

# The Age of Innocence

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## PEOPLE IN THIS STORY

### ***Newland Archer's family***

Newland Archer

Janey Archer, *Newland's sister*

Adeline Archer, *Newland's mother*

Louisa van der Luyden, *Adeline's cousin*

Henry van der Luyden, *Louisa's husband*

the Misses du Lac, *Newland's aunts*

the Duke of St Austrey, *Louisa's English cousin*

### ***May Welland's family***

May Welland

Mr Welland, *May's father*

Mrs Welland, *May's mother*

Countess Ellen Olenska, *May's cousin*

Count Olenski, *Ellen Olenska's husband*

Mrs Manson Mingott, *grandmother to May and Ellen*

Medora Manson, *Ellen's aunt*

Mr Lovell Mingott, *uncle to May and Ellen*

Mrs Lovell Mingott, *Mr Mingott's wife*

Regina Beaufort, *niece to Mrs Manson Mingott*

Julius Beaufort, *Regina's husband*

### ***Other people in the story***

Lawrence Lefferts } *New Yorkers,*

Sillerton Jackson } *and friends of Newland Archer*

Sophy Jackson, *Sillerton Jackson's sister*

Mrs Lemuel Struthers, *a friend of Julius Beaufort*

Monsieur Rivière, *Count Olenski's French secretary*

Mr Letterblair, *a lawyer, and Newland Archer's employer*

the Carfrys, *English friends of Mrs Archer*

the Blenkers, *friends of Ellen Olenska*

Fanny Ring, *Julius Beaufort's mistress, later wife*

Dallas, Mary, and Bill Archer, *Newland Archer's children*

Fanny Beaufort, *daughter of Julius Beaufort and Fanny Ring*

## CHAPTER 1

# A STRANGER IN NEW YORK

When Newland Archer arrived at the New York Academy of Music, one January evening in the early 1870s, the opera had already begun. There was no reason why the young man should not have come earlier. He had had dinner at seven, alone with his mother and sister, and then sat unhurriedly smoking his cigar in his private library. But fashionable young men did not arrive early at the opera. That was one of the unwritten rules of society, and in Newland Archer's New York these rules were as important as life and death.

Another reason for the young man's delay was that he enjoyed looking forward to pleasures just as much as actually experiencing them, and Gounod's *Faust* was one of his favourite operas. As he opened the door at the back of his box, he felt he had chosen just the right moment to arrive. Christine Nilsson, the Swedish singer whom all New York had gathered to hear, was singing, 'He loves me – he loves me not – *he loves me!*'

She sang in Italian, of course, not in English, since an unquestioned law of the musical world demanded that the German words of French operas sung by Swedish singers should be translated into Italian, for the clearer understanding of English-speaking audiences. This seemed as natural to Newland as all the other laws that governed his life, like never appearing in society without a flower in his buttonhole, and having two silver-backed brushes for his hair.

He turned his eyes away from the singer and looked at the audience. Directly opposite him was the box of old Mrs

Manson Mingott, who was now so fat that she was unable to attend the opera, but whose family often came on fashionable nights. Tonight the front of the box was filled by her daughter-in-law, Mrs Lovell Mingott, and her daughter, Mrs Welland. A little behind these ladies in their heavy silks sat a young girl in white, with her eyes fixed on the singer. As Madame Nilsson's voice rose above the silent audience (the boxes always stopped talking during this song), a warm pink spread over the girl's face and shoulders, right down to the top of her evening dress. She dropped her eyes to the enormous bunch of white flowers on her knee, and touched them gently.

Newland recognized his gift to her, and was pleased. 'The dear girl!' he thought. 'She has no idea what this opera is all about.' He watched her face, thinking fondly of her simple innocence. It would be his manly duty and pleasure to educate her. 'We'll read all the great books together, by the Italian Lakes ...'

It was only that afternoon that May Welland had let him know she 'cared' (the word that nice New York girls used to confess their love). Already his imagination, jumping ahead of the engagement ring, the first kiss, and the wedding, showed her at his side, sharing his interests as they travelled round the ancient places of Europe together.

