

AI-Generated Graded Readers

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About This Edition

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.

The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

Content Note

This adaptation is based on a historical literary work. It may contain expressions, attitudes, or depictions that some readers may consider inappropriate or offensive by today's standards. Such elements have been retained or reflected where necessary in order to preserve the historical and literary character of the original work.

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Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

Part 1 — Tea at Gardencourt

On a fine summer afternoon, tea was set out on the lawn of an old English country house. The house stood above the River Thames, not very near London, but not very far away. Its red walls, old windows, and green plants made it look as if many years of English life had passed quietly through it. The grass was smooth, the trees were large, and the light of the day was still warm. It was the kind of hour when people feel that time is moving slowly and kindly.

Three men were near the tea table. The oldest man sat in a deep chair with a shawl over his knees and a large cup in his hand. He was Mr. Touchett, an American who had come to England many years before and had become rich as a banker. He was old now, and his health was poor, but his eyes were still bright and clever. He looked at his house with real love, as if he still felt surprise that such a place belonged to him.

Near him walked two younger men. One was Lord Warburton, a handsome English gentleman of about thirty-five. He had a fresh face, clear eyes, and the easy manner of a man who had always had enough money, enough space, and enough respect. The other was Ralph Touchett, Mr. Touchett's son. Ralph was tall, thin, and weak-looking, with a clever but tired face. He seemed ill, but his eyes were full of quiet humor.

Ralph watched his father with care as he walked up and down the lawn. At last the old man looked at him and said, "I am getting on very well." Ralph asked if he had finished his tea, and Mr. Touchett said he had enjoyed it. Ralph offered him more, and the old man answered that he might wait and see. Their talk was gentle and half playful, but under it there was the truth that both father and son were not strong.

Lord Warburton joined the talk with easy good humor. Mr. Touchett said Ralph was a good nurse, though Ralph himself was ill. Ralph protested, but his father

only smiled. Then the old man asked Lord Warburton if he had ever been sick. Lord Warburton answered that he had once been ill in the Persian Gulf. Ralph said this was only a joke, but Mr. Touchett looked at Lord Warburton carefully and said he did not look like a man who had ever been sick.

The talk moved from sickness to life itself. Lord Warburton said he was tired of many things, and Ralph called him sick of life. Mr. Touchett listened with interest, because he liked young men but did not always trust their clever sadness. He thought the world was becoming more serious and more difficult. Lord Warburton agreed that great changes were coming, and that it was hard to know what a man should hold on to. Ralph said lightly that Lord Warburton should hold on to a pretty woman.

Mr. Touchett took the idea seriously enough to make it pleasant. He said that a good woman could make a man's life more interesting. There was a short silence, because both Ralph and Lord Warburton knew that Mr. Touchett's own marriage had not been very happy. Still, the old man spoke kindly and without bitterness. Lord Warburton said he was not very eager to marry, but he might change his mind if he met an interesting woman. Ralph asked what such a woman would be like.

Then Mr. Touchett suddenly said that Lord Warburton must not fall in love with his niece. Ralph laughed, because the old man had spoken too directly, as Americans sometimes do. Lord Warburton said he did not even know there was a niece. Ralph explained that Mrs. Touchett, his mother, had been in America during the winter and was now returning to England with a young niece she had found there. They knew very little about the young lady, because Mrs. Touchett usually sent short and difficult telegrams.

Ralph repeated the kind of message his mother sent. She had said that America was hot, that she was tired of it, that she had taken her sister's girl, and that the girl was quite independent. Mr. Touchett and Ralph had tried to understand what "independent" meant. Did it mean the girl had money? Did it mean she liked to make her own choices? Or did it mean she simply wished to do what she pleased? Mr. Touchett said that, whatever else it meant, it probably meant that.

Lord Warburton asked when Mrs. Touchett and the young lady would arrive. Ralph said no one knew, because his mother liked to do things in her own way. She did not like people to meet her or help her unless she asked for help. Mr. Touchett said she liked to arrive suddenly, perhaps because she hoped to find him doing something wrong. Lord Warburton asked to be told when the niece arrived. Mr. Touchett answered that he would agree only if Lord Warburton promised not to fall in love with her.

While this playful talk went on, Ralph had walked a little away from the others. His small dog suddenly ran toward the house, barking with excitement but not with anger. Ralph looked up and saw a young woman standing in the doorway. She wore a black dress and no hat, as if she already belonged inside the house. She bent down at once and picked up the little dog, holding him close while he barked into her face. Ralph watched her and thought she was unexpectedly pretty.

The young woman smiled at Ralph and asked, "Is this your little dog?" Ralph answered, "He was mine a moment ago, but now he looks as if he belongs to you." She asked if they could share him, because he was such a dear little creature. Ralph looked at her with amusement and said she might have him completely. She blushed a little, then said, "I should tell you that I am probably your cousin." Ralph laughed and asked if she had arrived with his mother.

She said that she and Mrs. Touchett had arrived half an hour before. Mrs. Touchett had gone straight to her room and had told Isabel to give Ralph a message. He was to come to her room at a quarter to seven. Ralph looked at his watch and promised to be there. Then he told his cousin that she was very welcome at Gardencourt and that he was glad to see her. Isabel looked around at the lawn, the trees, the house, the dogs, and the men under the shade, and said she had never seen anything so lovely.

Ralph asked if she would come and meet his father. Isabel at once became kind and serious, because she understood that Mr. Touchett was old and ill. They walked across the grass together, and Mr. Touchett slowly rose from his chair to greet her. Ralph said, "My mother has arrived, and this is Miss Archer." The old man placed his hands gently on Isabel's shoulders, looked at her with warm

pleasure, and kissed her. He said he wished they had known she was coming, so that they could have received her properly.

Isabel said they had been received very well, since there had been servants in the hall and an old woman at the gate. Mr. Touchett smiled and said they could do better than that if they had notice. He also said that Mrs. Touchett never liked grand welcomes and usually went straight to her room. Isabel told him that Mrs. Touchett would come down to dinner at eight. Then she turned to Ralph and reminded him not to forget his appointment at a quarter to seven. Mr. Touchett called Ralph a happy boy, because he was going to see his mother.

Mr. Touchett asked Isabel to sit and have some tea, but she said tea had already been brought to her room. She looked at him with open sympathy and said she was sorry he was not well. He answered that he was an old man, and it was time for him to be old. Then he added that he would feel better because she was there. Isabel sat with her hands folded on her black dress, but her eyes kept moving. Everything interested her, and every new thing seemed to enter her mind clearly and quickly.

Isabel again said that she had never seen anything so beautiful. Mr. Touchett said he understood the feeling, because he had once felt the same way about the place. Then, with the freedom of an old man, he told her that she herself was very beautiful. Isabel rose quickly and blushed, but she laughed and said, "Oh yes, of course I am lovely." She turned the talk at once to the house and asked how old it was. Ralph said it was early Tudor, and Isabel found the words delightful.

Lord Warburton had been watching her with interest. He now said that he also had an old house and that he would like to show it to her. Mr. Touchett told Isabel not to believe him, because Lord Warburton's house was not as good as Gardencourt. Isabel smiled at Lord Warburton, but she did not yet know enough to judge. Ralph, however, cared less about the houses than about his new cousin. He asked if she liked dogs, and she said she liked them very much. Ralph told her she must keep the little dog while she stayed.

Isabel said she would keep him with pleasure while she was there, but she did not know how long that would be. Her aunt would decide. Ralph said he would

settle it with Mrs. Touchett when he saw her. Isabel answered that she was glad to be there at all. Ralph said he could not understand why they had never known her before. Isabel explained that there had been some trouble between Mrs. Touchett and Isabel's father after Isabel's mother died, and because of that the families had not been close.

Ralph asked if she had lately lost her father. Isabel said he had died more than a year before, and that afterward Mrs. Touchett had come to see her and had suggested that she come to Europe. Ralph said, without meaning harm, that Mrs. Touchett had adopted her. Isabel's face changed at once. She said clearly that her aunt had not adopted her and that she was not a person waiting to be adopted. Then she added, with strong feeling, that she was very fond of her liberty.

Mr. Touchett called Isabel back to him and asked what she was saying about Mrs. Touchett. Isabel smiled and said that her aunt was really very kind. The old man enjoyed this answer, because he knew his wife was kind in her own sharp and private way. Lord Warburton remained with Ralph for a moment and looked toward Isabel. Then he said quietly, "A little while ago you asked what I meant by an interesting woman. There she is."

Part 2 — A Young Woman from Albany

Mrs. Touchett had many unusual ways, and her return to Gardencourt showed this at once. Most wives, after many months away, would first go to see their husband and son. Mrs. Touchett did not do that. She went to her room, changed her clothes, put everything in order, and only then prepared to meet the family. She did not mean to be unkind, but she always followed her own rule before she followed any warmer feeling.

She and Mr. Touchett had long lived almost separate lives. He stayed mostly in England, where his bank and his old house were. She lived in Florence, in Italy, where she had bought a house for herself and arranged her days exactly as she liked. She came to England from time to time, but never as a soft or tender visitor. She came as a person with clear opinions, clear habits, and very little wish to

please people merely for the sake of pleasing them.

Some months before her arrival at Gardencourt, Mrs. Touchett had gone to Albany, in America, and had found Isabel there. Isabel was sitting alone in an old room with a book. The house was large, square, and old-fashioned, with many rooms and two front doors, though one of the doors had not been used for years. Isabel had known the house as a child, when her grandmother lived there. To her, it was full of memory, secret corners, old furniture, and the strange life of the past.

Isabel liked to sit in a room that the family called the office, though no one knew why it had that name. It had a closed door, green paper over the side windows, and old chairs that seemed to have their own sad stories. As a child, Isabel had read many books there, choosing them first by the pictures at the front. She liked the smell of old paper and old wood. She also liked the feeling that the world outside the closed door was hidden and mysterious.

On that rainy afternoon, Isabel heard someone moving in the next room. She listened, but the step was not the step she expected. A moment later, a plain older woman in a waterproof coat stood in the doorway and looked at her hard. "Is this where you usually sit?" the woman asked. Isabel rose and answered, "Not when I have visitors." She did not yet know that this sharp stranger was her aunt.

Mrs. Touchett looked around the room and then asked if Isabel was one of Mr. Archer's daughters. Isabel understood suddenly and said, "Then you must be Aunt Lydia." She added that her father had called her the strange aunt, though not in those exact words. Mrs. Touchett replied that she was not strange in her own opinion and that she had no foolish ideas. Then she asked which daughter Isabel was, and Isabel told her she was the youngest. In this direct and rather awkward way, aunt and niece began to know each other.

Mrs. Touchett asked many questions. She knew that Isabel's two older sisters were married, that their father had died, and that the old house would probably be sold. She also knew that Isabel had very little money and very little knowledge about money. Isabel said she was fond of the house and hoped it would not be pulled down. Mrs. Touchett answered that if Isabel liked old houses where many things had happened, she should come to Florence. "I live in an old palace," she

said, and Isabel's imagination opened like a window.

"I should like very much to go to Florence," Isabel said. Mrs. Touchett told her that, if she behaved well and did what she was told, she might take her there. Isabel smiled, but she did not make the promise. "I do not think I can promise to do everything I am told," she said. Her aunt was not offended. She seemed to enjoy the answer, because it showed spirit, and Mrs. Touchett liked spirit when it did not stand directly in her way.

Isabel's oldest sister, Lily Ludlow, was thought to be the sensible one of the family. Their second sister, Edith, was the beauty, and Isabel was often called the clever one. Lily had married a New York lawyer named Edmund Ludlow, a loud and practical man who liked to argue. Lily loved Isabel, but she did not always understand her. She often said she wanted to see Isabel safely married, because Isabel seemed too original to be left alone in the world.

When Lily heard about Mrs. Touchett's visit, she hoped their aunt would take an interest in Isabel. "She needs a chance," Lily told her husband. Edmund asked, "A chance for what?" Lily answered, "A chance to develop." Edmund laughed and said he hoped Isabel would not develop too much. His words were teasing, but they showed what many people felt. Isabel was loved, but she was also difficult for ordinary minds to place.

That evening, while Lily and Edmund went to visit Mrs. Touchett at her hotel, Isabel stayed at home alone. She sat under the lamp, but she could not read. Something had changed, though nothing very large had yet happened. She felt that a door had opened in her life. She thought of her father, whom she had loved deeply, and of the free but irregular childhood he had given his daughters. He had not trained them carefully, but he had let them see the world and feel that life was wide.

Isabel believed she had been happy and fortunate. She had not known much real pain, and sometimes she wondered whether this made her ignorant. Her father had protected her from ugly things when he could, and even his mistakes seemed generous to her. She knew he had lost money and had not managed life well, but she remembered his charm, his kindness, and his large way of looking at

everything. To her, his faults were part of his freedom, and she was proud to be his daughter.

Before the evening ended, another visitor came. It was Caspar Goodwood, a young man from Boston who had travelled to Albany to see Isabel. He was tall, strong, serious, and very direct. Many people believed he wished to marry her, and Isabel knew that this belief was not wrong. She respected him more than any young man she had ever known, but his strength pressed on her too closely. After half an hour with her, Goodwood left the house feeling defeated, though he was not the kind of man who accepted defeat easily.

Back at Gardencourt, Ralph went to his mother's room at the appointed time. Mrs. Touchett was already dressed for dinner, and she received him with her usual dry affection. Ralph loved his father more warmly, but he knew his mother cared for him in her own ordered way. He asked her about Isabel, and Mrs. Touchett said she meant to ask Mr. Touchett to invite the girl to stay. Ralph said three or four weeks would be too little and that Isabel should stay three months.

Mrs. Touchett said she planned to take Isabel to Paris for clothes and then perhaps to Florence. Ralph wanted to know what she meant to do with Isabel in a larger sense. His mother answered that she meant to do her duty. She described Isabel as clever, strong-willed, and not at all willing to be bored. Ralph was amused and interested. He said Isabel had the air of being someone in particular, and this, more than her beauty, had already caught his attention.

After dinner, Ralph had his first longer talk with Isabel. Mr. and Mrs. Touchett went to their rooms, and Lord Warburton had already ridden home. Isabel asked Ralph to show her the pictures in the gallery, though the light was not very good. Ralph took a candle, and they walked slowly from picture to picture. Isabel looked closely, asked questions, and made small sounds of pleasure. Ralph soon found that he was looking as much at Isabel as at the paintings.

Isabel said she wanted to know more about everything. Ralph answered that she seemed to have a great love of knowledge. She said many girls were kept ignorant because people did not speak to them seriously enough. Then she asked whether the old house had a ghost. Ralph told her that she was too young and

happy to see such a thing. “You must suffer first,” he said. “Only then can your eyes see it.”

Isabel listened carefully, but she was not afraid. She said she liked knowledge, though Ralph told her she meant happy knowledge, not bitter knowledge. Isabel answered that people suffered too easily and that suffering was not the main purpose of life. At the foot of the stairs, Ralph gave her a candle for her room. He told her the great thing was to be as happy as possible. Isabel looked at him and said, “That is what I came to Europe for.” Then she went slowly up the stairs, and Ralph returned alone to the quiet drawing-room.

Part 3 — The Shape of Isabel’s Mind

Isabel Archer had many ideas about life, and she liked to arrange these ideas in her own mind. She did not always know whether they were true, but she enjoyed thinking about them. She believed that life should be large, bright, and free. She also believed that a person should try to be one of the best kind of people, not in a proud public way, but in a private and serious way. Because of this, she often expected much from herself, and sometimes she expected too much from the world.

In America, many people had thought Isabel very clever. Some said she had read a great deal, and others even believed she might write a book one day. This was not true, for Isabel did not really wish to be an author. She loved books and ideas, but she did not feel that she had a special gift for writing. Still, she liked the thought that her mind was alive and active. When people treated her as unusual, she did not always deny it in her heart.

Isabel’s faults came partly from this strong belief in herself. She often thought she was right before she had enough reason to be sure. Then, when she discovered that she had been wrong, she would feel deeply ashamed for a little while. But after that short time of shame, her old hope returned. She wanted to think well of herself, because she felt that life would be poor if one could not respect one’s own soul. To her, self-respect was not a luxury; it was almost a form of air.

She also had a very strong idea of independence. She did not think of herself as a lonely person, and she disliked the thought that an unmarried woman must be waiting for marriage. Her sister Lily had often said that Isabel should marry soon, but Isabel did not accept this as a law of nature. She thought marriage might be good if it came in the right way, but she would not let it be forced upon her. She wanted to choose her life with open eyes.

England now seemed to her like a new book, and Gardencourt was the first beautiful chapter. She liked the old house, the lawn, the river, the trees, and the quiet order of everything. She had seen parts of Europe as a child, but she had not really understood them then. Now she felt that every old stone and every old custom had something to tell her. She moved through the house and garden with a fresh pleasure that Ralph found charming to watch.

Mr. Touchett enjoyed talking with her on the lawn. He liked her quick questions and her clear young opinions, even when he thought them rather wild. Isabel asked him about England, English people, and English society. She wanted to know whether she would like the people as much as she liked the place. Her uncle told her that English people were good enough, especially if one liked them first. Isabel answered that being good was not enough; people should also be pleasant.

Mr. Touchett told her that American girls were often liked in England and that she would probably have success. Isabel was not sure that she wanted success if success meant pleasing people who were too fixed in their ways. She disliked the idea that everything in life might already be arranged before she arrived. Her uncle said that the English liked many rules, but they were also not always consistent. Isabel brightened at that. "Then perhaps they will suit me," she said, because unexpectedness was exactly what she desired.

Mrs. Touchett, meanwhile, had her own strong opinions about England. She liked living in Florence and liked judging England from a distance, even when she was sitting inside an English house. Isabel often found herself defending English life against her aunt, though she had been in England only a short time. Mrs. Touchett said that her point of view was not American or English, but

personal. Isabel saw that this answer was clever, because she too often judged things from her own private center.

Ralph watched Isabel during these days with growing interest. He had been bored by many things, and illness had made his life narrow. Isabel changed the air around him. She did not mean to comfort him, but her presence gave him something new to think about. He showed her the house, the pictures, the river, and the paths through the grounds. She asked questions about everything, and he was glad to answer, partly because her pleasure made the old place seem young again.

One day, after Isabel and Ralph had been out on the river, they came back toward the house and saw Lord Warburton under the trees. Ralph told her that here was a good example of an English gentleman. Isabel looked at Lord Warburton and said he seemed a very favorable example. Lord Warburton greeted her warmly and noticed at once that she had been rowing. When Ralph praised her and said she did everything well, Isabel accepted the compliment lightly, but inwardly it pleased her.

Lord Warburton stayed at Gardencourt that night and then stayed another day. He talked easily, laughed often, and seemed more and more interested in Isabel. She asked him about his family, his brothers and sisters, his house, and his opinions. He told her that he had strong political ideas and that some of his family disagreed with him. Isabel liked the sound of this, because she enjoyed people who had opinions and did not simply rest inside comfort.

That evening, Isabel wished to remain in the drawing-room with Ralph and Lord Warburton after Mrs. Touchett went upstairs. Her aunt stopped her at once and told her that young ladies in England did not sit late at night alone with gentlemen. Isabel blushed and was surprised, but she did not make a scene. Upstairs, she asked whether it had really been improper. Mrs. Touchett said it had, and Isabel answered that she was glad to know the rule, though she might not always agree with it. She wanted to know what one should not do, not because she would always obey, but because she wished to choose.

Soon after this, Lord Warburton invited Isabel and her aunt to visit his house,

Lockleigh. He said his sisters would also come to see her, and Isabel felt curious about the whole family. After he left, she told Ralph that she liked his English gentleman very much. Ralph said he liked him too, but he also pitied him. This surprised Isabel, because Lord Warburton appeared to have everything: money, position, health, good looks, and charm.

Ralph explained that Lord Warburton was troubled by his own great position. He had been born into power and comfort, but he did not fully believe in the system that gave them to him. Isabel thought this was interesting, though she was not sure it made him unhappy. Later, she spoke of him with Mr. Touchett, who said Lord Warburton was a fine young man but not one Isabel should fall in love with. Isabel promised that she would not do so unless her uncle recommended it.

Mr. Touchett then spoke of Lord Warburton's radical opinions. He said young noblemen like Warburton liked to talk about change, but their ideas often did not cost them much. Isabel said she would enjoy seeing a revolution, especially if people behaved bravely and beautifully. Her uncle laughed and said that Lord Warburton would probably survive any revolution very comfortably. Isabel felt a little sorry for that. A man who could not suffer for his ideas seemed to her to be in a poor position, even if he owned half the world.

Part 4 — Friends and Suitors

A few days after Isabel's visit to Lockleigh was arranged, Lord Warburton's sisters came to call at Gardencourt. They were the two Misses Molyneux, and Isabel liked them at once. They were shy, gentle, and very sweet in manner. Isabel thought they were original, though Ralph later told her that there were many English young women exactly like them. This did not change Isabel's feeling, because she found their quiet goodness fresh and pleasant.

The sisters were not very young, but their faces were soft and bright. They seemed almost afraid of Isabel, as if she were a strong new creature from another world. They spoke little, but their kindness was clear. They invited her to come to Lockleigh, where they lived with their brother. Isabel praised them warmly, and

after they had gone Ralph told her she had probably frightened them by calling them delightful.

Isabel said she could not help it, because she truly liked their calm and happy way of being. She told Ralph that she would like to become more like them. Ralph cried out that he hoped she would do no such thing. To him, Isabel's quick mind and bold spirit were much more interesting than quiet good sense. But Isabel was sincere for the moment; she really admired the peace that seemed to live in the Misses Molyneux.

