

put on her hat, but at the door of the room she stopped, turned round, and presented herself to her visitor with a small spot in either cheek, which had appeared there within the instant. 'I have suggested this, because it seems to me I ought to do something for you—in return,' she said. 'It's nothing, simply sitting there with me. And we haven't got anything else. This is our only hospitality. And the day seems so splendid.'

The modesty, the sweetness, of this little explanation, with a kind of intimated desire, constituting almost an appeal, for rightness, which seemed to pervade it, left a fragrance in the air after she had vanished. Ransom walked up and down the room, with his hands in his pockets, under the influence of it, without taking up even once the book about Mrs. Foat. He occupied the time in asking himself by what perversity of fate or of inclination such a charming creature was ranting upon platforms and living in Olive Chancellor's pocket, or how a ranter and sycophant could possibly be so engaging. And she was so disturbingly beautiful, too. This last fact was not less evident when she came down arranged for their walk. They left the house, and as they proceeded he remembered that he had asked himself earlier how he could do honour to such a combination of leisure and ethereal mildness as he had waked up to that morning—a mildness that seemed the very breath of his own latitude. This question was answered now; to do exactly what he was doing at that moment was an observance sufficiently festive.

XXV.

THEY passed through two or three small, short streets, which, with their little wooden houses, with still more wooden door-yards, looked as if they had been constructed by the nearest carpenter and his boy—a sightless, soundless, interspaced, embryonic region—and entered a long avenue which, fringed on either side with fresh villas, offering themselves trustfully to the public, had the distinction of a wide pavement of neat red brick. The new paint on the square detached houses shone afar off in the transparent air: they had, on top, little cupolas and belvederes, in front a pillared piazza, made bare by the indoor life of winter, on either side a bow-window or two, and everywhere an embellishment of scallops, brackets, cornices, wooden flourishes. They stood, for the most part, on small eminences, lifted above the impertinence of hedge or paling, well up before the world, with all the good conscience which in many cases came, as Ransom saw (and he had noticed the same ornament when he traversed with Olive the quarter of Boston inhabited by Miss Birdseye), from a silvered number, affixed to the glass above the door, in figures huge enough to be read by the people who, in the periodic horse-cars, travelled along the middle of the avenue. It was to these glittering badges that many of the houses on either side owed their principal identity. One of the horse-cars now advanced in the straight, spacious distance; it was almost the only object that animated the prospect, which, in its large cleanness, its implication of strict business-habits on the part of all the people who were not there, Ransom thought very impressive. As he went on with Verena he asked her about the Women's Convention, the year before; whether it had accomplished much work and she had enjoyed it.

'What do you care about the work it accomplished?' said the girl. 'You don't take any interest in that.'

'You mistake my attitude. I don't like it, but I greatly fear it.'

In answer to this Verena gave a free laugh. 'I don't believe you fear much!'

'The bravest men have been afraid of women. Won't you even tell me whether you enjoyed it? I am told you made an immense sensation there—that you leaped into fame.'

Verena never waved off an allusion to her ability, her eloquence; she took it seriously, without any flutter or protest, and had no more manner about it than if it concerned the goddess Minerva. 'I believe I attracted considerable attention; of course, that's what Olive wants—it paves the way for future work. I have no doubt I reached many that wouldn't have been reached otherwise. They think that's my great use—to take hold of the outsiders, as it were; of those who are prejudiced or thoughtless, or who don't care about anything unless it's amusing. I wake up the attention.'

'That's the class to which I belong,' Ransom said. 'Am I not an outsider? I wonder whether you would have reached me—or waked up my attention!'

Verena was silent awhile, as they walked; he heard the light click of her boots on the smooth bricks. Then—'I think I *have* waked it up a little,' she replied, looking straight before her.

'Most assuredly! You have made me wish tremendously to contradict you.'

'Well, that's a good sign.'

'I suppose it was very exciting—your convention,' Ransom went on, in a moment; 'the sort of thing you would miss very much if you were to return to the ancient fold.'

