment hung there, too monstrously, at the expense of Charlotte, before whose mastery of the greater style she had just been standing dazzled. All she now knew, accordingly, was that she should be ashamed to listen to the uttered word; all, that is, but that she might dispose of it on the spot forever.

"Isn't she too splendid?" she simply said, offering it to explain and to finish.

"Oh, splendid!" With which he came over to her.

"That's our help, you see," she added—to point further her moral.

It kept him before her therefore, taking in—or trying to—what she so wonderfully gave. He tried, too clearly, to please her—to meet her in her own way; but with the result only that, close to her, her face kept before him, his hands holding her shoulders, his whole act enclosing her, he presently echoed: "'See'? I see nothing but you." And the truth of it had, with this force, after a moment, so strangely lighted his eyes that, as for pity and dread of them, she buried her own in his breast.