Soon afterward, Isabel went with Mrs. Touchett and Ralph to Lockleigh. The house was large, old, and full of soft faded color. Isabel found the sisters sitting in a great drawing-room, wearing dark dresses and looking very much at home. She liked them even better there than she had at Gardencourt. Their quiet ways seemed part of the house itself, as if the old rooms had shaped them slowly over many years.

Isabel asked them whether their brother was truly a great radical. She had already heard that Lord Warburton had advanced political ideas, and she wished to know how his sisters saw him. The younger sister said that he was indeed very advanced. The elder sister added that he was also very reasonable. Isabel looked across the room at Lord Warburton, who was trying to make conversation with Mrs. Touchett, and wondered how far his ideas would carry him.

"Would he give up all this?" Isabel asked. The sisters did not understand at first. When they understood that she meant Lockleigh and the family property, they looked almost frightened. One said that perhaps he might rent one or two houses, but she could not imagine him giving up his position. Isabel smiled and said that perhaps his radical ideas were not so dangerous after all. The sisters did not answer easily, because to them their brother's place in the world seemed natural and good.

After lunch, Lord Warburton showed Isabel the house and grounds. From the garden, Lockleigh looked like a house from an old story, standing gray and strong beside still water. The day was cool, and the soft light made the old walls seem even older. Isabel enjoyed everything, partly because she was ready to enjoy

everything. Lord Warburton talked about the history of the house, but again and again he turned the conversation toward Isabel herself.

He told her that his sisters had taken a great liking to her and that he hoped she might come often. Isabel said she could make no promises, because she was in her aunt's hands. Lord Warburton answered that he did not quite believe this. He thought Isabel could do whatever she truly wished to do. Isabel did not like to hear this too clearly said, because it made her independence sound almost too bold.

Lord Warburton then said he hoped to see her often. Isabel answered that she would be glad to see him. This pleased him more than she expected, and after a moment he said that she had charmed him. The tone of his voice startled her. It sounded as if something serious might soon follow, and Isabel suddenly wished to step back from the edge of that seriousness. She said lightly that she might not be able to come to Lockleigh again, and they turned back toward the others.

The next day, Isabel received a letter from Henrietta Stackpole. Henrietta had arrived in England from America and wrote in her usual lively way. She said she had come as a journalist for the Interviewer and wanted to know where Isabel was. She guessed that Isabel was staying in some castle and perhaps had already married a lord. She also said she had something very particular to tell Isabel, though she did not explain what it was.

Isabel told Mr. Touchett about Henrietta's arrival but did not show him the whole letter. Mr. Touchett at once invited Henrietta to Gardencourt. Isabel was pleased, but also a little nervous, because Henrietta was not careful about what she wrote for the newspaper. Ralph went with Isabel to meet Henrietta at the station. On the platform, he joked that he did not know whether he would love her or hate her, and Isabel told him that Henrietta would not care very much either way.

Henrietta arrived looking neat, fresh, and ready to see everything. She had a round face, clear eyes, and a direct way of looking at people. Ralph had expected someone rougher and less agreeable, but he soon saw that she was not easy to dismiss. In the carriage and later at Gardencourt, she spoke with great confidence. She asked whether the Touchetts considered themselves American or English,

because she wished to know how to speak to them.

Ralph answered playfully that he would be anything she liked. Henrietta said that patriotism should begin at home. Ralph asked where home began, and she answered that she did not know where it began, but she knew it ended long before England. Mr. Touchett asked gently whether she disliked England. Henrietta said she had not yet decided, but that she felt a little pressed by the atmosphere. Then she added that she would make her own atmosphere, because that was the only way to breathe.

Henrietta soon made herself busy at Gardencourt. Each morning she worked on her writing, and then she expected company. Isabel spent much time with her and enjoyed her courage, but she soon discovered that Henrietta was preparing an article about Gardencourt. Isabel asked her not to publish it. Henrietta said the place was a beautiful subject and that readers would love it, but Isabel insisted that her uncle and cousin would feel betrayed. At last Henrietta agreed to give up the article, though she said she was sacrificing something excellent.

Mrs. Touchett did not like Henrietta. She said Henrietta talked too loudly and looked at people as if they wanted to be looked at. Henrietta, on her side, disliked Mrs. Touchett's manner and her ideas about servants and hotels. They argued about American hotels, which Henrietta thought the best in the world and Mrs. Touchett thought the worst. Ralph tried to make peace, but Henrietta rejected his middle view. To her, American things were either excellent or worth defending until they became excellent.

After a few days, Henrietta finally told Isabel the special news from her letter. Caspar Goodwood had crossed the ocean on the same ship. Henrietta believed he had come because of Isabel, though he had not said so directly. She had talked to him about Isabel and had seen how seriously he listened. Isabel turned pale and said she was sorry Henrietta had done this, because Goodwood already thought too well of her.

Henrietta said Goodwood needed only a little encouragement. Isabel answered that his feeling was not a grand passion, but she did not sound fully sure. Henrietta accused her of having changed since coming to Europe. Isabel said she hoped she

had changed, because one should gain new ideas. Still, Goodwood's name disturbed her. She admitted that she had once encouraged him, though she did not like to speak of it.

For the next two days, Isabel expected Goodwood to appear at any moment. The thought made the peaceful air of Gardencourt feel heavy. One afternoon she walked into the park with Bunchie, the little dog, and sat under a great tree near the house. She tried to be calm, but she could not turn her mind away from the fear of Goodwood's arrival. A servant came and gave her a letter, and at once she knew the handwriting.

The letter was from Caspar Goodwood. He wrote that he had come to England because she was there. He reminded her that when she had dismissed him in Albany, he had not accepted the dismissal. He asked to see her for half an hour and said that he would always think of her and of no one else. Isabel read the letter with deep attention. When she folded it and looked up, Lord Warburton was standing before her.

Part 5 — Lord Warburton's Offer

Isabel put Caspar Goodwood's letter into her pocket before Lord Warburton could see it. She stood up and greeted him with a calm smile, though she was surprised by her own calmness. He told her that the servants had said she was in the garden, and that he had come out because she was the person he wished to see. Isabel at once felt that he had come with a serious purpose. She suggested that they walk, because walking seemed safer than sitting still beside him.

They moved slowly over the grass, under the shade of the great trees. Lord Warburton seemed cheerful at first, but Isabel soon saw that his cheerfulness was not quite easy. He laughed once or twice without real reason, and his eyes rested on her with a feeling he could not hide. Isabel understood that something important was coming. The scene itself seemed almost like a story: an old English park, a nobleman, and a young woman who had come from far away.

At last Lord Warburton spoke plainly. He said he cared nothing for

Gardencourt at that moment and cared only for her. Isabel answered that he had known her for too short a time to say such a thing. He replied that time was not the measure of such feelings. He had been struck by her from the first hour, and the more he thought about it, the more certain he became. His voice was kind, steady, and full of deep feeling.

Isabel was moved, because she believed him. She did not think he was speaking lightly or beautifully only because he knew how to speak. He meant what he said, and this made his words harder to answer. When he asked her to become his wife, she told him gently that he knew very little about her. He answered that this was exactly why he wished to marry her: he wanted the right to know her better and to spend his life proving his love.

Isabel told him that she liked him very much. At that moment she felt the truth of her words with unusual warmth. She trusted him, admired him, and knew that many women would have accepted him gladly. But liking him was not the same as choosing him. He offered her rank, kindness, safety, fine houses, and a place in a great old world. Yet something in Isabel stepped back from all of it.

Lord Warburton asked her not to answer at once if she needed time. He said he would wait as long as necessary if waiting gave him hope. Isabel told him not to hope too much. Then, after a pause, she said that she was not sure she wished to marry anyone. He tried to treat this as a feeling many young women had before they were persuaded. Isabel answered that women who were persuaded probably wanted to be persuaded. Her words hurt him, though she had not wished to be cruel.

He wondered whether she objected because he was English. Isabel said this was not the reason. He offered to live wherever she liked, in any country and in any climate. He even said that if she did not like Lockleigh, she need never live there. Isabel was touched by this generosity, because it was simple and sincere. Still, the very greatness of the offer seemed to close around her like a beautiful cage.

Isabel asked him to say no more that day. She promised to think seriously and to write to him soon. Lord Warburton accepted this, but he did not hide his pain.

He said that if she refused him, he would not die, but he would live to no purpose. Isabel told him he would one day marry a better woman, but he asked her not to say that. Before he left, he took her hand and kissed it. Then he walked away quickly, deeply troubled.

When Isabel was alone, she returned to the bench and sat down. She was not asking herself whether to accept him, because she already knew she could not. What troubled her was that she could refuse so much without feeling torn apart. She asked herself whether she was proud, cold, or foolish. Lord Warburton had offered her one of the finest chances a woman could receive. If she refused such a chance, then surely she must be waiting for some larger life, though she could not name it clearly.

The next morning, Isabel went to see Mr. Touchett in his room. The old man sat near the window, with papers beside him and the park spread out below. Isabel told him directly that Lord Warburton had asked her to marry him. Mr. Touchett did not seem surprised, because Lord Warburton had already written to him. He asked whether she had accepted, and Isabel said she had not given a final answer but would certainly refuse.

Mr. Touchett did not press her. He said old men could not judge for young women, and perhaps it was better that she had made up her own mind. He liked Lord Warburton very much and thought his letter had been excellent. Isabel said she liked Lord Warburton too, and that this was not the problem. She simply did not wish to marry him. Her uncle said that ladies did not have to give reasons, which comforted her more than she expected.

Isabel did not answer Caspar Goodwood's letter. She felt that one serious suitor was enough for the quiet house, and two would be too much. After three days, however, she wrote to Lord Warburton. Her letter was respectful but clear. She said she had thought carefully, but her mind had not changed. She could not see him as the companion of her whole life, and she asked him not to return to the subject.

While Isabel was deciding these things, Henrietta Stackpole made a plan of her own. She took Ralph into the garden and told him that Isabel was changing in

a dangerous way. In Henrietta's eyes, Europe was beginning to draw Isabel away from her American strength. She feared that Isabel might marry some European gentleman and lose her natural freedom. To prevent this, Henrietta wanted Ralph to invite Caspar Goodwood to Gardencourt.

Ralph was amused, but he also became curious. Henrietta described Goodwood as a strong, fine American man and the only person truly worthy of Isabel. Ralph asked whether Isabel loved him, and Henrietta said that if she did not, she ought to. After more talk, Ralph agreed to send the invitation, partly to show Henrietta that he was not in love with Isabel himself. Goodwood replied with a short, stiff note. He thanked Ralph but said he could not come.

Henrietta was annoyed by this refusal and said there must be a deep reason for it. She then proposed that she and Isabel go to London together. Isabel liked the idea at once. London sounded rich, crowded, old, and full of things to see. They imagined inns, theatres, museums, old streets, and places connected with famous writers. When they told Ralph, he laughed and offered to go with them under Henrietta's protection.

Before the London plan could begin, Lord Warburton came again to Gardencourt for lunch. He brought Miss Molyneux with him, perhaps so the visit would not seem too private. Isabel was nervous, but Lord Warburton behaved with perfect control. He talked to Henrietta, answered her bold questions, and even joked about being a lord. Henrietta told him frankly that she did not approve of lords as an institution, and he answered that he did not approve of himself much either.

After lunch, Lord Warburton asked Isabel to come into the picture gallery. There, among the old paintings, he spoke again of her letter. He said he could not understand it, because she had no clear reason. Isabel said she had a reason, though she could not fully explain it. At last she told him that marrying him would feel like trying to escape her fate. It would give her a great deal, but it would also make her give up other chances.

Lord Warburton could not understand this. He said he was not offering to separate her from life, but to share life with her in a comfortable way. Isabel knew

he was kind, and this made the scene more painful. When the others came into the gallery, the conversation ended. Miss Molyneux asked Isabel to come again to Lockleigh, but Isabel said she was afraid she never could. Lord Warburton later asked when he would see her again, and Isabel said not for a long time. They shook hands and said good-bye.

After they left, Isabel went to her room. Before dinner, Mrs. Touchett came in and said that Mr. Touchett had told her about Lord Warburton. Isabel said there were hardly any relations between them, since he had seen her only a few times. Mrs. Touchett asked why Isabel had told her uncle first. Isabel answered that he knew Lord Warburton better. Her aunt replied that she knew Isabel better, though after a moment she seemed less sure. Then she said Isabel must expect to do something very fine if she could refuse such an offer.

Part 6 — London and Caspar Goodwood

It was decided that Isabel and Henrietta should go to London with Ralph as their guide. Mrs. Touchett did not like the plan, but she did not stop it. She said that after refusing an English lord, Isabel perhaps thought she could do anything. Isabel answered that she had refused Lord Warburton because she did not love him enough to marry him. Her aunt said this was a good reason, but added that Isabel had better be ready when the next great offer came.

Ralph found rooms for Isabel and Henrietta at a quiet hotel near Piccadilly. He himself stayed at the Touchett house in Winchester Square, though the house was empty and rather dark. Every morning he came to the hotel, and the three made plans for the day. They went to museums, churches, galleries, gardens, the Tower, and other famous places. Isabel was full of questions and feelings, and London seemed to open before her like a great gray book.

Henrietta also looked at everything, but in a different spirit. She did not care much for old stones, old pictures, or old stories unless they led to living people. She wanted to see important men and women of the present day. In Trafalgar Square she asked Ralph where the leading minds of England were. Ralph had to

admit that he could not simply call them out for her inspection, and Henrietta considered this a weakness in English civilization.

During these London days, Ralph was happy in a quiet way. He knew the city was half empty and dull at that season, but he enjoyed Isabel's fresh pleasure and Henrietta's loud judgments. At night he returned to the silent house in Winchester Square and sat alone in the dark dining-room. His body was tired, but his mind was alive. He felt that Isabel's presence had brought movement and color into a life that illness had made too still.

One afternoon, in Winchester Square, Henrietta met Mr. Bantling, a cheerful friend of Ralph's. Mr. Bantling was not very deep, but he was good-natured and knew many social facts that Henrietta wanted. He told her that his sister, Lady Pensil, might invite her to Bedfordshire. Henrietta at once saw this as a chance to study the inner life of England. Mr. Bantling admired her energy, and she admired his usefulness.

That evening, Henrietta had promised to dine with two American friends in Jermyn Street. Mr. Bantling offered to help her find a cab and go with her part of the way. Henrietta accepted, and soon she and Mr. Bantling left Isabel and Ralph alone in the square. The light was fading, and the quiet garden looked larger than it really was. Ralph and Isabel sat together in the open air, with the dark houses around them and London spreading beyond the gates.

Ralph asked whether Isabel would let him dine with her at the hotel. Isabel said no; she wished to eat alone and rest. Ralph wondered aloud whether she expected another visitor, but Isabel looked at him in surprise and asked what visitor she could have. Ralph felt ashamed of the question, because he was thinking of Caspar Goodwood. Isabel said that her past was across the sea and that none of it was in London. Ralph answered that her future, at least, was sitting beside her.

Their talk became more serious. Ralph asked why she had refused Lord Warburton. Isabel first said simply that she had not wished to marry him. Ralph said this was true but not enough, because such a refusal was important. Isabel thought for a while and then said that Lord Warburton had seemed almost too

perfect. His life was too complete, his position too strong, and his kindness too large. She felt that if she married him, she might enter a beautiful house and find that the doors had closed behind her.

Ralph did not try to change her mind. In truth, he felt a strange gladness that she had refused. Not because he disliked Lord Warburton, and not because he wanted Isabel for himself. He was too ill and too honest to think in that way. He was glad because Isabel had shown courage and because he wanted to watch what she would do with her freedom. She interested him deeply, and he told her that the world interested her too.

Isabel denied that she wanted adventure, but her eyes shone in the dusk. Ralph said she had courage, though women did not often speak of their own courage. Isabel laughed and said she had enough courage to go home alone in a cab, but no more. Ralph found a cab for her and offered again to go with her. Isabel refused kindly and told him he was tired and must go home. He helped her into the cab, and she drove away through the London streets.

At the hotel that night, Isabel tried to read, but she could not fix her mind on the page. Ralph's words returned to her, and behind them came the thought of Caspar Goodwood. Suddenly the waiter brought in a card. Isabel looked at the name and became still. It was Caspar Goodwood. For a moment she said nothing, and then she told the waiter to show him in.

Goodwood entered almost at once. He was strong, grave, and direct, as she remembered him. He asked why she had not answered his letter. Isabel asked how he had known where she was, and he said Henrietta had written to him. This made Isabel angry with her friend, but she had no time to think about Henrietta. Goodwood stood before her with the heavy force of a man who had crossed the sea for one purpose.

He told Isabel that he could not accept her silence. She said he had no right to press her in this way. He asked whether he disgusted her, and she answered with painful honesty that he did not suit her present life at all. She wished to be kind, but she also wished to be free. She said she did not want to marry now and might never marry. No one, she told him, had the right to push a woman toward marriage

against her will.

Goodwood suffered, but he did not give way easily. He feared that she would marry someone else, perhaps some brilliant man she had not yet met. Isabel told him that he must remember her love of liberty if he ever heard such a rumor. She had refused one noble and kind gentleman already, and she wanted Goodwood to understand what that meant. The news moved him deeply. For a moment he seemed to believe that perhaps she truly wished only for time, travel, and independence.

“Then I will wait,” he said. “If you need two years, I will wait two years.” Isabel told him that this was not what she meant. She promised nothing at all. Still, she asked him to go back to America and leave her alone. Goodwood finally agreed, though he said he would come back after two years wherever she might be. Isabel held his hand for a moment and spoke to him almost tenderly. Then she opened the door to her room and left him standing there.

In the dark bedroom, Isabel stood and listened. At last she heard Goodwood leave the sitting-room and close the outer door. Then she dropped to her knees beside the bed, not exactly praying, but trembling. She was glad he was gone, and this gladness frightened her. She had now refused two men in a short time, and she felt both troubled and secretly proud. Her love of liberty was still mostly an idea, but tonight it seemed to have become an action.

Soon Henrietta returned from dinner and saw at once that something had happened. She asked if Goodwood had come. Isabel told her that she had behaved wrongly by arranging the meeting. Henrietta answered that she had acted for the best and warned Isabel not to marry one of the Europeans around her. Isabel replied that she had asked Goodwood to leave her alone and now asked Henrietta the same thing. Henrietta said Isabel was drifting toward a great mistake, but Isabel answered that not knowing where she was going felt almost like happiness.

The next morning, Henrietta said she would not return to Gardencourt. She would stay in London and wait for Lady Pensil’s invitation, which Mr. Bantling had promised to help arrange. Ralph then came with serious news. His mother had sent a telegram: Mr. Touchett had suffered a sharp attack and might be in danger.

Ralph would consult a doctor and return to Gardencourt by the afternoon train. Isabel at once said she would go with him, because she loved her uncle and wished to be near him.

Before they left, Henrietta told Ralph that Goodwood had visited Isabel and that Isabel had sent him back to America. Ralph was relieved to know Isabel had not secretly planned the meeting herself. Yet he felt pity for Goodwood, whom he had never met, and a deeper feeling for Isabel, whom he was beginning to understand. Henrietta said she would tell Goodwood not to give up. Ralph answered politely, but his thoughts were already moving elsewhere, toward Gardencourt, his father's illness, and Isabel's strange and shining future.

Part 7 — Madame Merle and the Inheritance

Ralph and Isabel returned to Gardencourt almost in silence. The house was no longer the bright and pleasant place Isabel had first known. A quiet fear seemed to stand in the hall, on the stairs, and outside every closed door. Mr. Touchett was not better, and everyone moved carefully, as if a loud sound might hurt him. Isabel went to her room, but after an hour she came down again because she wished to hear news of her uncle.

She looked first for Mrs. Touchett, but her aunt was not in the library. Then Isabel heard music from the drawing-room. She thought Ralph might be playing the piano and felt a little hope, because music would mean that his fear had become lighter. She crossed the large room quietly and saw, at the far end, a woman sitting at the piano. The woman's back was turned, and Isabel knew at once that she was a stranger.

Isabel sat down without making a sound and listened. The music was soft, serious, and full of feeling. Outside, rain had begun to fall over the lawn, and the trees moved in the wind. The room grew darker as the woman played. When the music ended, Isabel stood and said warmly that it was very beautiful and that the playing had made it even more beautiful.

The woman turned and smiled. She asked whether the music had disturbed Mr.

Touchett. Isabel said she hoped not and that such music might even make him feel better. The woman answered that there were sad moments in life when even music could say nothing to us. Isabel liked this answer at once, because it sounded gentle and wise. She asked the woman to play again, and the stranger kindly agreed.

Before beginning, the woman looked at Isabel and asked if she was the young American niece. Isabel said simply that she was her aunt's niece. The stranger smiled and said that they were countrywomen. Isabel had first thought she might be French, but now she found it even more interesting that this graceful woman was American. To Isabel, she seemed American in a way she had never seen before.

Soon Mrs. Touchett came in for tea and introduced the visitor as Madame Merle. She said Madame Merle was an old friend and not foreign, though her name sounded foreign. Madame Merle explained that she had been born in the Brooklyn navy yard, because her father had been an officer in the American navy. She laughed a little and said she hated the sea and loved the land. Isabel watched her closely and felt that everything about her was calm, complete, and attractive.