'The ancient fold, you say very well, where women were slaughtered like sheep! Oh, last June, for a week, we just quivered! There were delegates from every State and every city; we lived in a crowd of people and of ideas; the heat was intense, the weather magnificent, and great

thoughts and brilliant sayings flew round like darting fire-flies. Olive had six celebrated, high-minded women staying in her house—two in a room; and in the summer evenings we sat in the open windows, in her parlour, looking out on the bay, with the lights gleaming in the water, and talked over the doings of the morning, the speeches, the incidents, the fresh contributions to the cause. We had some tremendously earnest discussions, which it would have been a benefit to you to hear, or any man who doesn't think that we can rise to the highest point. Then we had some refreshment—we consumed quantities of ice-cream!' said Verena, in whom the note of gaiety alternated with that of earnestness, almost of exaltation, in a manner which seemed to Basil Ransom absolutely and fascinatingly original. 'Those were great nights!' she added, between a laugh and a sigh.

Her description of the convention put the scene before him vividly; he seemed to see the crowded, overheated hall, which he was sure was filled with carpet-baggers, to hear flushed women, with loosened bonnet-strings, forcing thin voices into ineffectual shrillness. It made him angry, and all the more angry, that he hadn't a reason, to think of the charming creature at his side being mixed up with such elements, pushed and elbowed by them, conjoined with them in emulation, in unsightly strainings and clappings and shoutings, in wordy, windy iteration of inanities. Worst of all was the idea that she should have expressed such a congregation to itself so acceptably, have been acclaimed and applauded by hoarse throats, have been lifted up, to all the vulgar multitude, as the queen of the occasion. He made the reflection, afterwards, that he was singularly ill-grounded in his wrath, inasmuch as it was none of his business what use Miss Tarrant chose to make of her energies, and, in addition to this, nothing else was to have been expected of her. But that reflection was absent now, and in its absence he saw only the fact that his companion had been odiously perverted. 'Well, Miss Tarrant,' he said, with a deeper seriousness than showed in his voice, 'I am forced to the painful conclusion that you are simply ruined.'

'Ruined? Ruined yourself!'

'Oh, I know the kind of women that Miss Chancellor had at her house, and what a group you must have made when you looked out at the Back Bay! It depresses me very much to think of it.'

'We made a lovely, interesting group, and, if we had had a spare minute we would have been photographed,' Verena said.

This led him to ask her if she had ever subjected herself to the process; and she answered that a photographer had been after her as soon as she got back from Europe, and that she had sat for him, and that there were certain shops in Boston where her portrait could be obtained. She gave him this information very simply, without pretence of vagueness of knowledge, spoke of the matter rather respectfully, indeed, as if it might be of some importance; and when he said that he should go and buy one of the little pictures as soon as he returned to town, contented herself with replying, 'Well, be sure you pick out a good one!' He had not been altogether without a hope that she would offer to give him one, with her name written beneath, which was a mode of acquisition he would greatly have preferred; but this, evidently, had not occurred to her, and now, as they went further, her thought was following a different train. That was proved by her remarking, at the end of a silence, inconsequently, 'Well, it showed I have a great use!' As he stared, wondering what she meant, she explained that she referred to the brilliancy of her success at the convention. 'It proved I have a great use,' she repeated, 'and that is all I care for!'

'The use of a truly amiable woman is to make some honest man happy,' Ransom said, with a sententiousness of which he was perfectly aware.

It was so marked that it caused her to stop short in the middle of the broad walk, while she looked at him with shining eyes. 'See here, Mr. Ransom, do you know what strikes me?' she exclaimed. 'The interest you take in me isn't really controversial—a bit. It's quite personal!' She was the most extraordinary girl; she could speak such words as those without the smallest look of added con-

sciousness coming into her face, without the least supposable intention of coquetry, or any visible purpose of challenging the young man to say more.

'My interest in you—my interest in you,' he began. Then hesitating, he broke off suddenly. 'It is certain your discovery doesn't make it any less!'

'Well, that's better,' she went on; 'for we needn't dispute.'

He laughed at the way she arranged it, and they presently reached the irregular group of heterogeneous buildings—chapels, dormitories, libraries, halls—which, scattered among slender trees, over a space reserved by means of a low rustic fence, rather than inclosed (for Harvard knows nothing either of the jealousy or the dignity of high walls and guarded gateways), constitutes the great university of Massachusetts. The yard, or college-precinct, is traversed by a number of straight little paths, over which, at certain hours of the day, a thousand undergraduates, with books under their arm and youth in their step, flit from one school to another. Verena Tarrant knew her way round, as she said to her companion; it was not the first time she had taken an admiring visitor to see the local monuments. Basil Ransom, walking with her from point to point, admired them all, and thought several of them exceedingly quaint and venerable. The rectangular structures of old red brick especially gratified his eye; the afternoon sun was yellow on their homely faces; their windows showed a peep of flower-pots and bright-coloured curtains; they wore an expression of scholastic quietude, and exhaled for the young Mississippian a tradition, an antiquity. 'This is the place where I ought to have been,' he said to his charming guide. 'I should have had a good time if I had been able to study here.'