Madame Merle was not young, and she was not exactly beautiful, but Isabel found her more interesting than many beautiful women. Her face was full of life, and her manner was easy without being careless. She seemed to know when to speak, when to listen, and when to be silent. Isabel felt that Madame Merle had seen much of the world and had made herself into something finished and fine. This impressed Isabel deeply.

Before dinner, Isabel spoke of Madame Merle to Ralph. She asked who this woman was. Ralph answered that Madame Merle was the cleverest woman he knew, except perhaps Isabel herself. Isabel said she seemed very pleasant, and Ralph replied that she did everything beautifully. Yet Isabel felt that Ralph did not completely like her. When she said this, Ralph admitted that he had once been in love with Madame Merle, though he spoke in his usual half-joking way.

Mr. Touchett's illness grew worse during the following days. Doctors came and went, and Ralph spent long hours beside his father's bed. Mrs. Touchett also stayed often with her husband, more faithfully than some people might have

expected. Isabel was sometimes allowed to sit in the room and watch him while others rested. Her uncle rarely knew she was there, but she sat very still and wished she could be useful to him.

One evening, when Ralph was alone with his father, Mr. Touchett began to speak clearly. He knew that he was dying, and he did not wish to pretend otherwise. Ralph tried to give him hope, but the old man would not accept false comfort. He said he had lived long enough and that it was better to die when one was sick than when one was well. Then he told Ralph that he wanted to talk about Ralph's own future.

Mr. Touchett said Ralph would be very rich after his death. Ralph answered that he did not want too much money. He reminded his father that they had already spoken about this and that a man in his health could not use a great fortune. Mr. Touchett suggested that Ralph might marry. Then, after a pause, he asked what Ralph thought of Isabel. Ralph understood at once that his father was thinking of Isabel as a possible wife for him.

Ralph said he liked Isabel very much, but not in that way. He also said that a sick man should not marry. Mr. Touchett tried to argue with him, but Ralph's mind was firm. Then Ralph said he had another kind of interest in Isabel. He wanted to help her live freely and see what she would do with herself. He said he wished to put a little wind in her sails.

Mr. Touchett had already planned to leave Isabel five thousand pounds. Ralph said this was generous, but he wanted more for her. He asked his father to divide part of Ralph's own inheritance and give Isabel a much larger fortune. He wanted the money to come directly from Mr. Touchett, not from himself. That way, Isabel would never feel that Ralph had bought influence over her. She would simply be free.

Mr. Touchett was surprised and a little troubled. He asked whether it was right to make life so easy for a young woman. Ralph answered that it depended on the young woman. Isabel, he said, had good impulses, imagination, and courage. If she had money, she would not have to marry for support. She could follow her own mind and meet the great chances of life.

Still, Mr. Touchett saw a danger. He said a young woman with a large fortune might become a victim of men who wanted money. Ralph admitted the risk, but he believed Isabel would be strong enough. He knew that money might bring trouble, but he also believed that freedom without money was often only a dream. At last Mr. Touchett agreed to do what Ralph asked. Ralph felt that he had taken advantage of his dying father, but he also felt that he had done it for love.

During this time, Isabel and Madame Merle were often together. The bad weather kept them indoors, and the illness in the house left them much in each other's company. They talked in the drawing-room, walked under umbrellas, and sat by the fire while the rain darkened the windows. Isabel opened her mind to Madame Merle more than she had opened it to anyone before. Sometimes afterward she wondered whether she had said too much.

Madame Merle became a model to her. She wrote letters in the morning, painted when there was sun, played music in the evening, read serious books, and always seemed ready for society. She could work and talk at the same time, and she could stop what she was doing without showing annoyance. Isabel admired this power over life. She thought Madame Merle was not wild or fresh, but she was wise, graceful, and wonderfully useful in every situation.

Madame Merle told Isabel that one could not judge life properly before forty. Before that age, she said, people were too eager and too hard. Isabel listened as a young soldier might listen to an older officer. Madame Merle seemed to have lived through many things and come out smooth and strong. She said that life could pull Isabel about, but it would not break her. Isabel was proud to hear this.

Madame Merle also spoke to Isabel about marriage. Isabel did not tell her the full truth about Lord Warburton or Caspar Goodwood, but she admitted that she had had chances to marry. Madame Merle said it was good for a girl to refuse some offers, but not to refuse forever merely for the pleasure of refusing. Accepting could also be an act of power. Then she added that Isabel was beautiful and clever, but she wished Isabel had a little money.

After some days, Madame Merle had to leave Gardencourt. She told Isabel that she had made an exception for her, because at her age one did not often make

new friends. Isabel kissed her at parting, and the kiss pleased Madame Merle. After she had gone, Isabel felt more alone in the house. She walked by herself, read in the library without much attention, and wrote to Henrietta, who was now planning to go to Paris with help from Mr. Bantling.

A few days later, Isabel was sitting in the library near a window. Outside, the park looked wet and dull. She saw the doctor's carriage waiting for a long time before the door, and then she saw the doctor come out and drive away. The house became very still. After half an hour, Isabel heard a slow step on the carpet and turned. Ralph stood there, pale and without his usual smile. He said quietly, "It is all over. My dear father died an hour ago."

Part 8 — A New Freedom

About two weeks after Mr. Touchett's death, Madame Merle came to the house in Winchester Square. A sign had already been placed outside, saying that the house was for sale. Inside, the rooms looked half empty. Pictures had been taken down, curtains had been removed, and the floors seemed bare and cold. Madame Merle noticed everything at once and thought that English people lost no time when business had to be done.

Mrs. Touchett received her in the drawing-room and spoke of her husband without many tears. She said he had been a very good man and that she knew this better than anyone. She also said that he had treated her generously in his will. He had left her the London house, though she did not mean to live in it, and he had left her a share in the bank. Mrs. Touchett spoke clearly and practically, as if death itself were one more matter to be arranged.

Then she told Madame Merle the most surprising news. Mr. Touchett had left Isabel a large fortune, almost seventy thousand pounds. Madame Merle lifted her clasped hands and looked for a moment as if she could not hide her surprise. "Ah, the clever girl!" she said. Mrs. Touchett looked at her sharply, and Madame Merle at once explained that she only meant Isabel was clever in being so charming without trying to be charming.

Mrs. Touchett said Isabel had made no effort at all. She had not expected anything, and she had not asked for anything. In fact, the news had shocked her so much that she had burst into tears when the executor told her. The money would stay in the bank, and Isabel would receive the income from it. Madame Merle said softly that Isabel would soon become used to that pleasant arrangement.

Madame Merle then asked what Ralph thought of the will. Mrs. Touchett said Ralph had already left England for the south because he was tired and unwell. She added that Ralph would not object to anything his father had done. Madame Merle looked thoughtful and asked to see Isabel. Mrs. Touchett warned her that Isabel did not look happy, but sent a servant to call her.

Isabel came in pale and serious, dressed in deeper mourning. When she saw Madame Merle, her face brightened with real pleasure. Madame Merle went to her, placed a hand on her shoulder, and kissed her gently. She did not speak at once about the money, and Isabel was grateful for this good taste. The two women sat together, and Isabel felt again the calm attraction that Madame Merle had always had for her.

Soon after this, Mrs. Touchett took Isabel to the Continent. They stopped in Paris, where Mrs. Touchett had planned to spend part of the winter even before her husband's death. Isabel had time there to think about her new situation. At first the fortune felt heavy, almost frightening. She had wanted freedom, but now freedom had taken the form of real money, and real money brought real duties.

Little by little, Isabel decided that being rich could be a good thing. It meant she could act, help, travel, choose, and refuse. She sent money to her sisters, Lily and Edith, and this gave her pleasure. Mrs. Touchett told her that a young woman with a fortune must learn to play her part properly. Isabel submitted while her aunt guided her through shops and dressmakers, but buying fine things was not the kind of great use of money that she had imagined.

In Paris, Isabel met some of Mrs. Touchett's American friends. They were people who had lived abroad for many years and had made Paris almost into a private American drawing-room. Isabel visited Mrs. Luce on Sunday afternoons and heard people speak of food, clothes, servants, politics, and social calls. She

found their lives comfortable but empty. One day she asked them what such a life led to, and her question made the room feel less friendly.

Among these visitors was a young man named Edward Rosier. He had known Isabel long ago, when they were both children travelling in Europe. He remembered her as a little girl who liked to go too near the edge of a lake. Now he was a gentle, polished young man who knew a great deal about old china, old books, good hotels, good shops, and the best ways of living in Paris. Isabel liked talking with him, though she saw that his world was very small and very carefully arranged.

Henrietta Stackpole was also in Paris, and Isabel saw her often. Henrietta did not congratulate Isabel on her fortune. She said that if Mr. Touchett had asked her advice, she would have told him not to leave Isabel so much money. Isabel asked whether Henrietta truly thought the money would ruin her. Henrietta answered that the danger was not luxury but dreams. She feared that Isabel would move farther and farther from real life into a beautiful private world.

Henrietta told her that life was not romance. A person had to put her soul into life, and then life became hard and serious. She said Isabel liked to be admired and liked to please people, but one must sometimes be ready to please no one at all. Isabel listened with trouble in her face. Then she answered sadly that Henrietta herself seemed to be taking that difficult duty very seriously at that moment.

Henrietta, however, had her own new interest in Europe. Mr. Bantling had returned to England, but during his stay in Paris he had been her daily guide. He had shown her museums, palaces, streets, theatres, restaurants, and many things that she later wrote about. Henrietta called him a true friend and said she had never expected to like an Englishman so well. Isabel was amused by this friendship, but she also thought it good for both of them.

In the middle of February, Mrs. Touchett left Paris and travelled south. She stopped at San Remo, where Ralph was spending the winter near the Mediterranean. Isabel went with her aunt, though Mrs. Touchett carefully reminded her that she was now free to do as she liked. She could travel alone, keep her own house, or choose a companion. Still, Mrs. Touchett advised her to

remain with her, and Isabel agreed because it seemed proper and kind.

The day after they arrived, Isabel walked with Ralph near the sea. The light was bright, the air was soft, and Ralph sat under a white umbrella like a very tired prince. Isabel asked him whether he had known that his father meant to leave her so much money. Ralph tried at first to avoid the question, but she understood him. He admitted that he had known and that he and his father had spoken of it.

Isabel asked whether it was good for her to be made so rich. Ralph said he thought it was very good. He told her not to torment herself with too many questions about her own character. She should not keep asking whether every new thing was good or bad for her. She should live, use her wings, and let her character grow. Isabel listened closely, because his words touched the very fear that had been moving inside her.

“A fortune means freedom,” she said. “And freedom is a great thing. That is why it frightens me.” Ralph answered that freedom was dangerous only for weak people. Isabel asked how he knew she was not weak. Ralph looked at her with feeling and said that if she was weak, then he had been very badly mistaken. Isabel did not fully understand what lay behind his answer, but she was comforted by it.

San Remo became a peaceful pause before Italy. Isabel looked across the sea and thought of Genoa, Florence, Rome, and all the beautiful places she had not yet seen. Slowly, she became used to the fact that she was rich. The money became part of her idea of herself, not as a reason for pride alone, but as a chance to do fine and generous things. Yet from time to time, as she listened to the sea, she thought of Caspar Goodwood and Lord Warburton. They were already moving into the past, and Isabel felt that one of the sweetest freedoms in life was the freedom to forget.

Part 9 — Gilbert Osmond

In early May, about six months after Mr. Touchett's death, Madame Merle came to Florence and stayed with Mrs. Touchett. Not far from the city, on a hill above the Roman Gate, Gilbert Osmond lived in part of an old villa. The house

looked plain and almost closed from the front, but behind it there was a terrace and a wide view over the valley of the Arno. Inside, the rooms were full of old furniture, old pictures, carved boxes, dark cloth, books, and small beautiful objects. Everything seemed chosen with care by a man who wished to live among things that exactly pleased him.

On one morning in this villa, Osmond sat with two nuns and a young girl. The girl was his daughter, Pansy, who had just come back from a convent school in Rome. She was small, fair, and very gentle, with a sweet fixed smile and soft manners. She looked at one of her father's little pictures and asked if he had made it himself. When he said yes, she answered with perfect trust that he was very clever. The nuns watched her with pride, as if she were a precious child they had carefully kept safe.

Osmond spoke to the nuns politely, but his mind was on Pansy. He asked about her lessons, her health, and her drawing. The nuns said she was good, obedient, careful, and much loved by everyone at the convent. Osmond seemed pleased to hear this, though he did not show strong emotion. He sent Pansy into the garden to pick flowers for the sisters. When she returned with red and white roses, the nuns kissed her and prepared to leave.

At that moment Madame Merle arrived. Pansy cried out softly with pleasure when she saw her, and Madame Merle kissed the girl as if she were an old friend. The nuns greeted Madame Merle with respect, and Osmond explained that they had brought Pansy home. Madame Merle spoke kindly to them, but with the ease of a woman who knew how to take control of a room. When the nuns went out, she asked Pansy to stay with her. Pansy wanted to see them into the carriage, but she obeyed at once.

Madame Merle held Pansy's hand and looked at her closely. She praised her obedience and promised to give her gloves, useful ones but pretty enough. Pansy answered every question with sweetness and care. Madame Merle asked whether she would miss the convent, and Pansy said she would miss it when she thought of it. Madame Merle then said that perhaps one day Pansy might have another mother. Pansy answered simply that she had already had more than thirty mothers

at the convent.

When Osmond came back, Madame Merle spoke to him about Pansy and about his life in Florence. Their talk was quiet, but it had an old history under it. They knew each other too well to speak simply, yet they trusted each other in some hard and private way. Madame Merle said she had come to Florence because there was someone she wanted Osmond to meet. Osmond asked what good this new person could do him, and Madame Merle answered that she might amuse him.

The person was Isabel Archer. Madame Merle described her as young, beautiful, clever, generous, and rich. Osmond listened more carefully when he heard of her fortune. Madame Merle said Isabel had seventy thousand pounds and was Mrs. Touchett's niece. Osmond asked what Madame Merle wished to do with her. Madame Merle answered directly that she wanted to put Isabel in his way. After a pause, she added that she wanted him to marry her.

Osmond did not seem shocked, but he was not eager to show interest. He asked whether Madame Merle had told Isabel anything of this plan. Madame Merle answered that Isabel was not a machine and neither was she. She had only spoken of Osmond to Isabel as an old friend. Osmond looked cold and thoughtful, but he agreed to see the young woman. Madame Merle also looked into the garden and said that Pansy had grown pretty. Osmond answered that Pansy seemed to him as pure as a pearl.

Madame Merle did not press Isabel in the same obvious way. She only spoke of Osmond as a man Isabel should know if she wished to understand Italy. He was clever, she said, and had taste, knowledge, and a special way of seeing things. He was not always pleasant to everyone, and dull people often bored him. But with the right person, Madame Merle said, he could be brilliant. Isabel listened with interest because she trusted Madame Merle's judgement and liked meeting people who seemed hard to understand.

Florence delighted Isabel. In the mornings before breakfast, Ralph took her through narrow streets, old churches, galleries, and silent rooms full of art. She looked at famous pictures and statues and felt that she had entered a world she had only dreamed about before. Sometimes Madame Merle stayed at home, but

later she talked about the same paintings from memory, often disagreeing with Ralph in a bright and lively way. Isabel liked listening to them. Their talk made her feel that Europe was not only beautiful, but full of hidden meanings.

One day Gilbert Osmond came to Mrs. Touchett's house to see Madame Merle. Isabel was introduced to him, but she said little. Madame Merle and Osmond talked easily about Florence, Rome, people, art, and society, as if they had long practiced such conversation together. Isabel watched him more than she joined him. His face was fine rather than handsome, and his voice was clear but not warm. Something about him made her feel that it was more important to understand him than to make him admire her.

Before he left, Osmond invited Madame Merle and Isabel to come to his villa for tea. He said his house had a good view and that he wished Isabel to meet his daughter. Isabel accepted, and after he had gone, Madame Merle told her she had been charming. Isabel answered rather coldly that she had not meant to charm Mr. Osmond. Madame Merle said she had spoken for Isabel's sake, not for his. Isabel admitted that she had liked him, but she was not sure why this should matter.

Later Isabel asked Ralph about Osmond. Ralph said he knew him, though not very well. He described Osmond as an American who had lived in Italy for many years, a man with good taste, small income, and a great fear of vulgar things. Ralph said Osmond looked like a prince who had given up his throne because the world did not please him enough. He also said Osmond had been married, had lost his wife, and had a daughter. Isabel noticed that Ralph did not speak warmly, but he told her to judge Osmond for herself.

Isabel then defended Madame Merle, because she felt Ralph had spoken of her in a strange tone. Ralph said he respected Madame Merle greatly, perhaps too greatly. He called her too complete, too clever, too good, and too perfect. Isabel did not like this and said she saw no fault in her friend. Ralph answered that this was exactly the trouble: with other people one could find some small dark spot, but with Madame Merle there seemed to be none. Still, he said she was an excellent guide for Isabel if Isabel wished to see the world.

Soon afterward, Madame Merle took Isabel to Osmond's villa. They drove out

through the Roman Gate and climbed the road between high walls and flowering trees. The old house seemed grave and strong, and Isabel felt that it would take energy to leave it once one had entered. Osmond met them in the cold entrance hall and led them into his rooms. There Isabel met Pansy, who made a small convent-like bow and then came forward to be kissed. She also met Osmond's sister, the Countess Gemini, a thin, lively, highly dressed woman with quick eyes and many sudden remarks.

The Countess talked at once and talked a great deal. She said she had come only because Isabel was there and complained about the steep hill and the danger to her horses. She told Isabel not to sit in certain chairs and spoke as if everything in the room had a hidden fault. Osmond answered her with cool amusement, while Madame Merle smiled and watched. Isabel felt that the Countess was affected and restless, but not deep. Pansy, by contrast, stood quiet and small, like a white flower that had not yet opened.

Osmond showed Isabel his rooms and his beautiful things. He explained old pictures, small objects, and pieces of furniture, and Isabel tried hard to understand what mattered most. For the first time, she felt afraid not of being ignorant, but of liking the wrong thing. She knew Madame Merle had probably praised her to him, and she did not want to disappoint that praise. Osmond was kind as a guide, and this kindness surprised her. Yet she also felt tired by the effort to see everything through his eyes.

At last he took her out to the terrace. The sun was low, and the valley below them lay in soft gold and purple shadow. Florence, the hills, the gardens, and the distant light seemed to form one great peaceful picture. Osmond said that Isabel looked pleased and that perhaps she could be trusted to come back. Isabel said she certainly would. She asked whether settling in Florence would mean giving up her natural mission, and Osmond answered that a woman's natural mission was to be where she was most valued.

Isabel said such a place would have to be made very clear to her. Osmond then spoke of her plans to travel and said that making plans was one of life's pleasures. Isabel thought it seemed shallow to make a new plan every day. A person, she said,

ought to choose something carefully and remain faithful to it. Osmond answered that he had done exactly that. Long ago, he had chosen to live quietly, not to struggle, not to seek honors, and to be content with little.

Isabel did not fully understand whether he was confessing, joking, or showing her something carefully shaped. Osmond said he had been poor, without great talent, and too fine in his tastes to want common success. He had cared only for certain limited things: old art, rare objects, beautiful rooms, and his own idea of independence. Isabel felt sure there was more human story in his life than he admitted, but she did not ask for it. Instead she said gently that it must be pleasant to give up everything except beautiful things. Osmond answered that he was not unhappy, but now he had Pansy to think of, and Pansy was his great happiness.

Part 10 — The Plan Around Isabel

While Isabel and Osmond were still walking at the end of the terrace, Madame Merle and the Countess Gemini sat together and watched them. The Countess was not a patient woman, and silence soon became too heavy for her. She looked at the distant pair, then turned to Madame Merle with a sharp little smile. “My dear, I shall not congratulate you,” she said. Madame Merle answered calmly that she did not know why congratulations should be offered.

The Countess said she could see a plan when it was placed before her eyes. Madame Merle smiled and said the Countess understood only what she wished to understand. But the Countess would not be turned aside. She said Madame Merle and Osmond together were dangerous, not because either one alone had full power, but because together they made something stronger and colder. Madame Merle looked out at the hills and told her not to excite herself.

The Countess said she liked Isabel and would not enjoy seeing her sacrificed. Madame Merle replied that Isabel was not being forced or deceived. The Countess did not look convinced. She said she might speak to Isabel herself and warn her. Madame Merle answered that if the Countess wished Isabel to like her, she had better not begin by speaking badly of Osmond. Then, after looking again at Isabel

and Osmond, she said softly that Isabel might already be touched by him.

Pansy soon came to the tea table and asked whether her father would allow her to make the tea. The Countess looked first at the girl's dress and complained that it was too plain for a visit. Pansy answered gently that it was only a simple dress for ordinary days. She wanted to please, but she wanted still more to do what her father would approve. Madame Merle said that a careful little daughter making tea would probably please him, and Pansy at once began her work with happy seriousness.

The Countess asked Pansy what she thought of Isabel. Pansy said Isabel was charming and had been very polite to her. The Countess pressed further and asked whether Isabel pleased her father. Madame Merle stopped this question and sent Pansy to call the others to tea. When the child had gone, the Countess said that if Isabel was to become Pansy's mother, it mattered whether Pansy liked her. Madame Merle answered that if Osmond married again, he would not do it for Pansy's sake.

The Countess then spoke more freely. She said Osmond was a gentleman, of course, but she did not see why he believed himself so much better than other people. He had done nothing great, owned no great name, and had no grand position. Madame Merle answered that Osmond had taste, patience, and a fine nature, and that he had waited well. The Countess asked if he had waited for Isabel's money. Madame Merle did not answer in that spirit, but she said plainly that Isabel had a large fortune. The Countess sighed and said it was a pity Isabel was so charming, because an ordinary girl would have done just as well for a sacrifice.

During the following two weeks, Gilbert Osmond came often to Palazzo Crescentini. Mrs. Touchett noticed this at once. In the past he had visited her only now and then, but now he appeared again and again. He was polite to everyone, and he did not openly show why he came. Yet Mrs. Touchett had no doubt that Isabel was the reason. She told Ralph that it was clear what Mr. Osmond was thinking about, and Ralph agreed.

Mrs. Touchett did not like the idea at all. Isabel had refused Lord Warburton,

who had rank, money, kindness, and a great place in the world. To marry Osmond after that would seem, to Mrs. Touchett, almost willfully strange. Osmond was an American widower living in Italy, with beautiful objects, uncertain income, one quiet daughter, and too much pride. Mrs. Touchett said Isabel was exactly the kind of girl who might marry a man for his opinions, his taste, or some old picture on his wall. Ralph answered that Isabel might listen, but listening was not the same as accepting.

Ralph tried to make light of the danger. He said Isabel was studying life and would not surrender her freedom so quickly. She might stop for an hour to look at Osmond, but soon she would move on again. Mrs. Touchett did not enjoy Ralph's images and told him she preferred plain words like yes and no. She said Isabel could do whatever she liked, but Osmond had nothing solid to offer her. Ralph still believed Isabel would escape, because he had great faith in her wish to remain free.

Mrs. Touchett also spoke to Madame Merle about her fear. Madame Merle opened her eyes in surprise and said the idea had not occurred to her. This was not true, but she said it beautifully. Mrs. Touchett said she might ask Isabel directly, but Madame Merle warned her not to put the thought too clearly into the girl's head. Madame Merle offered to ask Osmond herself, because the matter was so little her business that she could speak without appearing official. Mrs. Touchett accepted the offer, though she was not comforted.

Isabel herself knew nothing of these discussions. She simply thought Osmond interesting and returned often in memory to the image of him on his terrace with Pansy beside him. He seemed to her quiet, sensitive, proud, and lonely. He appeared to have given up common ambitions and to have kept only the things that mattered most to him. His talk at Palazzo Crescentini was sometimes strange, sometimes sharp, and often full of strong opinions. Isabel liked the feeling that his ideas were old possessions of his mind, not clever remarks made only to shine.

Pansy came once with her father, and Isabel was glad to see her again. The girl sat beside her in small gray gloves and a neat little mantle, looking like a blank page waiting for a careful hand to write on it. Isabel hoped the page would receive

something good and beautiful. The Countess Gemini also came to call, and Isabel tried to like her because she was Osmond's sister. Mrs. Touchett disliked the Countess strongly, but Madame Merle defended her with wit and kindness, saying that poor Amy had made mistakes but was not truly bad.

Then Henrietta Stackpole arrived in Florence, with Mr. Bantling not far behind her. Henrietta had travelled through northern Italy and had written about Venice for her newspaper. She was now eager to go to Rome before the dangerous season began. Mr. Bantling was ready to go with her and serve as guide, soldier, friend, and general helper. Ralph then suggested that Isabel should also go to Rome under his escort. Isabel needed little persuasion, for Rome was one of the great names of her imagination.

Before leaving Florence, Isabel saw Osmond and told him of her plan. He said he would like to be in Rome with her and to see her in that wonderful city. Isabel, not wishing to be false or timid, said he might come. Osmond hesitated and spoke of Pansy, saying he did not like to leave her alone but did not think a young girl should be taken on a journey of pleasure. Isabel told him to bring her if he wished. He answered that young girls should be kept out of the world, and Isabel said she herself had been raised differently.

After Isabel left Florence, Osmond met Madame Merle at the Countess Gemini's house. He sat near her and said in a low voice that Isabel wanted him to go to Rome. Madame Merle answered that he had probably suggested it first and she had accepted. Osmond admitted that Isabel was encouraging. Madame Merle told him not to celebrate too soon, but she also said he must go. Osmond replied that this plan of hers made a man work hard, and Madame Merle told him not to pretend he disliked the work.

Osmond said Isabel was charming and had only one fault. Madame Merle asked what it was. He said she had too many ideas. Madame Merle reminded him that she had warned him Isabel was clever. Osmond answered that, fortunately, the ideas were bad ones, because they would have to be given up. Madame Merle sat still for a moment, then told the coachman to drive on. Before she left, Osmond asked what he should do with Pansy if he went to Rome. Madame Merle said she

would go and see the child.

In Rome, Isabel felt a deep happiness that she hardly knew how to express. The old stones, broken columns, wide churches, fountains, and warm streets seemed full of history. She did not talk as much as usual, and Ralph watched her quietly, understanding that the city had taken hold of her imagination. One afternoon the little party went to the Forum. Henrietta walked away with Mr. Bantling, and Ralph followed a guide to see some digging. Isabel sat alone on a fallen column near the Capitol, tired but pleased to be by herself for a few moments.

Her mind moved from ancient Rome to her own future. She was thinking so deeply that she did not hear steps near her until a shadow fell across the stones. She looked up and saw Lord Warburton. Both of them were startled. He had just come from the East and had not known she was in Rome. Isabel said her companions were nearby and that she was glad to see him. He asked whether he might sit down, and she let him sit beside her on the old stone.

They spoke first of safe things: her uncle's death, Ralph's health, her winter, her plans, and Lord Warburton's travels. Then silence came between them, and he told her that he had written to her several times but had burned the letters. He said he had tried to forget her and had even gone far away for that purpose, but nothing had changed. Isabel was kind, but she did not change either. She told him that she had often thought of him and would always do so, but she could not give him more.

Lord Warburton promised to be careful and not make her unhappy. Isabel said their friendship would end if he spoke in a way that caused pain. They returned to the others, and later the party visited Saint Peter's. There, in the great church, Isabel saw Osmond, who had come to Rome and had looked for her. He said he had not come for the others. The words colored Isabel's face, because they reminded her of words once spoken by Lord Warburton at Gardencourt.

Ralph noticed Osmond and did not feel joy. Lord Warburton also noticed him and asked who the man was. Ralph answered that his name was Gilbert Osmond, that he lived in Florence, and that he was an American, though one almost forgot

it. Lord Warburton asked if Isabel liked him. Ralph said she was trying to find out. When Lord Warburton asked whether she might accept him, Ralph answered that perhaps she would not if no one tried to prevent it. Then he added that Isabel wanted nothing they could give her.

Part 11 — Rome and the First Declaration

The next evening, Lord Warburton went to Isabel's hotel and learned that she and her friends had gone to the opera. He went there too, thinking he might visit them in their box during the interval. The theatre was large, plain, and not very bright. When the act ended, he looked up at the rows of boxes and soon saw Isabel. She was sitting near the front of a box, and Gilbert Osmond was beside her.

For a moment Lord Warburton stood still and watched them. They seemed to be alone, though the others had only gone out for a short time. He wondered whether he should go up and interrupt them. Then he thought Isabel had seen him, and this decided him. He could not seem to avoid her, so he went up the stairs toward the box.

On the stairs he met Ralph, who was coming down slowly. Ralph said he had seen Lord Warburton below and had wanted company. He spoke in his usual half-sad, half-playful way. The opera was bad, he said, and Henrietta and Mr. Bantling had gone out to eat an ice. Isabel had a visitor and did not need him. Lord Warburton said that if Isabel did not need Ralph, she probably did not need him either, but Ralph told him to go and sit with her while he walked about.

Lord Warburton entered the box, and Isabel welcomed him kindly. Her kindness troubled him more than coldness would have done. She seemed bright, friendly, and completely in control of herself. Osmond greeted him politely and then sat a little apart, as if he had no need to compete. When the others came back and the opera began again, Lord Warburton stayed in a dark corner and watched Isabel's clear face in the dim light.

He felt angry with himself for being there and angry again because he could not understand her. She had refused him as clearly as a woman could refuse a man.

Why then did she speak to him with such soft friendliness? Why did she seem to give him one kind of value while refusing the other kind, the kind he wanted most? After a while he stood, said good night, and left the theatre alone. He walked through the dark streets of Rome, feeling that the old stones around him had seen sorrows much heavier than his own.

After he had gone, Osmond asked Isabel what kind of man Lord Warburton was. Isabel said he was almost without fault. Henrietta answered that his real character was that he owned half England. Osmond listened with amusement, while Henrietta spoke against great landlords and Mr. Bantling made jokes at her expense. Isabel said Lord Warburton had advanced political ideas, but Henrietta said his great park and iron fence were not very advanced. Osmond then asked Isabel how well she knew him.

Isabel said she knew him well enough to like him. Osmond teased her gently and said that liking to like a person could become a strong feeling. Isabel answered that stronger feelings might come from liking to dislike someone. Ralph then said that very kind women sometimes pity men after they have hurt them. Isabel raised her eyebrows and asked if she had hurt Lord Warburton. Henrietta said he deserved it if she had.

Two days later, Isabel met Lord Warburton again in the gallery of the Capitol. He was standing before the statue of the Dying Gladiator when Isabel entered with her companions, and Osmond was again among them. Warburton greeted her, but he soon said he was leaving the gallery and leaving Rome. Isabel felt sorry, now that she was no longer afraid he would speak again of marriage. She wished him a good journey, but he saw the calmness of her words and looked hurt.

He said she did not care what he did. Isabel reminded him that he had promised not to speak in a way that would trouble her. His face changed, and he said that if he was failing, it was because he could not help it. That was why he was going away. They said good-bye, but he still asked when he would see her again. Isabel answered that perhaps it would be after he was married, and he said it would be after she was married. Then he left her among the white statues.

Isabel sat alone in the great room for a long time. The marble faces were calm,

blank, and beautiful. The warm Roman light came softly through the half-closed blinds and rested on the old figures. She felt quiet for a while, as if the silence of ancient things had covered her like a white cloth. Then the deeper movement of her own life returned, and she could not remain only a visitor among stones.

After half an hour, Osmond came back before the others. He was surprised to find her alone and asked whether she called old statues better company than an English lord. Isabel said her English lord had left her. Osmond answered that perhaps what he had heard was true: perhaps she was cruel to that nobleman. Isabel looked at the Dying Gladiator and said she was not cruel, but carefully kind. Osmond laughed softly and said that was exactly what he meant.

During the rest of Isabel's stay in Rome, Osmond spent part of each day with her and her friends. Even Ralph had to admit that he was agreeable. He knew when to speak, what to say, and how to make himself useful without seeming eager. He walked with them in gardens, stood with them in churches, and talked with them in quiet rooms after long days of seeing Rome. He seemed pleased with everything, but most of all he seemed pleased with Isabel.

Osmond himself felt happier than he had felt for many years. He did not think of happiness as a loud or simple thing. For him it came as the feeling that he might succeed at last. He had long wished the world to see his taste, his mind, and his special way of being, but he had disliked the common effort needed to win notice. Now he believed Isabel had understood him. If she loved and married him, she would show the world his value without his having to ask for it.

Then Mrs. Touchett sent Isabel a telegram from Florence. She would leave on the fourth of June for Bellaggio, and she would take Isabel with her if Isabel did not stay too long in Rome. Isabel answered that she would come. When she told Osmond, he said he would remain in Rome a little longer and would not return to Florence before she had left. This meant they might not see each other for months.

They spoke of this late in the evening in the sitting-room of the hotel. Ralph was making travel arrangements, and Henrietta had gone upstairs to visit an American family. The room was ugly, full of orange chairs, purple curtains, bright frames, and a pink lamp. Osmond hated the false richness of it, but Isabel hardly

noticed the room. She held a book on her knees but did not read it. The end of her Roman happiness was too near.

Osmond told her not to put Italy into a small part of a world journey. He wanted her to give Italy a chapter of its own. Isabel said he was laughing at her travels and at her ignorance. Osmond answered that he was not laughing at all. He thought she was trying to make her life into something beautiful. He told her to go everywhere, do everything, and be happy. Then he said that perhaps he should wait until she was tired before saying something he wished to say.

Isabel asked what he meant, and Osmond finally told her. He said, very quietly, that he was in love with her. Isabel rose at once and told him to keep that until she was tired. But Osmond continued, still calm and respectful. He said he had little to offer her: no fortune, no fame, and no great place in the world. He only wanted to tell her because someday the knowledge might give her pleasure. To him, she would always be the most important woman in the world.

Isabel was deeply moved and deeply troubled. She told him he did not offend her, but that he disturbed her. She said she was glad she was leaving Rome the next day, and then added that she did not really know him. Osmond answered that she would know him better if she stayed. Isabel said she might know him better another time, but for now he must go. Before he left, he asked one small service: when she returned to Florence, she should visit Pansy and tell the child to love her poor father very much.

The next day, Ralph took Isabel back to Florence by train. Henrietta stayed in Rome, planning to go to Naples with Mr. Bantling. Isabel had only three days before Mrs. Touchett would leave for Bellaggio, and she planned to use the last day to visit Pansy. Madame Merle was still at Mrs. Touchett's house and said she herself had thought of visiting the child. Then she changed her mind and told Isabel to go alone, though she made one strange remark about no one being the wiser.

Isabel wondered about this remark as she drove up the hill to Osmond's villa. She disliked the idea of doing anything secretly, and she told herself Madame Merle must have meant something harmless. At the villa, she heard Pansy

practising the piano. The girl came in at once, smoothed her dress, and welcomed Isabel with careful sweetness. Isabel stayed for an hour, walking through the quiet rooms and listening to Pansy's simple talk about her lessons, her father, the convent, and her small daily duties.

Pansy asked Isabel to play the piano, and Isabel did so. The child stood beside her and watched her hands with deep respect. When Isabel rose to leave, she kissed Pansy and told her to be good and to give pleasure to her father. Pansy answered that this was what she lived for, because her father had little pleasure and was rather sad. Isabel wanted to ask more and to speak of Osmond, but she stopped herself. She kissed the girl again and left her standing in the dark doorway, unable to follow beyond the place her father had forbidden her to pass.

Part 12 — The Engagement

Isabel returned to Florence only after many months had passed. During that time, she had seen more of Europe and had tried to gather wisdom from every place. Her sister Lily had come from America with her children, and Isabel had spent the summer with them in Switzerland. They had lived for a while among green valleys, flowers, mountains, and quiet paths under large trees. Isabel was kind and generous to the children, and Lily watched her with love, but also with some worry.

Lily did not fully understand what Isabel was doing with her life. She had thought that Isabel's fortune would lead to something clear and brilliant. Perhaps Isabel would return to New York and take a fine house near her sisters. Perhaps she would marry some great man in Europe. Instead, Isabel seemed to be moving from place to place, seeing everything, feeling everything, and telling no one the deepest things in her mind.

Isabel had not told Lily about Lord Warburton's offer. She had not told her about Caspar Goodwood's pain. She had not told her much about Gilbert Osmond, though Osmond's image was often near her thoughts. Isabel kept these things private partly because she was proud and partly because silence made them feel

more romantic. Lily, who wanted ordinary happiness for her sister, could only see that Isabel had become richer, freer, and harder to advise.

After Lily and her family returned to America, Isabel felt a new sharp sense of liberty. She stood at the railway station in London after seeing them off and felt that no one now had a claim on her daily movements. She could go where she liked, with whom she liked, and for whatever reason she chose. This feeling excited her, but it also made her restless. Madame Merle's letters reached her often, and those letters helped turn Isabel's mind toward wider travel.

Soon Isabel and Madame Merle made a journey to the East. They visited Greece, Turkey, and Egypt, and Isabel looked at old temples, old stones, strange streets, and wide seas. She was deeply interested, but she did not become quiet. She moved quickly, as if one wonderful sight only made her hungry for another. Madame Merle followed her with grace and patience, though sometimes she said that Isabel travelled like a person who wished to drink the whole world at once.

In March, Isabel returned to Rome and stayed in Madame Merle's rooms. A few days later, Gilbert Osmond came down from Florence and remained in Rome for three weeks. Because Isabel was staying with his old friend, he saw her almost every day. They visited churches and gardens, talked in drawing-rooms, and walked through streets full of old light. Isabel felt that she knew him much better than before, though a part of him still seemed carefully closed.

By the end of April, Isabel went back to Florence and stayed with Mrs. Touchett at Palazzo Crescentini. Madame Merle remained in Rome. Ralph was still away at Corfu for his health, but he was expected soon. Isabel looked forward to seeing him again, because more than a year had passed since they had been together. Still, on a warm spring day in Florence, it was not Ralph she was thinking about.

She stood alone near an open window in one of her aunt's smaller rooms. The green shutters were partly closed, and warm air from the garden entered through the opening. Isabel's mourning clothes were gone, and she looked richer and older than before. She was waiting for a visitor, and she knew the visit would not be easy. The visitor was Caspar Goodwood, who had come to Florence after

receiving her letter.

In that letter, Isabel had told him of her engagement to Gilbert Osmond. She had written carefully, because she wished to be honest without being cruel. Goodwood had crossed the ocean and hurried through Europe to see her. When the servant brought his card, Isabel told him to let the gentleman come in. She kept looking out of the window until she heard the door close behind him.

Caspar Goodwood stood there, strong, dark, and hard, as if travel had not weakened him at all. He said nothing at first, and Isabel had time to think that his great force was being wasted on pain. At last she said, "I hoped very much that you would not come." Goodwood answered that he had no doubt of that and looked for a place to sit. Isabel asked whether he was tired, but he said he was not. She remembered that he never seemed tired, and for a moment she wished he could be.

Goodwood told her he had arrived late the night before. Isabel tried to make the talk lighter, but he did not follow her. He said he would rather think of her as dead than married to another man. Isabel called that selfish, and he answered that perhaps it was. He said that after what she had done, nothing she said could hurt him much more. His plain, heavy words made Isabel angry, and that anger helped her control herself.

She asked if he had seen Henrietta Stackpole, and he said Henrietta had visited him in Boston just before he left. Isabel knew Henrietta would soon hear the news and would probably come to scold her. Goodwood then asked about Osmond. "Who is he? What is he?" he asked. Isabel answered that Osmond was a good and honorable man, not rich, not famous, and not in business. She knew these answers would not satisfy Goodwood, but she felt she owed him some form of truth.

Goodwood asked where Osmond belonged. Isabel said he had lived most of his life in Italy and had almost forgotten his American birthplace. Goodwood asked what Osmond had ever done. Isabel's patience became cold. She said Osmond had done nothing great and that Goodwood should give him up as a subject. But Goodwood saw more than she wished him to see. He said Isabel did not really think Osmond was nothing. She thought he was great, even if no one

else did.

Isabel felt the sharpness of this answer. It disturbed her because it was true in a way she had not wanted Goodwood to understand. She told him she could not discuss Osmond with him. Goodwood accepted this and rose after a while. He said he had come only to see her again and to hear her voice before she married. Isabel suddenly felt troubled by his self-control. She had expected anger, and his quiet misery left her with no easy way to defend herself.

Then she cried out that she had not deceived him. She had always told him she was free and would do as she chose. Goodwood said he knew this, but she had also said she would probably never marry. He had believed her. Isabel answered that no one was more surprised than she was by her own decision. Goodwood said he had come partly because he had hoped there might be some mistake. Isabel told him there was no mistake at all.

Goodwood asked why she had changed her mind. Isabel asked whether he thought she owed him an explanation. He looked at her for a long moment and said she had once been very sure. She answered that she had believed herself at the time, but she could not explain the change even to herself. He said he had done what he wished; he had seen her. Then he went to the door without taking her hand. He told her he would leave Florence the next day, and Isabel answered with sudden passion that she was glad. Five minutes after he had gone, she began to cry.

Isabel soon hid the signs of her tears, because she had another task before her. She had waited to tell Mrs. Touchett about the engagement until after seeing Goodwood. She felt strangely that it would not be honorable to make the matter public before hearing what he would say. Now she went to her aunt before breakfast and said she had something to tell her. Mrs. Touchett looked at her sharply and said she already knew. "You are going to marry that man," she said.

Isabel asked what man she meant, though she knew very well. Mrs. Touchett answered, "Madame Merle's friend, Mr. Osmond." Isabel disliked this name for him and said Madame Merle had had nothing to do with her engagement. Mrs. Touchett did not believe her. She said Madame Merle had prepared the way for

Osmond and had played two parts at once. Isabel defended her friend, saying Madame Merle had always been kind and honest with her.

Mrs. Touchett then attacked the marriage itself. Osmond, she said, had no money, no name, and no importance. Isabel answered that his name was good enough for her and that she had no great name herself. Mrs. Touchett asked whether Isabel was marrying him out of charity. Isabel said she could not explain and would not try. She had come to tell her aunt the fact, not to argue over her heart.

Her aunt warned her that Ralph would be hurt. Isabel said Ralph cared for her and would understand that she had acted with reason. Mrs. Touchett said Ralph had never believed Isabel would do such a thing. Isabel smiled and asked her aunt to tell Ralph the news when he arrived. It would be easier, she said, if he heard it first from Mrs. Touchett. Her aunt agreed, and at breakfast she kept her promise not to speak again of Osmond.

Two days later Ralph arrived from Corfu. Isabel was shocked by his appearance. He was thinner, weaker, and more broken in body than she remembered, though his humor still lived in his eyes. Mrs. Touchett had already told him the news, but he said nothing about it at first. He talked of his health, of Corfu, and of travel. Isabel waited for him to speak, and his silence slowly became harder to bear.