'Yes; I presume you feel yourself drawn to any place where ancient prejudices are garnered up,' she answered, not without archness. 'I know by the stand you take about our cause that you share the superstitions of the old bookmen. You ought to have been at one of those really mediæval universities that we saw on the other side, at Oxford, or Göttingen, or Padua. You would have been in perfect sympathy with their spirit.'

'Well, I don't know much about those old haunts,' Ransom rejoined. 'I reckon this is good enough for me. And then it would have had the advantage that your residence isn't far, you know.'

'Oh, I guess we shouldn't have seen you much at my residence! As you live in New York, you come, but here you wouldn't; that is always the way.' With this light philosophy Verena beguiled the transit to the library, into which she introduced her companion with the air of a person familiar with the sanctified spot. This edifice, a diminished copy of the chapel of King's College, at the greater Cambridge, is a rich and impressive institution; and as he stood there, in the bright, heated stillness, which seemed suffused with the odour of old print and old bindings, and looked up into the high, light vaults that hung over quiet book-laden galleries, alcoves and tables, and glazed cases where rarer treasures gleamed more vaguely, over busts of benefactors and portraits of worthies, bowed heads of working students and the gentle creak of passing messengers—as he took possession, in a comprehensive glance, of the wealth and wisdom of the place, he felt more than ever the soreness of an opportunity missed; but he abstained from expressing it (it was too deep for that), and in a moment Verena had introduced him to a young lady, a friend of hers, who, as she explained, was working on the catalogue, and whom she had asked for on entering the library, at a desk where another young lady was occupied. Miss Catching, the first-mentioned young lady, presented herself with promptness, offered Verena a low-toned but appreciative greeting, and, after a little, undertook to explain to Ransom the mysteries of the catalogue, which consisted of a myriad little cards, disposed alphabetically in immense chests of drawers. Ransom was deeply interested, and as, with Verena, he followed Miss Catching about (she was so good as to show them the establishment in all its ramifications), he considered with attention the young lady's fair ringlets and refined, anxious expression, saying to himself that this was in the highest degree a New England type. Verena found an opportunity to mention to him that she was wrapped up in the cause,

and there was a moment during which he was afraid that his companion would expose him to her as one of its traducers; but there was that in Miss Catching's manner (and in the influence of the lofty halls), which deprecated loud pleasantries, and seemed to say, moreover, that if she were treated to such a revelation she should not know under what letter to range it.

'Now there is one place where perhaps it would be indelicate to take a Mississippian,' Verena said, after this episode. 'I mean the great place that towers above the others—that big building with the beautiful pinnacles, which you see from every point.' But Basil Ransom had heard of the great Memorial Hall; he knew what memories it enshrined, and the worst that he should have to suffer there; and the ornate, overtopping structure, which was the finest piece of architecture he had ever seen, had moreover solicited his enlarged curiosity for the last half-hour. He thought there was rather too much brick about it, but it was buttressed, cloistered, turreted, dedicated, superscribed, as he had never seen anything; though it didn't look old, it looked significant; it covered a large area, and it sprang majestic into the winter air. It was detached from the rest of the collegiate group, and stood in a grassy triangle of its own. As he approached it with Verena she suddenly stopped, to decline responsibility. 'Now mind, if you don't like what's inside, it isn't my fault.'

He looked at her an instant, smiling. 'Is there anything against Mississippi?'

'Well, no, I don't think she is mentioned. But there is great praise of our young men in the war.'

'It says they were brave, I suppose.'

'Yes, it says so in Latin.'

'Well, so they were—I know something about that,' Basil Ransom said. 'I must be brave enough to face them—it isn't the first time.' And they went up the low steps and passed into the tall doors. The Memorial Hall of Harvard consists of three main divisions: one of them a theatre, for academic ceremonies; another a vast refectory, covered with a timbered roof, hung about with portraits and lighted by stained windows, like the halls of the colleges of

Oxford; and the third, the most interesting, a chamber high, dim, and severe, consecrated to the sons of the university who fell in the long Civil War. Ransom and his companion wandered from one part of the building to another, and stayed their steps at several impressive points; but they lingered longest in the presence of the white, ranged tablets, each of which, in its proud, sad clearness, is inscribed with the name of a student-soldier. The effect of the place is singularly noble and solemn, and it is impossible to feel it without a lifting of the heart. It stands there for duty and honour, it speaks of sacrifice and example, seems a kind of temple to youth, manhood, generosity. Most of them were young, all were in their prime, and all of them had fallen; this simple idea hovers before the visitor and makes him read with tenderness each name and place—names often without other history, and forgotten Southern battles. For Ransom these things were not a challenge nor a taunt; they touched him with respect, with the sentiment of beauty. He was capable of being a generous foe, and he forgot, now, the whole question of sides and parties; the simple emotion of the old fighting-time came back to him, and the monument around him seemed an embodiment of that memory; it arched over friends as well as enemies, the victims of defeat as well as the sons of triumph.

'It is very beautiful—but I think it is very dreadful!' This remark, from Verena, called him back to the present. 'It's a real sin to put up such a building, just to glorify a lot of bloodshed. If it wasn't so majestic, I would have it pulled down.'

'That is delightful feminine logic!' Ransom answered. 'If, when women have the conduct of affairs, they fight as well as they reason, surely for them too we shall have to set up memorials.'

Verena retorted that they would reason so well they would have no need to fight—they would usher in the reign of peace. 'But this is very peaceful too,' she added, looking about her; and she sat down on a low stone ledge, as if to enjoy the influence of the scene. Ransom left her alone for ten minutes; he wished to take another look at

the inscribed tablets, and read again the names of the various engagements, at several of which he had been present. When he came back to her she greeted him abruptly, with a question which had no reference to the solemnity of the spot. 'If Miss Birdseye knew you were coming out to see me, can't *she* easily tell Olive? Then won't Olive make her reflections about your neglect of herself?'

'I don't care for her reflections. At any rate, I asked Miss Birdseye, as a favour, not to mention to her that she had met me,' Ransom added.

Verena was silent a moment. 'Your logic is almost as good as a woman's. Do change your mind and go to see her now,' she went on. 'She will probably be at home by the time you get to Charles Street. If she was a little strange, a little stiff with you before (I know just how she must have been), all that will be different to-day.'

'Why will it be different?'

'Oh, she will be easier, more genial, much softer.'

'I don't believe it,' said Ransom; and his scepticism seemed none the less complete because it was light and smiling.

'She is much happier now—she can afford not to mind you.'

'Not to mind me? That's a nice inducement for a gentleman to go and see a lady!'

'Well, she will be more gracious, because she feels now that she is more successful.'

'You mean because she has brought you out? Oh, I have no doubt that has cleared the air for her immensely, and you have improved her very much. But I have got a charming impression out here, and I have no wish to put another—which won't be charming, anyhow you arrange it—on top of it.'

'Well, she will be sure to know you have been round here, at any rate,' Verena rejoined.

'How will she know, unless you tell her?'

'I tell her everything,' said the girl; and now as soon as she had spoken, she blushed. He stood before her, tracing a figure on the mosaic pavement with his cane, conscious that in a moment they had become more intimate. They

were discussing their affairs, which had nothing to do with the heroic symbols that surrounded them; but their affairs had suddenly grown so serious that there was no want of decency in their lingering there for the purpose. The implication that his visit might remain as a secret between them made them both feel it differently. To ask her to keep it so would have been, as it seemed to Ransom, a liberty, and, moreover, he didn't care so much as that; but if she were to prefer to do so such a preference would only make him consider the more that his expedition had been a success.

'Oh, then, you can tell her this!' he said in a moment.

'If I shouldn't, it would be the first——' And Verena checked herself.

'You must arrange that with your conscience,' Ransom went on, laughing.

They came out of the hall, passed down the steps, and emerged from the Delta, as that portion of the college precinct is called. The afternoon had begun to wane, but the air was filled with a pink brightness, and there was a cool, pure smell, a vague breath of spring.

'Well, if I don't tell Olive, then you must leave me here,' said Verena, stopping in the path and putting out a hand of farewell.

'I don't understand. What has that to do with it? Besides I thought you said you *must* tell,' Ransom added. In playing with the subject this way, in enjoying her visible hesitation, he was slightly conscious of a man's brutality—of being pushed by an impulse to test her good-nature, which seemed to have no limit. It showed no sign of perturbation as she answered:

'Well, I want to be free—to do as I think best. And, if there is a chance of my keeping it back, there mustn't be anything more—there must not, Mr. Ransom, really.'