Ralph, meanwhile, was deeply unhappy. He had once helped make Isabel rich because he wanted her to be free. Now he felt that his plan had failed and that the person he loved most was lost. He could not praise the engagement, but he also could not attack it unless he could save her by doing so. For several days he moved about the house like a man without a clear direction. Isabel met Osmond each morning in the quiet Cascine, and Ralph, sitting alone in the garden, felt that the bright future he had imagined for her was moving away from him.

Part 13 — Warnings Before Marriage

One morning, after Isabel returned from a drive, she entered the court of

Palazzo Crescentini but did not go upstairs. Instead, she crossed the court, passed under an arch, and went into the garden. The noon air was warm and still, and the garden was full of deep shade. Ralph was sitting there under a statue, with his thin body relaxed in a chair. At first Isabel thought he was asleep, but when she came near, he opened his eyes and looked at her.

Isabel sat down near him and said she was sorry if she had woken him. Ralph answered that he had not been sleeping, only thinking of her. She asked whether he was tired of thinking of her, and he said he was very tired of it because it led nowhere. His voice was light, but Isabel felt that something serious was beneath it. She closed her parasol and waited, knowing that at last he meant to speak of her engagement.

Ralph said he had been trying to find the right way to think about her marriage. Isabel told him not to think too much about it. He asked whether she meant that it was none of his business, and she answered that beyond a certain point it was not. Ralph said that was exactly the point he wished to find. He had not congratulated her, and he knew she must have noticed his silence.

Isabel said she had noticed it. Ralph then told her that he had been surprised, because she was the last person he had expected to see caught. Isabel disliked the word and asked why he called it that. Ralph answered that she was going to be put into a cage. Isabel replied that if she liked her cage, it should not trouble him. But Ralph said that was just what troubled him most.

He reminded her that a year before she had valued her freedom above almost everything. Isabel answered that she had seen more of life now and no longer found it an endless open field. A person, she said, must choose one part of life and care for it. Ralph agreed that choosing was necessary, but he had not guessed from her letters that she was choosing Gilbert Osmond. If he had known, he said, he would have asked her to wait for more light.

Isabel looked at him more coldly. She said he was walking around the subject and that he wished to say he did not like Mr. Osmond. Ralph answered that he did not want to wound her, though he was willing enough to wound Osmond. He was afraid of her pain, not of Osmond's anger. At last he said clearly, "I trust you, but

I do not trust him.” Isabel looked at him with deep attention and said she was glad he had made himself plain.

Ralph tried to explain without cruelty. He said he had imagined a larger future for her. He had thought she would not give herself so soon or to such a man. Isabel’s face flushed, and she asked what he meant by a larger future. Ralph said he had expected her to marry someone with a freer and more active nature. Then, after hesitation, he said that Osmond seemed to him small.

The word was painful to Isabel, but she did not at once grow angry. She repeated it as if she were testing it. Ralph said Osmond was narrow and selfish and took himself too seriously. Isabel answered that Osmond respected himself, and this made her believe he could respect others. Ralph said Osmond judged everything by taste, and Isabel replied that his taste was excellent. When Ralph said she had not been made only to protect the feelings of a cold lover of art, she rose quickly.

Ralph rose too, and they faced each other in the shaded garden. Isabel told him he had gone too far. Ralph said he had spoken because he loved her, and Isabel grew pale. For a sharp moment she feared that Ralph too had entered the old painful line of men who wanted more from her than she could give. But Ralph added quickly that he loved her without hope. He meant only that her happiness mattered terribly to him.

Isabel turned away toward the bright garden and then came back to him. She said his warning was kind if he was truly afraid, but it would not change her by one inch. She would forget his words as soon as she could. She could not accept his idea of Osmond, because she saw Osmond in a completely different way. To her, Osmond was not small because he had no public importance. He was large because public importance meant nothing to him.

She said Osmond was poor, private, and free from common ambition, and that this was exactly what pleased her. She did not want a marriage for money, title, houses, or social power. She had one wish now: to follow a good feeling. Her own fortune made it possible for her to marry a poor man without fear. She felt almost grateful to her dead uncle because his gift allowed her to choose a man who had

borne poverty with dignity.

Isabel's words came with deep force, and Ralph listened in sadness. He saw that she was wrong, but he also saw that she believed in her own nobleness. She had made an idea of Osmond and now loved that idea with all her strength. Ralph remembered how he had helped make her rich so that she could live by her imagination. Now her imagination had turned against her, and he felt sick with shame.

Isabel ended the conversation and walked back toward the house. Ralph walked beside her through the court until they reached the great staircase. She asked whether he would come up to breakfast, but he said he was not hungry. Then he told her that when he had once imagined her in trouble, he had felt he would suffer greatly. Today, he said, he felt exactly that. Isabel asked whether he thought she was in trouble. Ralph answered that people were in trouble when they were wrong, and Isabel went upstairs saying she would never complain of her trouble to him.

After this, Isabel walked in the Cascine with Osmond and did not tell him how little her family approved of him. Their opposition did not truly shake her. It only made her feel more strongly that she was marrying to please herself. Osmond behaved with perfect tenderness during these bright days before the marriage. He knew how to seem quiet, grateful, and deeply moved, and Isabel saw in his calm manner the proof of a noble heart.

Osmond did speak once of her family's doubts. He said they probably believed he loved her money. Isabel asked how he knew what they thought. He answered that Mrs. Touchett had not replied to his note, and that silence was clear enough. He said he was not sorry Isabel was rich, because he loved everything that belonged to her. Money, he told her, was ugly when one chased it, but pleasant when one met it by chance.

These words pleased Isabel because they sounded honest. Osmond said loving her had made him better, kinder, and more peaceful. Life, he said, now seemed like a long golden Italian afternoon stretching before them. They would live in Italy, admire beautiful things, and make a small life for Pansy. Isabel believed him.

She felt that marriage to him would not be a loss of freedom, but a new duty that would gather her scattered feelings into one clear point.

Osmond brought Pansy to the Cascine two or three times. The girl still seemed very young, with her small steps, large hat, and shy smile. Osmond had not told her at first about the engagement. He enjoyed keeping her innocent a little longer, and Isabel saw that he treated the child almost like a carefully made work of art. When he finally told her, Pansy was not frightened. She said she would have a beautiful sister.

The next day Isabel went to call on the Countess Gemini, and Pansy was there waiting. Pansy greeted Isabel with careful sweetness and said her father had told her the happy news. She thought Isabel and her father would suit each other well because both were quiet and serious. She also said Isabel would be a perfect companion for her father and a model for herself. Isabel was touched and promised that she would be very kind to her.

Then the Countess Gemini entered, moving quickly and kissing Isabel with much ceremony. She said at once that Isabel must not expect congratulations. She was glad for herself that Isabel was coming into the family, because Isabel was rich, clever, pretty, and original. But she would not pretend that she was glad for Isabel. She never congratulated girls on marriage, she said, because marriage was often a terrible trap.

The Countess spoke fast, with bright eyes and restless hands. She said that when she first guessed Osmond's plan, she had thought of writing to warn Isabel not to listen to him. Then she had decided that this would be disloyal to her brother. She also admitted that she was selfish and liked the idea of having Isabel in the family. Pansy stood there listening, but Isabel would not send her away. She said she preferred to hear nothing that Pansy could not hear.

Part 14 — After the Marriage

Several years had passed since Isabel Archer had become Mrs. Osmond. She now lived in Rome with her husband and Pansy in a tall, dark house called Palazzo

Roccanera. The house stood near a small sunny square, but inside it was full of shadow, old furniture, and carefully chosen objects. Isabel had a place in Roman society, and every Thursday evening people came to her rooms. To visitors, she looked calm, beautiful, and important, but the life inside the house was colder than it appeared.

One autumn afternoon, Edward Rosier went to see Madame Merle in her small Roman apartment. He had come to Rome for one main reason: he was in love with Pansy Osmond. He had met her during the summer at Saint Moritz and had thought her the sweetest young girl he had ever known. Since then, he had searched his own heart and had found no fault in her. To him, she was gentle, pretty, pure, and perfect.

Rosier was careful by nature, so he did not go first to Pansy herself. He asked Madame Merle for advice, because she knew the Osmond family well. Her small room was full of old lace, small tables, rare objects, and soft faded colors. Rosier admired these things almost before he remembered his trouble. Madame Merle watched him with amused patience, knowing that his love of beautiful objects was part of his character.

At last Rosier told her that he cared for Pansy more than for all the rare things in Europe. Madame Merle asked if he wanted her help, and he said he did. He knew that Gilbert Osmond would have to approve the marriage. He also knew that he himself was not rich enough to look like a great prize. Still, he thought he could make Pansy happy, and he hoped Madame Merle would speak a good word for him.

Madame Merle did not laugh at him openly, but she did not give him quick comfort. She said Osmond had high hopes for his daughter, though he was not planning to give her much money. Rosier answered that he did not need money from Osmond. Madame Merle replied that Osmond would probably think of money all the same. Then Rosier said that Isabel loved Pansy and might help them, but Madame Merle warned him not to involve Isabel too soon.

“Mrs. Osmond is fond of Pansy,” Madame Merle said. “But she has little power in this matter.” Rosier did not like to hear this, because Isabel had always

seemed to him a splendid and generous woman. Madame Merle told him that husband and wife did not think alike. She also told him that adding another point of difference between them would be unwise. Rosier promised to be careful, though he went away feeling that loving Pansy was going to be more difficult than he had imagined.

Soon afterward, Rosier went to one of Isabel's Thursday evenings. He entered the first large room, where Osmond stood near the fire with his hands behind him. Osmond looked at him in a way that made Rosier feel completely measured. Rosier tried to speak lightly about a piece of old porcelain he had seen that day. Osmond answered coldly that he no longer cared about old pots and plates. The words sounded as if they meant more than they said.

Rosier left him and found Isabel coming through the doorway. She wore black velvet and looked like a gracious lady in a picture. Rosier had known her long ago as a child, but now she seemed higher, calmer, and farther away. Isabel greeted him kindly, then asked him to take tea to a young woman in pink who had no one to talk to. Rosier wanted only to speak with Pansy, but he obeyed because Isabel asked it of him.

After a few minutes, Pansy came near the tea table. She was now nineteen and very pretty, but she still did not seem fully worldly or sure of herself. Her dress was fresh and neat, yet she wore it as if it had been given to her for the evening and must be kept safe. Rosier saw no fault in this. To him, her very lack of display was part of her beauty. She looked pure, careful, and soft, like something that had never been roughly touched.

Rosier found a chance to walk with her into a colder, less crowded room. There, while the sound of talk came softly from the other rooms, he told her that he came to the house to see her. Pansy looked at him with wide and troubled eyes. She said she had thought so, but she had not known because he had never told her. Rosier asked if his coming was unpleasant to her. Pansy smiled gently and said it was not.

This answer made Rosier bold. He asked if she liked him, and Pansy said, "Yes, I like you." The simple words filled him with joy. He took her hand for a moment

and kissed it. Pansy did not pull it away, but after a moment she asked whether her father knew. Rosier said her father knew everything, but Pansy answered that he must make sure. To her, no happiness could stand outside her father's will.

Madame Merle arrived soon after this, and her presence changed the air in the rooms. She spoke with Osmond, who told her that Rosier had already come. Osmond said he did not want Rosier's proposal and did not wish to be troubled by explanations. Madame Merle advised him not to send the young man away too quickly. Rosier was not great, she said, but he was a gentleman and had some income. Osmond answered that this was not what he had dreamed of for Pansy.

Osmond spoke of Pansy as if she had been educated for this very test. She had been trained to do what he preferred when the moment came. Madame Merle was not afraid that Pansy would openly disobey him. But she also knew that the girl had thought much about Rosier. When Pansy and Rosier came back into the room, Madame Merle understood at once that he had spoken to her. Osmond understood it too, and his cold displeasure began to settle over the matter.

Later that evening, Rosier spoke to Isabel. He told her that he loved Pansy and wished to marry her. Isabel listened with sympathy but also with pain. She knew Rosier was kind and honest, but she knew Osmond would not think him important enough. She told Rosier that Pansy herself did not care about money, but her father did. Rosier spoke too sharply of Osmond, then regretted it and tried to apologize. Isabel's answer was strange and grave: she said it was not that she would not help him, but that she simply could not.

The next day, Rosier returned to Madame Merle. She told him to wait and to go less often to the house. Osmond did not like the proposal, and he liked even less that Rosier had spoken to Pansy. Rosier obeyed for a while, though waiting was a painful word to him. When he came again on a Thursday evening, Osmond received him with cold irony. Rosier tried to defend himself, saying he had Pansy's promise, but Osmond answered that Pansy probably had no memory of giving it.

At that moment a new visitor entered the room. He was handsome, older than before, and clearly English. Osmond recognized him after a moment and brought

him to Isabel. It was Lord Warburton, who had just arrived in Rome with Ralph Touchett. Isabel was startled and moved, but she kept her manner steady. Lord Warburton told her that Ralph was very ill but happy to be in Rome again. Isabel at once said she would go to Ralph the next morning.

Lord Warburton then spoke with Isabel quietly, and for the first time she felt that time had changed him. He still remembered the past, but he did not press it with the same old force. He asked if she was happy, and Isabel answered quickly that she was. He looked around at the beautiful rooms and said she had a very good house. Isabel said the house was her husband's work. Then Lord Warburton saw Pansy across the room and asked who the young girl was.

Rosier, sitting near Pansy, had meanwhile heard from her that Osmond had forbidden her to marry him. Pansy said she could not disobey her father, but she also said she loved Rosier just as much. She asked him to wait and promised not to give him up. Rosier said patience was a terrible word, but Pansy believed Mrs. Osmond would help them. A moment later Isabel brought Lord Warburton to the tea table and introduced him to Pansy, who rose and made her small convent-like curtsey.

Part 15 — Warburton Returns

Ralph Touchett had seen less of Isabel since her marriage than before it. He had warned her once, and after that both of them had been silent about his warning. They still cared for each other, and they still spoke kindly when they met. But something fine and easy had gone out of their friendship. Isabel believed she had forgiven him, yet his words had remained like a mark under the skin.

Ralph had been present at her wedding in Florence. It had been a small wedding in the American chapel on a hot June day. Mrs. Touchett, Ralph, Pansy, and the Countess Gemini had been there, but Madame Merle had not come from Rome. Henrietta had not been invited, though she sent a letter full of strong feeling. Ralph had watched the ceremony with a quiet face and a very heavy heart.

After the marriage, Ralph had kept away as much as he could. He knew

Osmond did not like him, though Osmond was too proud to show jealousy in an ordinary way. Ralph also knew that Isabel would suffer if she had to choose between an old kindness and her husband's cold opinion. So he had gone off again and again, leaving Isabel less company than she might have wished. His illness grew worse, but one desire still kept him alive: he wanted to see what would become of her.

When Lord Warburton returned to Rome with Ralph, Isabel visited her cousin in his rooms. She found him weaker than before, but still alive in mind. His body seemed almost finished, yet his eyes still held their old humor and pain. Isabel sat beside him and tried to speak lightly, but she could not pretend that his condition did not frighten her. Ralph talked of Rome, of the weather, and of Warburton, but under every word lay the old subject: Isabel herself.

Osmond called on Ralph with exact politeness, and Ralph came more than once to Palazzo Roccanera. Isabel was glad when he came, though she could not enjoy the visits freely. Osmond's quiet manner made even kindness feel watched and measured. Ralph saw this clearly, and the sight gave him no comfort. He had thought Isabel might suffer, but seeing her in the middle of that cold beautiful house was worse than imagining it.

Lord Warburton soon became a regular visitor at Isabel's evenings. He had changed since the old days, or at least he seemed to have learned self-command. He no longer spoke to Isabel as a man with an old wound. He was friendly, calm, and useful in society. Osmond liked him at once as a visitor, because he was important, agreeable, and impossible to treat as common.

Lord Warburton also noticed Pansy. At first Isabel thought this was only kindness. He talked to the girl because she was young, shy, and in need of attention. Pansy listened to him with her little serious face lifted toward his, as if every word from him were a lesson. She was pleased by his stories of India, England, and travel. Isabel watched them and told herself there was no reason to be uneasy.

Edward Rosier, however, saw the matter very differently. To him, Lord Warburton was a terrible rival, even if the rival did not yet know he was one. Rosier came to the house whenever he could, but Osmond treated him with colder

and colder courtesy. Pansy did not stop loving him, but she never forgot that her father had forbidden the match. Rosier felt caught between her gentle promise and Osmond's hard will.

One evening Rosier tried to speak again with Isabel. He told her that Pansy loved him and that no great nobleman could make her truly happy. Isabel listened with pity, but she did not encourage him. She knew that Rosier was sincere, yet she also saw how little he could do against Osmond. She told him he must be patient and careful. He answered that patience was easy advice from people who were not in love.

Madame Merle returned to Rome and quickly understood the new situation. She saw Lord Warburton's attention to Pansy and treated it as a chance that must not be lost. In a private talk with Isabel, she spoke of the match almost as if it were already reasonable and natural. Pansy would become Lady Warburton, she said, and Osmond would be satisfied. Isabel listened with a cold face, because Madame Merle's eagerness troubled her.

Madame Merle reminded Isabel that Lord Warburton had once wished to marry her. Isabel said this had nothing to do with Pansy. Madame Merle answered that Isabel therefore had great influence with him, whether she admitted it or not. If Isabel would not marry him herself, she could at least help him to marry someone else. Isabel disliked the words, yet a part of her mind began to work on them. She said at last that if such a marriage could be arranged without wrong, she would be glad.

Madame Merle embraced her with unusual warmth and left her. Isabel remained standing where she was, feeling that something had been placed in her hands. She did not like the feeling, but she also saw a possible duty in it. If she could help Pansy make a splendid marriage, Osmond would be pleased. If Osmond were pleased, perhaps their household would become less dark. Isabel knew this was a poor hope, but it was still a hope.

That evening Lord Warburton came to Palazzo Roccanera and stayed for half an hour. Isabel asked him first about Ralph, then spoke very little. She wished him to talk with Pansy, and she even pretended to read so that he would be drawn

toward the girl. After a while she went to the piano and played softly, though her mind was not in the music. She watched them from the side of the room and wondered whether she was helping happiness or arranging a small betrayal.

Pansy looked pleased and frightened at the same time. She answered Lord Warburton's questions with great care, as if she wished to give exactly the right reply. Lord Warburton bent toward her kindly and spoke without any proud manner. Isabel remembered how kind he had once been to herself at Gardencourt. She told herself that if Pansy were simple enough to accept such kindness fully, perhaps the child might be happier than Isabel had been.

Yet Rosier's face came between Isabel and this thought. She knew Pansy cared for him in her quiet way. She knew also that Pansy's habit of obedience might be stronger than her wish. This made the problem darker. Isabel had once loved freedom more than almost anything, but now she was thinking of helping another young woman accept a choice made by others. The knowledge made her uneasy, though she tried to call it practical wisdom.

Later that night, after Pansy had gone to bed, Osmond came into the drawing-room. Isabel was alone, holding some work in her hands. He had been in his study since dinner and now stood near her with a calm face. For the first time, he spoke directly of Pansy's future. He said he had sent Rosier away and hoped Isabel had not been encouraging the young man.

Isabel answered that she had given Rosier no encouragement. Osmond said this was fortunate. She replied that perhaps it was fortunate for herself, but it mattered little for Rosier, who still had hope. Osmond said a lover outside the door was no danger if the girl inside knew how to sit still. Then he said that Pansy had only to sit quietly, and she could become Lady Warburton.

Isabel looked at him carefully and asked whether he would like that. Osmond did not enjoy the question, because he preferred to seem above desire. Still, he answered that of course he would like it. Lord Warburton was an excellent man, a great match, and a person no father could despise. He spoke calmly, but Isabel heard the force beneath his calmness. This was not only a wish for Pansy; it was a wish for himself.

Osmond then said Isabel could help the matter. She had influence with Lord Warburton, and she should use it. Isabel answered that no one should push a man toward marriage. Osmond said she need not push; she need only discover whether Warburton was serious and make the road smooth if he was. Isabel felt the old pressure of his will moving over her like a cold hand. She said she would do nothing wrong, and Osmond answered that he had asked for nothing wrong.

When the talk ended, Isabel remained in the room after he left. The lamp burned low, and the great house seemed silent around her. She felt that another chain had been placed near her, not yet locked, but ready. To please Osmond, to protect Pansy, to be just to Rosier, and to be honest with Lord Warburton: all these duties stood before her at once. She picked up her work again, but her hands were still, and her thoughts moved in a dark circle.

Part 16 — Isabel's Night of Seeing

After Osmond left the room, Isabel did not move for a long time. His words had placed the whole matter before her, and she could not answer because she was too busy looking at it. She leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes. A servant came in to attend to the fire, and she told him to bring fresh candles and then go to bed. After that she was alone in the great silent drawing-room.

Osmond had told her to think of what he had said, and she did think of it. But she thought of many other things as well. He had said that she had influence over Lord Warburton, and the words had startled her because they had some truth in them. Until now she had not wished to ask herself this question clearly. Now she saw that something still remained between Lord Warburton and herself, something very thin, but not quite broken.

Isabel did not believe that her own feeling had changed. Lord Warburton was still to her a noble, kind, and good man, and in some ways she liked him better than before. But she wondered what he still felt for her. Did he still wish to please her? Did he still remember the old days at Gardencourt too warmly? If so, was it fair to use that feeling in order to make him speak to Pansy?