'Anything more? Why, what are you afraid there will be—if I should simply walk home with you?'

'I must go alone, I must hurry back to mother,' she said, for all reply. And she again put out her hand, which he had not taken before.

Of course he took it now, and even held it a moment;

he didn't like being dismissed, and was thinking of pretexts to linger. 'Miss Birdseye said you would convert me, but you haven't yet,' it came into his head to say.

'You can't tell yet; wait a little. My influence is peculiar; it sometimes comes out a long time afterwards!' This speech, on Verena's part, was evidently perfunctory, and the grandeur of her self-reference jocular; she was much more serious when she went on quickly, 'Do you mean to say Miss Birdseye promised you that?'

'Oh yes. Talk about influence! you should have seen the influence I obtained over her.'

'Well, what good will it do, if I'm going to tell Olive about your visit?'

'Well, you see, I think she hopes you won't. She believes you are going to convert me privately—so that I shall blaze forth, suddenly, out of the darkness of Mississippi, as a first-class proselyte: very effective and dramatic.'

Verena struck Basil Ransom as constantly simple, but there were moments when her candour seemed to him preternatural. 'If I thought that would be the effect, I might make an exception,' she remarked, speaking as if such a result were, after all, possible.

'Oh, Miss Tarrant, you will convert me enough, any way,' said the young man.

'Enough? What do you mean by enough?'

'Enough to make me terribly unhappy.'

She looked at him a moment, evidently not understanding; but she tossed him a retort at a venture, turned away, and took her course homeward. The retort was that if he should be unhappy it would serve him right—a form of words that committed her to nothing. As he returned to Boston he saw how curious he should be to learn whether she had betrayed him, as it were, to Miss Chancellor. He might learn through Mrs. Luna; that would almost reconcile him to going to see her again. Olive would mention it in writing to her sister, and Adeline would repeat the complaint. Perhaps she herself would even make him a scene about it; that would be, for him, part of the unhappiness he had foretold to Verena Tarrant.

XXVI.

'MRS. HENRY BURRAGE, at home Wednesday evening, March 26th, at half-past nine o'clock.' It was in consequence of having received a card with these words inscribed upon it that Basil Ransom presented himself, on the evening she had designated, at the house of a lady he had never heard of before. The account of the relation of effect to cause is not complete, however, unless I mention that the card bore, furthermore, in the left-hand lower corner, the words: 'An Address from Miss Verena Tarrant.' He had an idea (it came mainly from the look and even the odour of the engraved pasteboard), that Mrs. Burrage was a member of the fashionable world, and it was with considerable surprise that he found himself in such an element. He wondered what had induced a denizen of that fine air to send him an invitation; then he said to himself that, obviously, Verena Tarrant had simply requested that this should be done. Mrs. Henry Burrage, whoever she might be, had asked her if she shouldn't like some of her own friends to be present, and she had said, Oh yes, and mentioned him in the happy group. She had been able to give Mrs. Burrage his address, for had it not been contained in the short letter he despatched to Monadnoc Place soon after his return from Boston, in which he thanked Miss Tarrant afresh for the charming hour she had enabled him to spend at Cambridge? She had not answered his letter at the time, but Mrs. Burrage's card was a very good answer. Such a missive deserved a rejoinder, and it was by way of rejoinder that he entered the street car which, on the evening of March 26th, was to deposit him at a corner adjacent to Mrs. Burrage's dwelling. He almost never went to evening parties (he knew scarcely any one who

gave them, though Mrs. Luna had broken him in a little), and he was sure this occasion was of festive intention, would have nothing in common with the nocturnal 'exercises' at Miss Birdseye's; but he would have exposed himself to almost any social discomfort in order to see Verena Tarrant on the platform. The platform it evidently was to be—private if not public—since one was admitted by a ticket given away if not sold. He took his in his pocket, quite ready to present it at the door. It would take some time for me to explain the contradiction to the reader; but Basil Ransom's desire to be present at one of Verena's regular performances was not diminished by the fact that he detested her views and thought the whole business a poor perversity. He understood her now very well (since his visit to Cambridge); he saw she was honest and natural; she had queer, bad lecture-blood in her veins, and a comically false idea of the aptitude of little girls for conducting movements; but her enthusiasm was of the purest, her illusions had a fragrance, and so far as the mania for producing herself personally was concerned, it had been distilled into her by people who worked her for ends which to Basil Ransom could only appear insane. She was a touching, ingenuous victim, unconscious of the pernicious forces which were hurrying her to her ruin. With this idea of ruin there had already associated itself in the young man's mind, the idea—a good deal more dim and incomplete—of rescue; and it was the disposition to confirm himself in the view that her charm was her own, and her fallacies, her absurdity, a mere reflection of unlucky circumstance, that led him to make an effort to behold her in the position in which he could least bear to think of her. Such a glimpse was all that was wanted to prove to him that she was a person for whom he might open an unlimited credit of tender compassion. He expected to suffer—to suffer deliciously.

By the time he had crossed Mrs. Burrage's threshold there was no doubt whatever in his mind that he was in the fashionable world. It was embodied strikingly in the stout, elderly, ugly lady, dressed in a brilliant colour, with a twinkle of jewels and a bosom much uncovered, who stood

near the door of the first room, and with whom the people passing in before him were shaking hands. Ransom made her a Mississippian bow, and she said she was delighted to see him, while people behind him pressed him forward. He yielded to the impulsion, and found himself in a great saloon, amid lights and flowers, where the company was dense, and there were more twinkling, smiling ladies, with uncovered bosoms. It was certainly the fashionable world, for there was no one there whom he had ever seen before. The walls of the room were covered with pictures—the very ceiling was painted and framed. The people pushed each other a little, edged about, advanced and retreated, looking at each other with differing faces—sometimes blandly, unperceivingly, sometimes with a harshness of contemplation, a kind of cruelty, Ransom thought; sometimes with sudden nods and grimaces, inarticulate murmurs, followed by a quick reaction, a sort of gloom. He was now absolutely certain that he was in the best society. He was carried further and further forward, and saw that another room stretched beyond the one he had entered, in which there was a sort of little stage, covered with a red cloth, and an immense collection of chairs, arranged in rows. He became aware that people looked at him, as well as at each other, rather more, indeed, than at each other, and he wondered whether it were very visible in his appearance that his being there was a kind of exception. He didn't know how much his head looked over the heads of others, or that his brown complexion, fuliginous eye, and straight black hair, the leonine fall of which I mentioned in the first pages of this narrative, gave him that relief which, in the best society, has the great advantage of suggesting a topic. But there were other topics besides, as was proved by a fragment of conversation, between two ladies, which reached his ear while he stood rather wistfully wondering where Verena Tarrant might be.

'Are you a member?' one of the ladies said to the other. 'I didn't know you had joined.'

'Oh, I haven't; nothing would induce me.'

'That's not fair; you have all the fun and none of the responsibility.'

'Oh, the fun—the fun!' exclaimed the second lady.

'You needn't abuse us, or I will never invite you,' said the first.

'Well, I thought it was meant to be improving; that's all I mean; very good for the mind. Now, this woman to-night; isn't she from Boston?'

'Yes, I believe they have brought her on, just for this.'

'Well, you must be pretty desperate when you have got to go to Boston for your entertainment.'

'Well, there's a similar society there, and I never heard of their sending to New York.'

'Of course not, they think they have got everything. But doesn't it make your life a burden, thinking what you can possibly have?'

'Oh dear, no. I am going to have Professor Gougenheim—all about the Talmud. You must come.'

'Well, I'll come,' said the second lady; 'but nothing would induce me to be a regular member.'

Whatever the mystic circle might be, Ransom agreed with the second lady that regular membership must have terrors, and he admired her independence in such an artificial world. A considerable part of the company had now directed itself to the further apartment—people had begun to occupy the chairs, to confront the empty platform. He reached the wide doors, and saw that the place was a spacious music-room, decorated in white and gold, with a polished floor and marble busts of composers, on brackets attached to the delicate panels. He forbore to enter, however, being shy about taking a seat, and seeing that the ladies were arranging themselves first. He turned back into the first room, to wait till the audience had massed itself, conscious that even if he were behind every one he should be able to make a long neck; and here, suddenly, in a corner, his eyes rested upon Olive Chancellor. She was seated a little apart, in an angle of the room, and she was looking straight at him; but as soon as she perceived that he saw her she dropped her eyes, giving no sign of recognition. Ransom hesitated a moment, but the next he went straight over to her. It had been in his mind that if Verena Tarrant was there, *she* would be there; an instinct

told him that Miss Chancellor would not allow her dear friend to come to New York without her. It was very possible she meant to 'cut' him—especially if she knew of his having cut her, the other week, in Boston; but it was his duty to take for granted she would speak to him, until the contrary should be definitely proved. Though he had seen her only twice he remembered well how acutely shy she was capable of being, and he thought it possible one of these spasms had seized her at the present time.