This thought filled Isabel with dislike. If Lord Warburton cared for Pansy, then the matter was simple. If he cared for Isabel and only turned toward Pansy because Isabel wished it, then the matter was ugly. Isabel tried to believe he was honest and that his kindness to Pansy was sincere. She did not want to think badly of him, and she did not want to see herself as a woman who used an old affection for her husband's advantage.

Yet even after she made this decision, peace did not come. Other fears moved forward in her mind as soon as there was space for them. That afternoon she had received a strange impression that Osmond and Madame Merle understood each other more deeply than she had thought. She could not prove anything, but the thought returned again and again. It stood in the room with her like a quiet person who had entered without sound.

Her short talk with Osmond had also shown her something she knew too well. He had a power to spoil whatever he touched. If he looked at a duty, the duty became colder. If he wished for a good action, the action at once seemed less good. Isabel had wanted to prove that she was a loyal wife, but the knowledge that Osmond expected the proof made the proof itself feel poisoned.

She asked herself whether the fault was in him or in her own deep mistrust of him. This mistrust was now the clearest result of their married life. A wide space had opened between husband and wife, and they looked at each other from opposite sides. Isabel had not meant to deceive him. She had admired him, believed in him, and entered marriage with a full and generous heart.

Yet what had opened before her was not the large life she had imagined. She had thought marriage might lead to a higher place, where two minds could look at the world together. Instead, it had led into a narrow dark passage with a wall at the end. Other lives seemed to move more freely above her, as if she were hearing them from below. The sound made her own failure feel heavier.

Isabel knew now that Osmond hated her. This was the terrible thing, and the worst part was that hatred was not a crime. He was not violent. He did not openly hurt her. He would never give her an easy reason to accuse him. He would keep himself formally right, while she, with her quicker feelings and stronger impulses,

would often appear to be wrong.

She even pitied him at moments. He had also been deceived, though not by her intention. When he first knew her, she had made herself smaller than she truly was because she was under his charm. She had wanted him to have space. She had listened, admired, and received him as if he were the guide and she the learner. Only later had he discovered that she had a whole life of her own.

Isabel remembered very clearly how powerful his charm had been. It had not wholly disappeared, and she still understood why he could delight people when he wished to do so. He had seemed poor, lonely, fine, and above common success. She had thought she could help him and give him the chance he deserved. Her fortune had seemed almost heavy to her, and she had believed that placing it in his life would make it beautiful.

Now she saw that this had been part of her mistake. She had wanted to make a noble use of her money. She had thought that marrying Osmond would lift the money out of common selfishness and turn it into something delicate. She had not married him only for this reason; she had truly loved him and believed him better than other men. But her money had been present in the choice, and the thought burned her face in the empty room.

She remembered one of the first clear signs of danger. Osmond had said that she had too many ideas and must get rid of them. Before the marriage, he had said something like this and she had not understood. Afterward she understood too well. He did not only object to particular opinions. He objected to her own way of seeing, feeling, judging, and being alive.

Osmond had wanted her mind to belong to him. He had not wanted her to be stupid, because her intelligence had pleased him. But he had wanted her intelligence to work for him, to support his views and honor his tastes. He wanted her thoughts to be like a small garden beside his own great park. He would arrange it, water it, and enjoy its flowers, but it would still be his property.

Isabel had also learned what Osmond meant by tradition and good form. At first she had admired his love of order, beauty, and old ways. Later she saw that much of it was only a hard system of control. There were people they must know

and people they must not know. There were attitudes they must take and feelings they must hide. Around her, this system closed like an old room without air.

She had tried to resist it. At first she resisted lightly, with humor and kindness. Then she resisted more strongly, asking for freedom, truth, and a life that was not ruled by appearances. Osmond answered her with scorn. He was ashamed of her, and she understood that her real offence was having a mind of her own. From that time, their home had become a beautiful prison.

Ralph was now the one light in this darkness. Osmond disliked her visits to him and thought she saw too much of her cousin. Isabel knew this, but she could not pretend to be cold to Ralph. Ralph was ill, perhaps dying, and he was generous in a way Osmond was not. When she sat with him, the world seemed larger for a little while. She never complained to him, because she had once promised herself that he should never know he had been right.

This effort to hide her misery gave Isabel a strange kind of purpose. She spoke calmly to Ralph, smiled when she could, and kept curtains drawn over the truth. Ralph probably saw through them, but she went on with the act. It was, in her mind, a form of kindness. She did not want his last days to be darkened by the knowledge that she had thrown away her happiness.

The fire went out, but Isabel did not feel cold. She sat far into the night while the candles burned lower and lower. Her mind was too awake for sleep, and painful images came more clearly there than they would have come in bed. When the clock struck four, she finally rose. Then, in the middle of the room, she stopped once more, held by one last picture: Osmond and Madame Merle, close together in some old, familiar understanding.

Part 17 — The Ball and the Journey to Rome

Three nights after Isabel's long night alone, she took Pansy to a great party. Osmond never went to dances, so Isabel was responsible for the girl. Pansy was ready and happy, though her father had already forbidden her love for Rosier. She had not decided that all pleasure was wrong because one pleasure had been

stopped. She held her flowers tightly, watched her dress carefully, and looked at everything with a serious young joy.

Pansy was much admired and soon had many partners. She gave her flowers to Isabel to hold while she danced. Isabel stood quietly with the bouquet in her hand, and after a few minutes Edward Rosier came toward her. His usual light smile had disappeared, and he looked almost brave. When he saw the flowers, his face softened, and he said at once that they must be Pansy's.

Rosier asked if he might hold the bouquet for a moment. Isabel smiled and said she could not trust him, because he might never give it back. He answered that she was right and that he might leave the house with it at once. Then he asked for only one flower. Isabel hesitated, but at last she held out the bouquet and let him choose. She told him not to put the flower in his coat where everyone could see it.

Rosier said he wanted Pansy to see it, because she had refused to dance with him. Isabel answered that her father had told her not to dance with him. Rosier said he had expected Isabel to do more for him. He reminded her that they had known each other since childhood, as if old friendship gave him a right to her help. Isabel answered gently that if he himself had asked her to marry him, she would have refused him at once. She respected him, but she was not in love with him for Pansy.

The little speech hurt him, but it did not make him angry. Isabel saw that his pain was real, though his manner was not grand. She suddenly felt sorry for him in a new way. Her own unhappiness helped her understand him. She asked whether he would truly be kind to Pansy. Rosier lifted the little flower to his lips and asked whether Isabel did not pity Pansy too.

Isabel said she was not sure. She believed Pansy would always find some way to enjoy life, because Pansy had been trained to accept what came. Rosier answered that this depended on what one called life. He said Pansy would not enjoy being made to suffer. Isabel told him there would be no such thing, though she herself was not fully certain. Then she saw Pansy coming back and asked Rosier to leave before the girl reached them.

Pansy returned looking fresh and calm after the dance. She took back her flowers and counted them. Isabel noticed this small action and understood that Pansy knew one flower was gone. But Pansy said nothing of Rosier. She spoke only of the music, her partner, and the little tear in her dress. A moment later she went away again with another young man, carrying the same bouquet in her careful hands.

Soon Lord Warburton came through the crowd. He asked where “the little maid” was, using the name he had begun to give Pansy. Isabel said Pansy was dancing and that he would see her. Warburton looked across the room, found her, and said she had at last smiled at him. He asked Isabel to dance, but Isabel said he should dance with Pansy instead. He said one dance need not stop the other, but Isabel did not move.

Isabel watched him closely while they spoke. She liked him very much, and his presence still gave her comfort. Yet she did not want him to come too near her again, even in thought. He praised Pansy and said Isabel had done much for the girl. Isabel answered that she had only taken her out and made sure she was properly dressed. Still, Warburton spoke as if Isabel’s nearness to Pansy had made the girl more charming, and this troubled her.

Pansy soon came back with another tear in her dress. Isabel took out a pin and repaired it while the girl stood very still. All the time Isabel was pinning the dress, she was thinking of Lord Warburton. She wondered whether he was really falling in love with Pansy or only moving toward Pansy because Isabel was there. If the second thing was true, the matter was dangerous and wrong. She wished to know the truth before it became too late.

Warburton spoke with Pansy, and Isabel left them together for a short time. Pansy looked shy and pleased, and Warburton bent kindly over her. Later, when Pansy went off with another partner, Warburton returned to Isabel. He said Pansy had promised him a dance later. Isabel asked whether he had engaged her for the cotillion, the important dance of the evening. He answered that he had not, and Isabel said almost sharply that he was not clever.

Warburton seemed surprised, and Isabel told him she had kept Pansy free for

that dance in case he should ask. He said he would ask if Isabel wished it. Isabel answered that if he did it only because she wished it, that would be useless. Then she asked him directly to let her understand him. He had told her that he wished to marry Pansy. Had he forgotten that? Warburton said he had even written to Osmond about it that morning, but then admitted that he had not sent the letter.

Isabel pressed him further. Did he still wish to marry Pansy? Warburton answered that he did, very much. Isabel asked whether he was afraid he might bore her, since he had already thought one dance might be too much. He tried to turn the question aside, but Isabel would not let the matter remain soft and unclear. She agreed to sit with him in a quiet room while the cotillion went on. On the way, they passed Rosier standing in a doorway, watching the dance with a sad fixed face.

Warburton asked who the unhappy young man was. Isabel said he was the man who loved Pansy. Warburton asked what was wrong with him. Isabel said he had too little money and was not very clever, though he was kind and charming. Warburton seemed surprised, because Rosier's income sounded good enough to him. Isabel said her husband had larger ideas. Then she called Rosier Warburton's rival, and Warburton looked startled.

In the small quiet room, Isabel spoke more openly. She told Warburton that Pansy liked him and wished deeply to please her father. But she also said that such obedience was a poor reason for a man to take a wife. Warburton answered that he was forty-two and could not love like a very young man. Isabel told him that, if he were truly in love, he would not care so much about good reasons. He asked why she was so doubtful, and for one moment their eyes met with an old and difficult meaning.

Isabel then smiled and told him that, as far as she was concerned, he might do whatever came into his head. She left him and returned to the larger rooms, where important Roman guests soon spoke to her. Still, she felt she had learned what she needed to know. When she passed Rosier again, she told him he had been right not to leave. She could not promise much, but she would do what she could for him. Later, as she and Pansy entered their carriage, she reminded Warburton

gently not to forget to send his letter to Osmond.

Meanwhile, in Florence, the Countess Gemini was bored and eager to go to Rome. She had long wished to live among Roman parties, famous people, and brighter society. Her husband kept her mostly in Florence, where she felt trapped. Now Osmond had invited her to stay at Palazzo Roccanera, though he warned that she must be quiet. The Countess accepted at once, partly because she wanted amusement and partly because she wanted to see whether Isabel had stood up against Osmond.

A few days before her journey, Henrietta Stackpole came to see her. Henrietta said she was going to Rome because Isabel had changed and no longer wrote in the same way. The Countess said the reason was probably Osmond. She also said that Lord Warburton was often at the house and was, according to rumor, making love to Isabel. Henrietta was shocked by this way of speaking. She said she was not afraid for Isabel in that sense; she was afraid Isabel was unhappy.

The Countess answered that Isabel might well be unhappy, because Osmond could not love anyone. But she cared more to know whether Osmond himself was unhappy too. Henrietta found this hard and unpleasant. She had crossed the ocean because she wanted to look after Isabel, not because she wanted revenge on Osmond. The Countess, for a moment, was touched by such friendship. Then she returned to her lighter mood and asked only that Henrietta describe her in the newspaper.

After leaving the Countess, Henrietta went to Goodwood's hotel and left a note asking to see him. Then she walked to the Uffizi gallery to visit a painting she loved. In the gallery she met Goodwood himself. He was now older-looking and more serious than before. Henrietta told him she had wanted to speak to him about something important. He said he would listen, though he was sure he would not like what she was going to ask.

Henrietta asked him to consider whether it was truly wise to go to Rome. Goodwood said he had thought about nothing else for two months and had still decided to go. He admitted that seeing Isabel might not help her, but he wanted to see her for himself. Henrietta asked whether it might hurt her. Goodwood

answered that he was nothing to Mrs. Osmond now and that he would not harm her. But Henrietta told him that if he went, he must be a true friend, not a selfish one.

Goodwood looked at her carefully and asked whether Isabel needed help. Henrietta tried not to answer too plainly, but she said most women needed help. Goodwood understood that she had heard something. He asked if she had heard that Isabel was unhappy. Henrietta said he would not see that, but her answer did not comfort him. He said he would see for himself. When she told him she was leaving for Rome the next day, he struggled for a moment with his wish to travel alone.

Goodwood did not enjoy Henrietta's direct way of entering his private feelings. She seemed always to carry a lamp into places where he wished to keep darkness. Yet he also knew she was travelling alone and that he should not leave her without help. At last he said, very seriously, that if she was going the next day, he would go too, so that he might be of assistance. Henrietta accepted this as if it were only proper. In this way, almost against his own wish, Goodwood became her travelling companion to Rome.

Part 18 — Warburton Leaves

The day after the ball, Isabel went to see Ralph at his hotel. She knew that Osmond disliked these visits. He had not yet forbidden them, but she felt that the order might come soon. Ralph was a friend of freedom, and Osmond did not wish her to have a free mind. This made the visit both sweet and painful, because Isabel felt that every step toward Ralph was also a step away from the quiet obedience her husband expected.

Ralph was sitting in his chair when she came in. He looked weaker than ever, and his thin legs stretched before him as if they did not fully belong to him. Isabel did not begin with his health. She had come with another question, and she knew she must ask it before her courage failed. She asked him whether Lord Warburton was truly in love.

Ralph at first thought she meant in love with herself. When he understood that she meant Pansy, he answered plainly that he did not believe it. He said Lord Warburton had spoken well of Pansy and had behaved properly, but that was not the same as love. Isabel became troubled, because this was exactly the doubt she had tried to keep away. She had wanted Ralph to give her peace, and instead he gave her a clearer fear.

Isabel said that Ralph was no help to her. The words came out suddenly, with more feeling than she had meant to show. Ralph heard the pain under them and was deeply moved. He said, very gently, that she must be terribly unhappy. Isabel at once drew back from him. She smiled quickly and said she had only meant a small family problem, not a tragedy.

Ralph knew she had put her mask on again. He wished she would speak openly and say that Osmond made her suffer. He wanted her to trust him with the truth, if only for a few minutes. But Isabel would not give him that comfort. She spoke of Lord Warburton, Pansy, and Rosier, as if the matter were only a question of ordinary marriage plans.

She said Pansy cared for Rosier and that it would be cruel to make her give him up. Ralph answered that Lord Warburton would be kind to Pansy if he married her. Isabel said kindness was not enough. Pansy could see that Lord Warburton did not love her, and a young girl should not be bought by a splendid offer. Ralph did not disagree, but he saw the deeper danger: Osmond would blame Isabel if Lord Warburton went away.

Before she left, Ralph said what he feared most. He told Isabel that Osmond might say she had not helped the plan because she was jealous of Pansy. Isabel blushed deeply and pulled her hand away from Ralph's. His words hurt her more than he had expected. She told him he was not kind. Ralph begged her to be honest with him, but she left the room quickly, carrying her pain with her.

That evening, before dinner, Isabel went to Pansy's room. The girl was already dressed, as usual, and sat quietly near the bedroom fire. The large room was dark except for the firelight, and Pansy looked very small inside it. When Isabel came in, Pansy rose at once with her gentle respect. Then she knelt on a cushion in front

of Isabel and rested her folded hands on Isabel's knees.

Isabel found the scene difficult. She wanted to know the truth of Pansy's heart, but she could not seem to ask without pushing her in one direction. She told Pansy that she had not spoken before about marriage because she had wished to leave her free. Pansy looked up and said she had greatly wished Isabel would speak. She asked Isabel to advise her.

Isabel said that advice should come from Pansy's father. Pansy answered that a lady could advise a young girl better than a man. Isabel felt the danger of this trust. She loved Pansy, but she also felt bound to Osmond. So she told the girl that she must give the greatest respect to her father's wishes.

Pansy said she would certainly do that. Then, simply and quietly, she said that the only thing she wanted in life was to marry Edward Rosier. He had asked her, and she had told him she would marry him if her father allowed it. Now her father would not allow it. Isabel said that in that case it was impossible. Pansy agreed, but her agreement did not mean that she had stopped loving him.

Pansy said she would never marry without her father's consent. She would obey him completely. But she also said that, even if she never married Rosier, she would never stop thinking of him. There was no anger in her voice. She did not speak like a girl ready to rebel. She spoke like a girl ready to suffer quietly and keep one small treasure hidden inside herself.

Isabel tried to speak as Osmond's wife. She said that Pansy's father wished her to make a better marriage and that Rosier had little money. Pansy did not understand why this should matter so much. She had little money herself, she said, so why should she ask for a great fortune? Isabel answered that having little was one reason to look for more. As she said this, she felt false and cold, and she was glad the room was dark.

Isabel then spoke of Lord Warburton. She said that he had shown Pansy great attention and that her father would be extremely pleased if such a marriage were possible. Pansy listened with her small wise smile. She said Lord Warburton had been very kind, but she did not believe he would ask her to marry him. He knew she did not want it, and that was why he would not trouble her. To Pansy, this was

the true meaning of his kindness.

Isabel was surprised by the girl's clear sight. Pansy understood more than anyone had given her credit for. She knew Lord Warburton did not love her, and she knew he would not press her. Yet she did not want to tell her father too soon. As long as Osmond believed Lord Warburton might still ask, he would not bring forward another man. This small hope gave Pansy a little space in which to remain faithful to Rosier.

Isabel felt both relieved and ashamed. Pansy had found her own little wisdom, while Isabel herself had so little light to give. Before leaving, Isabel said that Pansy's father believed she would at least like to marry a nobleman. Pansy stood at the door and held back the curtain for Isabel to pass. Then she answered very gravely that Mr. Rosier looked like a nobleman to her.

For several days after this, Lord Warburton did not come to the house. Osmond noticed the absence and grew quietly impatient. At last he asked Isabel what had become of him. Isabel said she knew nothing. Osmond reminded her that Lord Warburton had said he would write, but no letter had come. Then he asked Isabel to remind him.

Isabel asked if he wanted her to write to Lord Warburton. Osmond answered that he had no objection. Isabel said he expected too much of her. He replied coldly that he expected a great deal and had already survived much disappointment. When Isabel told him to deal with Lord Warburton himself, Osmond said that would not be easy with her working against him. Isabel trembled, because the accusation was cruel and almost open.

At that moment Lord Warburton was announced. He had come to say good-bye. He had been suddenly called back to England and would leave Rome almost at once. He spoke pleasantly and bravely, praising England and inviting the Osmonds to visit him there. He mentioned Pansy kindly and said she would be admired in England. Osmond listened with a controlled face, but Isabel could feel the anger and disappointment hidden under his silence.

Lord Warburton asked to say good-bye to Pansy. Osmond left the room to send for her, and Isabel was alone with Lord Warburton for a few minutes. He said he

wished to see Pansy, but Isabel told him she was glad this was the last time. He understood her. When Pansy came, she looked pale and brave, with two red spots on her cheeks. Lord Warburton wished her happiness, asked her to think of him sometimes, shook Isabel's hand in silence, and left.

After he had gone, Pansy did not cry. Instead, she told Isabel sweetly that Isabel was her guardian angel. Her father had just kissed her kindly, and she believed Isabel had asked him to be gentle. Isabel told her she had asked nothing. Later that night, Osmond spoke to Isabel alone. He accused her of arranging everything so that Lord Warburton would leave. Isabel answered that Pansy did not care for him and that he did not care for Pansy. Osmond would not accept this. He said only that Pansy had at least shown she could aim high, and Isabel left him with the sad thought of poor little Pansy.

Part 19 — Goodwood in Rome

Isabel learned from Henrietta that Caspar Goodwood had come to Rome. This happened three days after Lord Warburton left. Madame Merle had also gone away for a short visit to Naples, and Isabel felt a strange relief at her absence. She had begun to fear Madame Merle in a quiet way. At night, when the house was still, she sometimes imagined Madame Merle and Osmond joined together in some dark old understanding.

Goodwood's arrival troubled Isabel more than she wished to admit. She had known from Henrietta that he was in Europe, but she had hoped he might not come to see her. Their last meeting before her marriage had felt final and painful. He had represented the only real wound she believed she had given to another person. Lord Warburton had sorrow, but he had other supports; Goodwood seemed to Isabel to have nothing between himself and his pain.

For several days after he reached Rome, Goodwood did not come to Palazzo Roccanera. This gave Isabel a little peace, though not complete peace. She saw him twice in the street while she was driving with Henrietta and Pansy. He looked straight ahead and did not appear to see them. He seemed larger and harder than

before, like a man walking through cold weather inside himself. Isabel watched him pass and felt that his silence was almost more terrible than a visit.

Henrietta, on the other hand, came at once and came often. Isabel received her in her own sitting-room and took her out driving, though Osmond disliked this friendship. Henrietta had crossed the ocean in winter because she had guessed that Isabel was unhappy. That guess touched Isabel deeply. She had defended Henrietta for years against people who laughed at her direct ways, and now she felt that her old loyalty had been right.

Henrietta did not take long to speak plainly. She looked at Isabel and said that she was miserable. Isabel tried first to answer lightly, but the truth rose in her throat. "Yes, I am miserable," she said very quietly. The words hurt her even as she spoke them. Still, because Henrietta was a woman and a friend, not Ralph, not Warburton, and not Goodwood, Isabel could say this much.