When he stood before her he found his conjecture perfectly just; she was white with the intensity of her self-consciousness; she was altogether in a very uncomfortable state. She made no response to his offer to shake hands with her, and he saw that she would never go through that ceremony again. She looked up at him when he spoke to her, and her lips moved; but her face was intensely grave and her eye had almost a feverish light. She had evidently got into her corner to be out of the way; he recognised in her the air of an interloper, as he had felt it in himself. The small sofa on which she had placed herself had the form to which the French give the name of *causeuse*; there was room on it for just another person, and Ransom asked her, with a cheerful accent, if he might sit down beside her. She turned towards him when he had done so, turned everything but her eyes, and opened and shut her fan while she waited for her fit of diffidence to pass away. Ransom himself did not wait; he took a jocular tone about their encounter, asking her if she had come to New York to rouse the people. She glanced round the room; the backs of Mrs. Burrage's guests, mainly, were presented to them, and their position was partly masked by a pyramid of flowers which rose from a pedestal close to Olive's end of the sofa and diffused a fragrance in the air.

'Do you call these the "people"?' she asked.

'I haven't the least idea. I don't know who any of them are, not even who Mrs. Henry Burrage is. I simply received an invitation.'

Miss Chancellor gave him no information on the point he had mentioned; she only said, in a moment: 'Do you go wherever you are invited?'

'Why, I go if I think I may find you there,' the young man replied, gallantly. 'My card mentioned that Miss Tarrant would give an address, and I knew that wherever she is you are not far off. I have heard you are inseparable, from Mrs. Luna.'

'Yes, we are inseparable. That is exactly why I am here.'

'It's the fashionable world, then, you are going to stir up.'

Olive remained for some time with her eyes fastened to the floor; then she flashed them up at her interlocutor. 'It's a part of our life to go anywhere—to carry our work where it seems most needed. We have taught ourselves to stifle repulsion, distaste.'

'Oh, I think this is very amusing,' said Ransom. 'It's a beautiful house, and there are some very pretty faces. We haven't anything so brilliant in Mississippi.'

To everything he said Olive offered at first a momentary silence, but the worst of her shyness was apparently leaving her.

'Are you successful in New York? do you like it?' she presently asked, uttering the inquiry in a tone of infinite melancholy, as if the eternal sense of duty forced it from her lips.

'Oh, successful! I am not successful as you and Miss Tarrant are; for (to my barbaric eyes) it is a great sign of prosperity to be the heroines of an occasion like this.'

'Do I look like the heroine of an occasion?' asked Olive Chancellor, without an intention of humour, but with an effect that was almost comical.

'You would if you didn't hide yourself away. Are you not going into the other room to hear the speech? Everything is prepared.'

'I am going when I am notified—when I am invited.'

There was considerable majesty in her tone, and Ransom saw that something was wrong, that she felt neglected. To see that she was as ticklish with others as she had been with him made him feel forgiving, and there was in his manner a perfect disposition to forget their differences as

he said, 'Oh, there is plenty of time; the place isn't half full yet.'

She made no direct rejoinder to this, but she asked him about his mother and sisters, what news he received from the South. 'Have they any happiness?' she inquired, rather as if she warned him to take care not to pretend they had. He neglected her warning to the point of saying that there was one happiness they always had—that of having learned not to think about it too much, and to make the best of their circumstances. She listened to this with an air of great reserve, and apparently thought he had wished to give her a lesson; for she suddenly broke out, 'You mean that you have traced a certain line for them, and that that's all you know about it!'

Ransom stared at her, surprised; he felt, now, that she would always surprise him. 'Ah, don't be rough with me,' he said, in his soft Southern voice; 'don't you remember how you knocked me about when I called on you in Boston?'

'You hold us in chains, and then, when we writhe in our agony, you say we don't behave prettily!' These words, which did not lessen Ransom's wonderment, were the young lady's answer to his deprecatory speech. She saw that he was honestly bewildered and that in a moment more he would laugh at her, as he had done a year and a half before (she remembered it as if it had been yesterday); and to stop that off, at any cost, she went on hurriedly—'If you listen to Miss Tarrant, you will know what I mean.'