Henrietta asked what Osmond did to her. Isabel said he did nothing, but that he did not like her. Henrietta cried that Osmond must be very hard to please. Then she asked why Isabel did not leave him. Isabel answered that she could not change her life in that way. She had married him freely, before the world, and she could not now publish her mistake as if marriage were only an article to be corrected.

Henrietta said Isabel was too proud. Isabel did not deny it completely, but she said she was also ashamed. She had chosen Osmond with full intention, and she must accept the result of her own act. She could not call everyone to witness that she had been wrong. She would rather bear her pain privately. Henrietta thought this was too considerate, but Isabel answered that she was not considering Osmond so much as herself.

Osmond soon made his opinion of Henrietta clear. He told Isabel that she was unlucky in her friends. Ralph, he said, was tiresome and proud under the protection of illness. Lord Warburton had behaved like a man looking over a house and then deciding not to take it. Henrietta, in his view, was the worst of all. Her voice, her ideas, and even the thought that she talked about him disturbed every nerve in him.

Isabel listened without trying to defend her friend too much. She knew that if

she argued warmly, Osmond would enjoy making her warmth look foolish. She only said that Henrietta did not speak of him as much as he imagined. This was true, because Henrietta had many other subjects. She talked about America, travel, Mr. Bantling, English customs, Roman streets, and everything that passed before her eyes. Yet she always returned, in the end, to Isabel.

Caspar Goodwood at last wrote a note asking whether he might call. Isabel answered that she would be at home at six. She spent the day wondering why he was coming and what he hoped to gain. When he arrived, she received him calmly and tried to appear happy. She thought she succeeded. She believed she had shown him a smooth face, a good house, and the life of a woman who had accepted her place.

Goodwood spoke little about himself and asked no open questions about her marriage. He seemed to look at her as a man looks at a closed door. Isabel thought perhaps he had come only to see her once more and to satisfy himself that the past was finished. This idea pleased her because it made him less frightening. If he had come for his own peace, then perhaps she no longer owed him anything.

After that first call, Goodwood came regularly to her Thursday evenings. He came early, stood seriously among the guests, and looked as if the occasion were a duty. Osmond was always polite to him, often more polite than necessary. He spoke to him about modern life, America, business, taste, and the future. His tone was graceful, but there was something sharp behind it. Goodwood did not always understand the words, but he felt the hidden pressure.

Ralph, meanwhile, had decided to return to England. His health had grown so poor that even he could no longer pretend Rome was good for him. Henrietta told him he could not travel alone, and he answered that he would have servants. She said servants were not enough. He needed a woman's care, and she would go with him. Ralph laughed when she left the room, not because he disliked the plan, but because it was so strange and somehow so comforting.

Goodwood also went to see Ralph. He told him that Isabel had asked him to travel with him. Ralph said this was very kind of everyone. Goodwood answered that his kindness was not toward Ralph but toward Isabel. He knew she wanted

him to leave Rome. She had given him work to do so that he could be removed. Ralph said he saw too much in the matter, but Goodwood did not agree. He said he had watched Isabel and now understood that she only seemed happy.

Ralph answered lightly that Isabel was the most visibly happy woman he knew. Goodwood heard the sadness under the joke and said that was exactly the point. She had undertaken to appear happy, and she was very good at it. He had come to see what that appearance meant, and now he had seen enough. Ralph told him that perhaps it was time for him to go. That was the only serious conversation the two men had about Isabel.

Isabel was grateful when Henrietta told her she would go with Ralph. It seemed to Isabel that Henrietta and Ralph, though so different, had always been meant to understand each other. Henrietta said the main point was not understanding but getting Ralph safely to England. Then she looked hard at Isabel and said Isabel wanted them all to go. Isabel answered that she wanted to be alone. Henrietta said the people in Isabel's own house would not let her be alone, but Isabel called them part of the play, while the others were only spectators.

Before Ralph left, Isabel went to see him. He told her, half jokingly, that she seemed glad to get rid of them all. She touched his hand and spoke his name softly, and that was enough answer for him. They talked of the journey, of the stages, and of Henrietta's care. Isabel said she ought to go with him. Ralph answered that her husband would not like that, and Isabel said simply that she was afraid.

Ralph asked if she was afraid of Osmond. Isabel stood up and said she was afraid of herself. The words were strange even to her own ear. Then she spoke quickly of Goodwood and said that with Henrietta leading the little party, there would be nothing left for him to do. Ralph answered sadly that there was never anything left for Goodwood. Isabel colored and prepared to leave. Before she went, she told Ralph that if he ever sent for her, she would come.

That evening was one of Isabel's Thursday receptions, and Goodwood came among the first guests. Osmond talked to him for a long time and was unusually bright. He said he and Isabel would miss him, because they liked meeting a truly modern American who was not common. He spoke as if he and Isabel thought and

judged together in perfect unity. Goodwood sat stiffly, hearing more in the tone than in the words, and felt anger rise in him.

Goodwood wanted only to speak to Isabel alone. The evening moved slowly. Music began, guests came and went, and the Countess Gemini kept several men laughing near the fire long after the proper hour. Isabel seemed busy with everyone. At last Goodwood asked whether he might speak with her in another room. She said people were leaving and she had to remain visible. He answered that he would wait until everyone had gone.

At last she rose and led him into a bright empty room. She stood in the middle of it, slowly moving her fan. Goodwood looked at her and felt all his old feeling rush back with painful force. Isabel saw something in his face that frightened her. She asked if he had come to say good-bye. He said yes, but he did not like it and did not want to leave Rome.

Isabel thanked him for helping Ralph, but Goodwood broke through her polite words. He said he did not care about Ralph in that way. He cared because she had asked him. Then he asked what she had truly made of her life. He said he could not understand her. People said she was unhappy, but she herself showed only calmness. He had not come near the truth of her at all.

Isabel warned him that he was coming very near. Goodwood said that was exactly the trouble: he came near but could not touch her life. He asked if she had done well. Isabel said he asked a great deal. Then his control broke further, and he told her again that he loved her. He said he would go away because she wished it, but he wanted one answer before he went.

Isabel lifted her fan partly over her face. She looked at the door and told him softly not to spoil his good behavior. Goodwood said no one could hear him and that he loved her more than ever. He asked for only one thing. He wanted to know whether he might pity her. Isabel's eyes rested on his for a moment above the fan. Then she said he should not give his life to pitying her, but he might think of her sometimes. After that she turned and went back to the Countess Gemini.

Madame Merle had not come to Isabel's house on the Thursday evening when Goodwood said good-bye. Isabel noticed this, but she was not surprised. Something had changed between them since Madame Merle had returned from Naples. The change had begun when Madame Merle came to see Isabel and asked at once about Lord Warburton. She had hoped to find him still in Rome and to congratulate Pansy on a great marriage.

Isabel told her not to speak of Lord Warburton, because everyone had already spoken too much of him. Madame Merle smiled, but there was a sharpness under the smile. She said she had set her heart on the marriage. Isabel answered that Madame Merle should have stayed in Rome if she had wished to watch the matter so closely. Madame Merle replied that she had trusted Isabel, and the answer sounded more like blame than trust.

Isabel then understood something she had not clearly understood before. Madame Merle had not been simply a kind friend standing near the family. She had had a strong interest in Osmond's wishes, and now that his plan had failed, she was hurt and angry. Isabel felt a cold voice inside her say that this woman had been an active force in her life. Madame Merle had been near her, nearer than Isabel had ever guessed.

Madame Merle asked whether Lord Warburton had left because he wished to leave or because Isabel had led him away from Pansy. Isabel grew pale. The question was too direct and too ugly. Madame Merle said that Osmond needed to know the truth, because it would change how he judged his daughter's future. If Lord Warburton had given up Pansy only to please Isabel, then perhaps Isabel could stop being pleased and let the marriage happen.

Isabel looked at her and felt a sudden horror. "Who are you?" she asked in a low voice. "What have you to do with my husband?" Madame Merle rose slowly and answered, "Everything." The word seemed to open a dark door. Isabel sat still, with her face lifted, waiting for more light, but no light came. She only covered her face with her hands and understood, at last, that Madame Merle had helped marry her to Osmond.

After Madame Merle left, Isabel went out alone in her carriage. She wished for open air, distance, and old Roman stones around her. Among ruins, her own ruined happiness seemed less strange. She began to see the line of the past more clearly. Madame Merle had become especially loving after Isabel inherited her fortune. She had then placed Gilbert Osmond in Isabel's path, not by chance, but with purpose.

The worst thought then came to Isabel. Osmond, whom she had believed to be above common greed, had married her for money. She had thought many hard things of him, but not this. Now the thought entered her mind and would not leave. If he had wanted her money, why had he not let her know? A man might marry for money, but Isabel felt that at least he should not cover the act with fine words about taste, spirit, and beauty.

That same afternoon, Osmond went to Madame Merle's apartment. She stood before him in her carefully arranged room, looking calm and sad. She told him she did not believe he was unhappy. He told her not to speak of gratitude and not to make him angry. They spoke like two people who had long known how to wound each other without raising their voices.

Madame Merle said she had given him an interest in life. Osmond answered that the winter had never seemed longer to him. She told him he had never looked better and had never been more brilliant. He answered bitterly that he cared nothing for his own brilliance. Then Madame Merle said Isabel did not know what to do with herself. Osmond replied that Isabel knew perfectly well: she had drawn her own line and meant to follow it.

Madame Merle suddenly lost more control than usual. She said she would give her right hand if she could weep, but she could not. Osmond asked what good tears would do. She said they would make her feel as she had felt before she knew him. Then she accused him of drying up her soul. Osmond stayed cold, but her pain was real, and for a moment her smooth manner broke.

She said he had taken revenge on Isabel. Osmond rejected the word and called it vulgar. Madame Merle answered that he had made Isabel afraid of him. He denied this, but not with warmth. He said Isabel was not afraid of him and that he

had not wished for fear. Madame Merle answered that Isabel had feared her that morning, but that it was really Osmond inside her fear.

Osmond then spoke of his marriage as if it were a mistake in form, not a failure of heart. He said he had expected Isabel to fit him comfortably. He had wanted her to like him, even to adore him. Madame Merle answered that she herself had never adored him. Osmond said she had pretended to do so. Their old relation stood between them like a broken object neither of them wished fully to name.

At last Osmond said that if Isabel did not like him, at least Pansy did. He would find comfort in his child, because he had no fault to find with her. Madame Merle said softly, "If I had a child." Osmond answered formally that the children of others could be a great interest. Madame Merle then said that what still held them together was not fear, but the good she might still do for him. She had been jealous of Isabel because she wanted Osmond's life to be her work.

The next part of the trouble came through Pansy. Isabel often took the Countess Gemini and Pansy to see Roman ruins, because it gave them something to do and kept the Countess away from gossip for a little while. One afternoon they went to the Colosseum. The Countess and Pansy climbed the old steps, while Isabel stayed below in the great empty arena. Soon Edward Rosier came toward her, eager and nervous.

Rosier told Isabel that he had sold almost all his small art objects in Paris. The sale had brought him fifty thousand dollars, and now, he said, Osmond could not call him poor. Isabel was sorry he had sold the things he loved, though she understood why he had done it. She told him gently that he deserved to succeed. Rosier heard sadness in her voice and knew she could not promise success.

When Pansy and the Countess returned, Isabel told Rosier to go away. But Rosier saw the Countess and wished to meet her, because she was Osmond's sister. Isabel warned him that the Countess had no power over her brother. Still, he introduced himself, and the Countess received him with interest. Isabel took Pansy back to the carriage. Pansy said little, but her eyes showed a small bright pain that touched Isabel deeply.

About a week later, Isabel found Pansy waiting in her room before dinner. The

girl was pale and trembling. She said she was going back to the convent that evening. Her father had told her it would be good for her to make a little retreat from society and think quietly. Pansy tried to repeat his reasons bravely, but then she put her arms around Isabel and shook with feeling. Isabel could only kiss her and tell her to think of her.

At dinner, Isabel said she would miss Pansy very much. Osmond answered calmly that she might visit the girl, though not too often. He explained that a young girl should sometimes be taken out of society, kept fresh, and given quiet. He spoke of the convent as a place of peace, order, and good manners. Isabel listened and felt a deep chill, because she understood that this sudden act was also a message to her.

The Countess Gemini understood the matter in her own way. She told Osmond that he need not invent so many pretty reasons for sending Pansy away. He had done it, she said, because the Countess herself had begun to like Mr. Rosier. Osmond smiled and answered that if her ideas truly stood against his own, it would be simpler to send her away instead. Isabel sat at the table, hardly able to eat. Pansy had been removed from the house, and the beautiful prison had become darker.

Part 21 — The Secret Revealed

The Countess Gemini was not sent away after Pansy returned to the convent, but she felt that her place in Osmond's house was no longer safe. She knew her brother too well to mistake his silence. He had not ordered her to leave, but his cold manner told her that she had almost reached the end of his patience. She stayed a little longer, partly because she enjoyed troubling him, and partly because she felt something important might soon happen. In that dark house, every person seemed to be waiting for a door to open.

About a week later, Isabel received a telegram from England. It was from Mrs. Touchett at Gardencourt, and its words were sharp in her usual way. Ralph could not live many more days, and he wished to see Isabel if she could come without

failing in other duties. Mrs. Touchett added that Isabel used to talk a great deal about duty, and now her aunt would like to see whether she had found out what duty meant. Isabel stood still with the paper in her hand and felt that the words had entered her heart.

She had known that Ralph was dying, because Henrietta had written from England. Henrietta had taken him safely to Gardencourt, though she said he had arrived more dead than alive. Ralph had gone to bed and would never rise again. Henrietta also wrote that Goodwood had been no help at all, because he was ill in another way. Then Mrs. Touchett had returned from America and had taken charge of the house, as if even death must obey her rules.

Isabel put the telegram into her pocket and went straight to Osmond's study. She paused at the door for a moment, then opened it and went in. Osmond sat at a table near the window, copying a small old coin from a book with fine brushes and watercolors. His back was turned, but he knew at once that it was his wife. Isabel said she was sorry to disturb him, but her cousin was dying.

Osmond did not turn around at first. He said he did not believe it and that Ralph had seemed to be dying for years. Isabel went on because she had no strength for this kind of coldness. She told him that her aunt had sent for her and that she must go to Gardencourt. Osmond asked, with a calm voice, why she must go there. Isabel answered that she must see Ralph before he died.

For a time Osmond said nothing. He worked carefully with his brush, as if the small colored disk before him mattered more than any living person. Then he said he saw no need for the journey. Ralph had come to Rome, and Osmond had allowed her to see him there. He had disliked it, but he had endured it because he had thought it was the last time. Now Isabel wished to run after him again, and Osmond called this ingratitude.

Isabel asked what she should be grateful for. Osmond laid down his tools, rose slowly, and looked at her. He said she should be grateful that he had not interfered while Ralph was in Rome. Isabel answered that she remembered very well how clearly he had shown his dislike. Then she said again that she must go to England. Her voice was low, but the words were firm, and Osmond heard the firmness in

them.

Osmond told her he would not like it if she went. Isabel answered that this changed nothing, because he liked nothing she did or did not do. He had even chosen to think she lied. Osmond turned a little pale and said that perhaps she wished to go not for Ralph, but to take revenge on him. Isabel said she knew nothing about revenge. Osmond answered that he knew much about it and warned her not to give him a reason to use it.

Their talk became harder and colder. Osmond said that if she left Rome, the act would be clear and planned disobedience. Isabel answered that she had received the telegram only a few minutes before, and that nothing could be less planned. He said she was quick in making calculations. She told him his own opposition was planned and cruel. It was the first time she had spoken so directly to him, and yet he showed almost no surprise.

Osmond then spoke of marriage as if it were a sacred form that she was about to break. He said Ralph was nothing to him and nothing to them as husband and wife. He said Isabel should not cross Europe alone to sit beside the bed of another man. He said he took their marriage seriously, even if she had found a way not to do so. Isabel listened and felt his words become a net around her.

She knew he was using noble words for selfish reasons, yet the words still had power. Marriage, duty, honor, and consequence were not empty sounds to her. She had once stood with Osmond and made great promises. She hated his cold control, but she could not pretend that the promises had never been made. For a moment she felt that his wish to keep appearances was sincere, and that this sincerity, even in him, was something real.

Still, she could not accept his view. She asked how he could speak of union when he accused her of falsehood. She asked where his peace was when his heart was full of ugly suspicion. Osmond answered that their duty was to live decently together in spite of such things. Isabel cried that they did not live decently together. He answered that they certainly would not if she went to England.

Isabel said that if she went, perhaps he would not expect her to come back. Osmond turned quickly, and for the first time his surprise was not controlled. He

asked if she was out of her mind. Isabel said she did not understand how her going could be anything but a break, if everything he said was true. Osmond sat again at his table and said he could not argue with her while she spoke of defying him. He took up his little brush and returned to his drawing.

Isabel left the room feeling weak and covered by a cold mist. On her way back to her own room, she found the Countess Gemini standing in the doorway of a small room with a book in her hand. The Countess asked Isabel to suggest something amusing to read, because everything in the house was dull. Isabel looked at the book but could not understand the title. She said she had bad news: Ralph was dying.

The Countess threw the book down and said she was very sorry. Then she looked more closely at Isabel and guessed that she had been with Osmond. Isabel admitted this, and the Countess quickly asked whether Osmond had been hateful. Isabel said he had told her it was impossible for her to go to England. The Countess at first thought of her own comfort, because Ralph's death would mean mourning and fewer parties. But then she saw that Isabel's trouble was deeper than social loss.

The Countess told Isabel that nothing was impossible for her. Isabel answered bitterly that she felt stupidly weak. The Countess asked why Osmond objected, and Isabel said it was because she and her husband were so happy together that they could not separate even for two weeks. After this Isabel went to her room and walked up and down for a long time. She felt that marriage had become a heavy wall standing across her path.

At last Isabel sank onto a sofa and hid her head among the cushions. When she lifted it again, the Countess was standing in the room. She had entered quietly and had watched Isabel for several minutes. Her face was bright with a strange excitement, as if she had carried a secret too long and could not carry it any further. She sat beside Isabel and said Isabel was not simple enough. Then she added that there was something Isabel ought to know.

Isabel felt fear before she heard the words. The Countess said that Osmond's first wife had had no children. Isabel stared at her, not yet understanding. The

Countess explained that Pansy was truly Osmond's child, but not the child of his wife. Pansy's mother was another man's wife, a woman whose husband had left her and would not accept the child. Osmond had accepted Pansy and had built a false story around her birth.

Isabel asked whose wife the woman had been. The Countess answered that she had been the wife of a Swiss man, Monsieur Merle. The name did not need to be spoken more plainly. Isabel sank back into her seat, and the room seemed to move around her. Madame Merle was Pansy's mother. The woman who had guided Isabel, praised Isabel, and placed Osmond before her had been bound to him for years by this hidden child.

The Countess explained more. Madame Merle and Osmond had once been lovers, and everyone had been careful not to know too much. Osmond had claimed the child after his own wife died, and the real mother had given up every visible claim. Madame Merle had been careful for years never to betray herself. She had wanted Osmond to marry Isabel because Isabel had money and because Isabel might be good to Pansy. The Countess said this with sharp pleasure, but also with a kind of pity.

Isabel began to cry. She did not first cry for herself, and this almost annoyed the Countess. Isabel thought of Madame Merle, of the secret child, of the years of hiding, and of the terrible sight of another woman caring openly for Pansy. Then she thought of Osmond's dead wife and of the false story built over her grave. The Countess said Isabel had a strange way of pitying people. Isabel could only say that the whole past had stood between Osmond and Madame Merle.

The Countess also said that Madame Merle had brought Isabel and Osmond together. She had watched them for years and knew the truth. Madame Merle had feared the Countess because the Countess knew too much. She had hidden behind perfect manners and a spotless reputation. But her one real success, the Countess said, had been to give Osmond a rich wife and to give Pansy a woman who would love her.

Isabel listened as if a heavy load had been opened at her feet. The truth was ugly, yet it explained many small things that had once seemed strange. Madame

Merle's feeling about Pansy, her anger over Lord Warburton, her closeness to Osmond, and her interest in Isabel's fortune all came together. Isabel asked how the Countess knew all this. The Countess answered almost angrily that Isabel might suppose she had invented it if she wished.

Then the Countess touched Isabel's arm and asked whether she would now give up her journey. Isabel rose, but she was weak and had to lean on the mantelpiece. Her head fell on her arm, and for a moment she stood with closed eyes and pale lips. The Countess cried that she had done wrong and had made Isabel ill. Isabel answered not with anger, and not with the revenge the Countess had expected. She said only, with a sadness that seemed to come from the whole of her life, that she must see Ralph.

Part 22 — Farewell to Pansy

After the Countess left her, Isabel acted quickly. There was a train that evening for Turin and Paris, and she decided to take it. She called her maid and gave short, clear orders. Clothes were to be packed, papers prepared, and nothing unnecessary was to delay them. Isabel spoke calmly, but her mind was moving through darkness. She could think of Ralph and of the journey, and then of only one other person: Pansy.

She could not leave Rome without seeing the child. Osmond had told her that it was too soon to visit the convent, but that no longer mattered. Pansy had been shown to Isabel in a terrible new light, not as Osmond's simple daughter only, but as the child of Madame Merle and Osmond. Yet this knowledge did not make Isabel draw back from her. It made her reach out toward her more strongly. Pansy was innocent, and innocence now seemed the one thing in Rome that Isabel could still touch without shame.