'Oh, Miss Tarrant—Miss Tarrant!' And Basil Ransom's laughter came.

She had not escaped that mockery, after all, and she looked at him sharply now, her embarrassment having quite cleared up. 'What do you know about her? What observation have you had?'

Ransom met her eye, and for a moment they scrutinised each other. Did she know of his interview with Verena a month before, and was her reserve simply the wish to place on him the burden of declaring that he had been to Boston since they last met, and yet had not called in Charles Street? He thought there was suspicion in her face; but

in regard to Verena she would always be suspicious. If he had done at that moment just what would gratify him he would have said to her that he knew a great deal about Miss Tarrant, having lately had a long walk and talk with her; but he checked himself, with the reflection that if Verena had not betrayed him it would be very wrong in him to betray her. The sweetness of the idea that she should have thought the episode of his visit to Monadnoc Place worth placing under the rose, was quenched for the moment in his regret at not being able to let his disagreeable cousin know that he had passed *her* over. 'Don't you remember my hearing her speak that night at Miss Birdseye's?' he said, presently. 'And I met her the next day at your house, you know.'

'She has developed greatly since then,' Olive remarked drily; and Ransom felt sure that Verena had held her tongue.

At this moment a gentleman made his way through the clusters of Mrs. Burrage's guests and presented himself to Olive. 'If you will do me the honour to take my arm I will find a good seat for you in the other room. It's getting to be time for Miss Tarrant to reveal herself. I have been taking her into the picture-room; there were some things she wanted to see. She is with my mother now,' he added, as if Miss Chancellor's grave face constituted a sort of demand for an explanation of her friend's absence. 'She said she was a little nervous; so I thought we would just move about.'

'It's the first time I have ever heard of that!' said Olive Chancellor, preparing to surrender herself to the young man's guidance. He told her that he had reserved the best seat for her; it was evidently his desire to conciliate her, to treat her as a person of importance. Before leading her away, he shook hands with Ransom and remarked that he was very glad to see him; and Ransom saw that he must be the master of the house, though he could scarcely be the son of the stout lady in the doorway. He was a fresh, pleasant, handsome young man, with a bright friendly manner; he recommended Ransom to take a seat in the other room, without delay; if he had never heard Miss

Tarrant he would have one of the greatest pleasures of his life.

'Oh, Mr. Ransom only comes to ventilate his prejudices,' Miss Chancellor said, as she turned her back to her kinsman. He shrank from pushing into the front of the company, which was now rapidly filling the music-room, and contented himself with lingering in the doorway, where several gentlemen were stationed. The seats were all occupied; all, that is, save one, towards which he saw Miss Chancellor and her companion direct themselves, squeezing and edging past the people who were standing up against the walls. This was quite in front, close to the little platform; every one noticed Olive as she went, and Ransom heard a gentleman near him say to another—'I guess she's one of the same kind.' He looked for Verena, but she was apparently keeping out of sight. Suddenly he felt himself smartly tapped on the back, and, turning round, perceived Mrs. Luna, who had been prodding him with her fan.

XXVII.

'You won't speak to me in my own house—that I have almost grown used to; but if you are going to pass me over in public I think you might give me warning first.' This was only her archness, and he knew what to make of that now; she was dressed in yellow and looked very plump and gay. He wondered at the unerring instinct by which she had discovered his exposed quarter. The outer room was completely empty; she had come in at the further door and found the field free for her operations. He offered to find her a place where she could see and hear Miss Tarrant, to get her a chair to stand on, even, if she wished to look over the heads of the gentlemen in the doorway; a proposal which she greeted with the inquiry—'Do you suppose I came here for the sake of that chatterbox? haven't I told you what I think of her?'

'Well, you certainly did not come here for my sake,' said Ransom, anticipating this insinuation; 'for you couldn't possibly have known I was coming.'

'I guessed it—a presentiment told me!' Mrs. Luna declared; and she looked up at him with searching, accusing eyes. 'I know what you have come for,' she cried in a moment. 'You never mentioned to me that you knew Mrs. Burrage!'

'I don't—I never had heard of her till she asked me.'

'Then why in the world *did* she ask you?'

Ransom had spoken a trifle rashly; it came over him, quickly, that there were reasons why he had better not have said that. But almost as quickly he covered up his mistake. 'I suppose your sister was so good as to ask for a card for me.'

'My sister? My grandmother! I know how Olive