At five o'clock, Isabel drove to the convent near the Piazza Navona. The street was narrow, and the building rose high and plain above it. A kind, talkative portress admitted her and showed great respect to Mrs. Osmond. Isabel had been there before with Pansy and knew the large rooms, the clean floors, and the garden

that had sun in winter and shade in spring. She knew the sisters were good women, but today the place seemed more than ever like a prison.

The portress left Isabel in the visitors' room while she went to announce her. The room was large, cold, and very silent. Its furniture looked new and stiff, and on the walls there were religious pictures in dark frames. There were wax flowers under glass, and an empty white stove stood against one wall. Isabel sat there and did not try to think clearly. The silence seemed to press against her ears.

After a few minutes, the door opened, and Isabel rose, expecting to see one of the sisters. Instead, Madame Merle entered. The sight was so strange that Isabel almost felt faint. She had been thinking of Madame Merle all day: of her lies, her skill, her suffering, and her hidden past. Now the woman herself stood before her, not like a memory but like proof brought into a court. For a moment Isabel could not speak.

Madame Merle also seemed changed. She did not enter with her usual easy smile or her perfect social power. She looked grave and careful, as if she had decided not to pretend too much. Yet even this gravity was a kind of art. Isabel saw that Madame Merle was playing a part, but perhaps it was the truest part she could play. She looked at Isabel from head to foot with cold gentleness and then asked the portress to leave them alone.

Madame Merle said she had come to see Pansy because the girl must be lonely and perhaps sad. She said she had not meant to offend Isabel by arriving first. She had stayed only a short time with Pansy and had found her in a pleasant little room with flowers and a piano. She also said the sisters spoke of Pansy with love and called her almost a little saint. Isabel listened without answering. She wished never to look at Madame Merle again, but she could not stop hearing the voice she had once trusted.

Madame Merle went on speaking, as if words could make a path across the broken place between them. She said she had gone to speak with Mother Catherine, and that the portress had then announced another visitor for Pansy. Madame Merle had guessed at once that the visitor was Isabel. She had asked to come and receive her instead of the nun. The Mother Superior had wished to show

Isabel proper honor, but Madame Merle had said that she herself knew how to treat Mrs. Osmond.

Isabel did not answer this. The room seemed too empty for ordinary conversation, and the truth between them was too large. Then Mother Catherine came in, a good and wise-looking woman with gentle eyes. She greeted Isabel kindly and said Pansy was ready to see her. Isabel followed her out of the cold room and up the stairs. Behind her, she left Madame Merle sitting still, as if she had been placed there to wait for judgement.

Pansy's room was small, neat, and almost cheerful. There were a few flowers, a piano, a little table, and signs of careful hands everywhere. Pansy rose as Isabel entered and came toward her with quiet joy. She looked thin and pale in her simple dark dress, but her smile had the same obedient sweetness. Isabel kissed her and held her a little longer than usual. Pansy seemed to feel that the embrace had a special meaning.

Mother Catherine left them together. Isabel asked if Pansy was comfortable, and Pansy said everyone was very kind. She had her lessons, her music, and time to think. She said she was not unhappy when she was busy. But then she added that the convent was different after one had been in the world. She had seen enough of life to know that the walls were walls.

Isabel sat near her and tried to speak with control. She told Pansy that she had come to say good-bye because she was leaving Rome that night. Pansy's face changed at once. She took hold of Isabel's dress and asked whether Isabel looked strange because she was unhappy. Isabel tried to smile and said she was harmless. Pansy asked whether she would come back. Isabel said she could not tell.

Pansy grew frightened. She said Isabel must not leave her. Isabel asked what she could do for her, and Pansy answered that she did not know, but she was happier when she thought Isabel was near. Isabel said Pansy could always think of her. Pansy answered that thinking was harder when someone was far away. Then, with a small hesitation, she said she was a little afraid of her father and a little afraid of Madame Merle.

Isabel felt the words sharply, but she corrected Pansy at once. She told her she

must not speak in that way. Pansy accepted the correction immediately and said she would do everything they wanted. She only meant that obedience would be easier if Isabel were there. Isabel looked at her for a long moment. Then she said, slowly and firmly, that she would not desert her.

They held each other in silence, almost like sisters. Afterward Pansy walked with Isabel along the corridor to the top of the stairs. As they walked, she said Madame Merle had been there. Isabel did not answer. Then Pansy suddenly said she did not like Madame Merle. Isabel stopped and told her she must never say that. Pansy looked surprised, but obedience was deeper in her than surprise. She promised she would never say it again.

Pansy was not allowed to go down the stairs, so they had to part at the top. Isabel began to descend, and when she reached the bottom, she looked up. Pansy was still standing above her, small and pale in the light from the corridor. She called down, asking whether Isabel would come back. Isabel looked at her and answered that she would. She remembered afterward the sound of Pansy's voice.

Below, Mother Catherine met Isabel and led her back toward the visitors' room. Outside the door, the nun paused. She said Madame Merle was waiting inside. Isabel became stiff for a moment and almost asked whether there was another way out. But she did not wish Mother Catherine to see her wish to escape. The nun gently touched her arm and asked what she thought of Pansy. Isabel said it would take a long time to answer. Mother Catherine replied that they thought the child had suffered enough.

Madame Merle was sitting exactly where Isabel had left her. When the door closed, she rose and said she had waited, but not to speak about Pansy. Isabel answered that Mother Catherine thought Pansy had suffered enough. Madame Merle said she agreed, but then asked about Ralph. Did Isabel truly believe he was dying? Isabel said she knew only what the telegram had told her, but the telegram confirmed what everyone feared.

Then Madame Merle asked a strange question. She asked whether Isabel was very fond of Ralph. Isabel said yes, but she did not understand why the question was asked. Madame Merle said Ralph had once done Isabel a very great service.

Isabel answered that Ralph had done many. Madame Merle said this one was greater than the rest: Ralph had made her rich. Isabel stared and said the money had been her uncle's.

Madame Merle explained that the money had been Mr. Touchett's, but the idea had been Ralph's. Ralph had persuaded his father to leave Isabel the great fortune. He had given her the extra brightness that made her such a brilliant match. Isabel stood still and felt another flash of terrible light pass over her life. Even the money, which she had thought came simply from her uncle's kindness, had been part of Ralph's love.

Isabel went to the door and opened it. She had no wish to stay with Madame Merle one moment longer. Then she turned and gave the only hard answer she allowed herself. She said she had believed Madame Merle was the person she had to thank. Madame Merle lowered her eyes and stood like a proud woman doing penance. She said Isabel was very unhappy, but that she herself was more unhappy. Isabel said she could believe that, and that she would like never to see her again.

Madame Merle lifted her face and answered quietly that she would go to America. Isabel passed out and did not answer. The convent door closed behind her, and the Roman evening lay in the street, warm, heavy, and full of shadows. She had seen Pansy, and she had seen Madame Merle for the last time. Now the train, the long road north, and Ralph's dying face waited before her.

Part 23 — Back to Gardencourt

Isabel arrived in London after the long journey from Rome. She came out of the train at Charing Cross with tired eyes and a still face. Henrietta Stackpole was waiting for her, and Isabel was not surprised, because she had sent a telegram from Turin. Still, the sight of her friend brought a kind of help. Isabel felt as if a hand had been placed under her before she could fall.

During the journey, Isabel had seen almost nothing of the countries she crossed. Spring was bright outside the train windows, but her mind moved through a colder land. Again and again she remembered small things from the past that now had a

new meaning. Madame Merle's words, Osmond's silences, Pansy's obedience, and Ralph's kindness all came back with heavy light on them. She had not been thinking clearly; she had only been moving toward Gardencourt.

To Isabel, Gardencourt now seemed like a place of shelter. It had been the beginning of her European life, and now she was going back there in weakness. She had left it full of hope, and she would return full of pain. Yet the house still seemed sacred to her. Ralph was there, and Ralph was dying, and that was enough to draw her through fatigue, fear, and shame.

Henrietta took Isabel to her rooms in Wimpole Street. Mr. Bantling came in soon afterward and received Isabel with great kindness. He had changed very little, except that he seemed even more fixed in his loyalty to Henrietta. Isabel was too tired to notice everything at once, but she saw that something warm and settled had grown between them. Henrietta looked a little proud and a little shy, which was unusual for her.

Later, when they were alone, Henrietta told Isabel the news. She was going to marry Mr. Bantling and live in England. Isabel laughed softly, not because the matter was foolish, but because it was so strange. Henrietta, who had once warned Isabel against Europe, was now giving herself to an English life. She admitted the fact bravely and said she had come to it little by little.

Isabel asked if Henrietta was going to give up her country. Henrietta said she would not pretend otherwise. She was going to marry Mr. Bantling, and that meant placing herself in London. Yet she also said she was not surrendering like a prisoner. She was going to study England from the inside, and marriage would give her a better right to do so.

This answer was very like Henrietta, and Isabel felt both amused and sad. Henrietta had always seemed to her like a clear flame, sharp, free, and almost without ordinary human weakness. Now she too had shown that she was a woman with personal hopes. Isabel was glad for her, but the news also made the world look more common for a moment. Even Henrietta had entered the old human road of love, marriage, and compromise.

The next morning Isabel went with Henrietta and Mr. Bantling to Paddington

Station. Mr. Bantling looked cheerful and neat, with his umbrella and his easy English manner. Isabel gave him her hand and told him she was glad. He answered that perhaps she thought the whole thing very odd. Isabel said she did think it very odd, and he replied that he thought it even odder himself, but that he had always liked to take his own line.

The journey to Gardencourt was quiet. Henrietta and Mr. Bantling travelled with Isabel part of the way, and then she went on toward the old house. The green English country passed before her eyes, but she felt no fresh pleasure in it. She was thinking of Ralph. Each mile seemed both too long and too short, because it brought her nearer to the moment she feared and desired.

Isabel's second arrival at Gardencourt was even quieter than her first. The servants did not know her well and showed her coldly into the drawing-room. They took her name upstairs to Mrs. Touchett, and Isabel was left alone for a long time. The room was dark, wide, and still. The silence reminded her of the days before Mr. Touchett's death, and she felt that the house remembered sorrow better than people did.

At last Isabel could not remain seated. She walked through the rooms, into the library, and then along the picture gallery. Everything looked almost the same as when she had first come years before. The pictures, furniture, and old objects had not changed, while she herself had changed deeply. She stopped before a small picture and suddenly remembered her aunt's visit to Albany. If Mrs. Touchett had not found her that day, Isabel wondered, would she have lived another life and perhaps married Caspar Goodwood?

Mrs. Touchett came at last. She looked older, but her eyes were still bright and sharp. She explained that she had been sitting with Ralph while the nurse was away. Ralph had seemed to be sleeping, and she had not wished to disturb him. Isabel asked whether he slept much, and Mrs. Touchett said he lay with closed eyes but that it was not always sleep.

Mrs. Touchett took Isabel to her old room. Ralph had asked that she should have it when he heard she was coming. Isabel asked if there was any hope for him, and her aunt answered that there was none. She said his life had not been

successful. Isabel answered that it had been beautiful, and at once she felt the old difference between herself and her aunt.

At luncheon, they sat together in the sad dining-room. Mrs. Touchett spoke of America, Isabel's sisters, and the small matters that still filled her practical mind. Then she told Isabel that Lord Warburton had visited Ralph the day before. Isabel was startled, because she did not want another difficult meeting with him. But her aunt added that Lord Warburton was now engaged to be married.

Isabel said she was very glad. She said it more than once, because she knew her aunt was watching her. She did not wish Mrs. Touchett to think she was hurt by the news. Yet inside herself, something moved strangely. It was not jealousy. It was as if one whole part of the past had finally closed, and as if Pansy too had lost the last shadow of that possible future.

Mrs. Touchett then asked Isabel three questions. First, had she ever been sorry she had not married Lord Warburton? Isabel answered no. Second, did she still get on with her husband? Isabel answered with simple truth that it was her husband who did not get on with her. Third, did she still like Madame Merle? Isabel said not as she once had, and added that Madame Merle was going to America.

It was not until evening that Isabel was able to see Ralph. He had lain unconscious or silent for many hours. The doctor came and went, and the nurse moved softly in the room. At last Ralph knew that Isabel had arrived, though no one had told him. Isabel entered and sat beside his bed in the dim light, and he moved his hand so that she could take it.

For three days, Ralph gave almost no sign. Isabel sat with him, watched him, and walked sometimes through the empty house. He looked already like a figure of death, thin, still, and far away. Yet she felt they were together. She had come to wait, and waiting beside him seemed the only thing in the world that had clear meaning.

On the evening of the third day, Ralph spoke. His voice was weak and far off, but his mind was clear. He said he felt better and wanted to say something. Isabel knelt beside him and begged him not to tire himself, but he answered that he would

soon have all eternity for rest. He had waited for this hour, he said, because he had thought she would come.

Ralph told her she had been like an angel beside his bed. Isabel said she had not been waiting for his death, but for this moment. Then he said softly that he wished it were over for her too. At that, Isabel broke down and cried. All her shame and silence fell away, because Ralph was beyond ordinary pain now, and there was no reason to hide the truth from him.

She asked what he had done for her. She knew now that he had made her rich, and she cried that she had never thanked him. Ralph turned his face away and said that the act had not been happy. Then he said, with terrible sadness, that he believed he had ruined her. Isabel answered with the truth she had carried from Rome: Osmond had married her for the money.

Ralph did not deny the pain of this, but he told her that Osmond had also been in love with her. Isabel said yes, but that he would not have married her if she had been poor. Ralph answered that he had always understood. These words comforted her now, though they would once have wounded her pride. To be understood by Ralph, even in her failure, felt like being forgiven before she had asked.

Ralph told her that she had wanted to see life for herself and had been punished for that wish. Isabel said she had indeed been punished. He asked whether Osmond had been hard about her coming to England, and she said he had made it very difficult. Then Ralph asked whether everything was over between them. Isabel answered that she did not think anything was over, and that she did not yet know whether she would go back.

For the moment, she said, she cared only for Ralph. Kneeling beside him, with his hand in hers, she was happier than she had been for a long time. Ralph told her that pain was deep, but that love was deeper and remained. He said she would grow young again. Then, with the last strength of his love, he told her to remember that if she had been hated, she had also been loved, and not only loved but adored. Isabel bowed herself lower and cried out to him as to a brother.

Part 24 — The Straight Path

On the first evening Isabel had ever spent at Gardencourt, Ralph had told her that the old house had a ghost. He had said she might see it one day if she suffered enough. Now, in the cold pale dawn after her last talk with him, she thought the ghost had come. She had lain down without undressing, because she believed Ralph would not live through the night. She had not slept, but for a little while her eyes had closed, and then she started up as if someone had called her name.

For one instant, she seemed to see Ralph standing near her bed. His face was white and kind, and his eyes looked at her with their old gentle knowledge. Then she saw that no one was there. She was not afraid, because she felt sure of what the vision meant. She left her room at once and went through the dark passages, down the old wooden stairs, and toward Ralph's door.

Outside the room, Isabel stopped and listened. She heard only the deep silence of a house where death had entered. Then she opened the door as softly as if she were lifting a cloth from a sleeping face. Mrs. Touchett sat beside Ralph's bed, holding one of his hands. The doctor was on the other side, and the nurses stood near the foot of the bed. No one spoke when Isabel entered.

Ralph was dead. His face was fairer and calmer than it had been in life, and Isabel saw in it a strange likeness to his father's face years before. She went to her aunt and put an arm around her. Mrs. Touchett was stiff, dry-eyed, and terrible in her sharp grief. Isabel murmured her aunt's name, but Mrs. Touchett drew herself away and said only that Isabel should thank God she had no child.

Three days later, many people came down from London by morning train for Ralph's funeral. The little gray church stood near the station, and the graveyard was green, sweet, and full of spring air. The day was warm and quiet, with birds singing and white flowers bright in the hedges. Isabel stood beside Mrs. Touchett at the grave. Her tears came, but they did not blind her; Ralph's death had been expected for so long that it seemed gentle, not violent.

Lord Warburton was there, and so were several gentlemen connected with the bank. Henrietta stood with Mr. Bantling, crying openly. Caspar Goodwood was

there too, standing taller than the others and bowing his head less. Isabel felt his eyes on her during much of the service, but she did not look at him. She had thought he would have left England after bringing Ralph to Gardencourt, and his presence made her uneasy.

After the funeral, Isabel stayed at Gardencourt. Ralph had hoped she would remain there for a while, and she told herself that it was kind to stay with her aunt. But this reason did not fully satisfy her. Her real errand was finished; she had left Rome to see Ralph, and now Ralph was gone. Somewhere far away, Osmond was waiting, but he sent no word. Pansy sent no word either, and Isabel understood that Osmond had forbidden her to write.

Mrs. Touchett accepted Isabel's company but gave her little comfort. She was already thinking about practical matters and about Ralph's will. Ralph had left her the use of Gardencourt for a year, after which the house was to be sold. Much of the money from the sale would support a hospital for people with his illness. He had left small gifts to many people who had once shown him kindness. To Henrietta, in a strange and touching joke, he had left his library, "for her services to literature."

Isabel could not read in that library. She took down books, opened them, and found that the words had no meaning. Her mind moved from Ralph to Rome, from Rome to Pansy, from Pansy to Osmond, and then away again in fear. She knew she must decide something, but day followed day, and she decided nothing. Gardencourt held her in its deep shade. The thought of Rome came to her like cold air from a dark room.

About a week after the funeral, Lord Warburton came down from London to call on Mrs. Touchett. Isabel saw his carriage arrive and at once went out into the park, telling herself he had not come to see her. But Mrs. Touchett soon brought him across the lawn, and Isabel could not hide. Lord Warburton looked grave, proper, and uncomfortable. He said he was glad to find her still there, and Isabel answered quickly that she would not remain long.

He spoke of his sisters and asked Isabel to visit Lockleigh someday. He seemed to be trying to do everything in the correct way, and this made the meeting

awkward. Isabel remembered that he was now engaged to be married, and she wished him every happiness. He blushed, thanked her, and looked at his watch because his train was soon. When he left, Isabel asked her aunt whether he was truly going to marry. Mrs. Touchett said she could not be surer than he was, but he had accepted her congratulations.

Isabel gave up trying to understand Lord Warburton's heart, but she still thought of him as she walked under the trees. Then she came to a rustic bench and stopped. She knew the place at once. Years before, she had sat there after receiving Caspar Goodwood's letter, and Lord Warburton had then come to ask her to marry him. The bench seemed full of old life, and for a moment she was afraid to sit on it. Then a great tiredness came over her, and she sank down.

Twilight grew thick around the lawn. Isabel sat without purpose, her hands lying still in the folds of her black dress. She did not know how long she had been there when she suddenly felt she was not alone. She looked up and saw Caspar Goodwood standing a few yards away. His step on the grass had made no sound, and he had come upon her just as Lord Warburton had once done. Isabel rose quickly, but Goodwood came forward with a force that made her sit again.

He took her wrist for one moment, then let it go. Isabel said he had frightened her. Goodwood answered that he had not meant to, though perhaps a little fear did not matter. He had come from London, but had waited because another man had arrived before him. He had wanted to see her alone. His voice was fast, deep, and urgent, and Isabel felt danger in him as she had never felt it before.

Goodwood said he now knew everything. Ralph had spoken to him before death and had told him to do all he could for Isabel, all that Isabel would allow. Isabel cried that he had no right to speak of her with Ralph. Goodwood answered that a dying man was different and that Ralph had loved her. Then he said what he had come to say: Isabel was terribly unhappy, Osmond had made her suffer, and she must not go back to Rome.

Isabel turned on him with anger and asked if he was mad. Goodwood said he had never been more sane. He told her to trust him, to turn straight to him, and to save what remained of her life. She had no children, he said, and nothing truly

held her. The world was large, and they could go anywhere. He spoke of happiness as if it stood just before them, easy and waiting.

His words entered Isabel more deeply than she wished. They came like a strong wind, hot and wild, and for a moment she felt herself lifted away from everything she knew. She had never been loved like this. The force of it frightened and tempted her at the same time. She tried to resist by saying that the world was very small, but in truth it seemed huge and open, like a sea in the dark.

Goodwood begged her to be his, as he was hers. Isabel felt her head swim, and tears came into her eyes. She asked him to do the greatest kindness and go away. He cried out that she must not kill him with such words. Then she clasped her hands and begged him, if he loved and pitied her, to leave her alone.

For one hard moment he looked at her through the dusk. Then he took her in his arms and kissed her. The kiss was like lightning. It seemed to fill the darkness, strike through her whole body, and show her all the force she had feared in him. When she was free, she did not look back. She ran across the lawn toward the lights of the house, and at the door she stopped only long enough to breathe and listen. She had not known where to turn before, but now she knew. There was a very straight path.

Two days later, Caspar Goodwood knocked at Henrietta Stackpole's door in Wimpole Street. Henrietta herself opened it, dressed to go out. Goodwood asked if Mrs. Osmond was there. Henrietta made him wait a moment before answering. Isabel had come the day before and had spent the night, she said. But that morning she had started for Rome.

Goodwood looked down at the doorstep and could not finish his question. He turned away stiffly, but he could not move. Henrietta came out, closed the door behind her, and took his arm. She told him to wait. He looked at her face and understood that she meant he was young and that time might still have something to give him. The thought felt poor and bitter, but she walked away with him as if she had given him the key to patience.