He did not want the future Mrs Newland Archer to remain a simple, innocent girl. He intended that, with his help, she would become a social success among the married women of his circle, confident in any situation, always able to make clever and amusing conversation. If he had looked deep within himself (as he sometimes nearly did), he would have found there the wish that his wife should have the same social experience and eagerness to please as the married lady whose company he had enjoyed for two quite pleasant years.

How this wonderful being of fire and ice was to be created, he had never taken the time to consider. He knew his views on women were shared by all the carefully dressed, buttonhole-flowered men who greeted him from their boxes or visited him in his own, and he did not see a need to think

differently.

'My God!' said Lawrence Lefferts suddenly. He was one of the group of Newland's friends in the box – a man who knew more about 'form' than anyone else in New York. He always knew what was, or was not, socially correct behaviour, and he always had the answers to all the mysterious questions, such as when a black tie should or should not be worn.

'Look!' he added, handing his opera-glasses to his old friend Sillerton Jackson, who was standing next to him.

Newland saw with surprise that a new figure had entered old Mrs Mingott's box. It was that of a young woman, a little less tall than May Welland, with curly brown hair and a dark blue, unusually low-cut evening dress. Sillerton Jackson returned the opera-glasses to Lawrence Lefferts, and the young men in the box waited eagerly to hear what old Mr Jackson had to say, since he knew as much about 'family' as Mr Lefferts knew about 'form'. He also knew the details of all the scandals and mysteries that had lain under New York's calm surface for the last fifty years. There was a moment's silence. Then Sillerton Jackson said simply, 'I didn't think the Mingotts would have attempted that.' Newland felt annoyed that the box which was the centre of attention for so many men was the one in which his fiancée was sitting, and he could not at first imagine why the newcomer was creating such excitement. Then he remembered who she was, and immediately felt even more annoyed. No, indeed, no one would have thought the Mingotts would have attempted that!

He was in no doubt that the young woman was May Welland's cousin, whom the family always spoke of as 'poor Ellen Olenska'. He knew that she had suddenly arrived from Europe a day or two previously, and he had heard from May that she herself had been to see poor Ellen, who was staying with her grandmother, old Mrs Mingott. There was nothing mean or ungenerous in the young man's heart, and he was glad that his future wife was being kind (in private) to her unhappy cousin. But to welcome Countess Olenska into the family circle was a very different thing from producing her in society, at the opera, of all places, and in the very box with

the young girl whose engagement to him, Newland Archer, was to be announced within a few weeks.

Of course, he knew that old Mrs Mingott was as socially daring as any man in New York. In spite of having no beauty or family connections, she had made an excellent marriage when quite young, and had become extremely wealthy when her husband died. Since then she had done exactly what she wanted, and made sure that all her children and grandchildren, not to mention half of New York, obeyed her orders.

As he was thinking, Newland suddenly became aware of the conversation going on around him in his box.

‘After all,’ a young man was saying, ‘just *what* happened?’

‘Well – she left him. Nobody tries to say she didn’t,’ someone replied.

‘But her husband, this Polish Count,’ said the young man, ‘he’s an awful man, isn’t he?’

‘The very worst type,’ said Lawrence Lefferts. ‘I knew him in France. Rather handsome. When he isn’t with women, he collects paintings. Pays any price for both, I understand.’

There was a general laugh. Lefferts continued, ‘Anyway, she ran off with his secretary. It didn’t last long. I believe her uncle, Lovell Mingott, went to bring her back – she was living alone in Venice. He said she was desperately unhappy. That’s all right – but bringing her to the opera’s another thing.’

‘It’s strange that they’ve brought Miss Welland along as well,’ whispered someone, with a sideways look at Newland.

‘Oh, she’s here on Grandmother’s orders, no doubt,’ Lefferts laughed. ‘The old lady has doubtless demanded the whole family’s support for the Countess.’

Suddenly Newland felt he must be seen by his fiancée’s side, to inform the waiting world of his engagement to May Welland, and to help her through any difficulties caused by her cousin’s situation. He left his box and hurried round to old Mrs Mingott’s. As he entered, his eyes met May’s, and he saw she had immediately understood his reason for coming.

People in their social circle never expressed their feelings in free and open discussion, and the fact that she and he understood each other without a word seemed, to the young man, to bring them closer than any explanation would have done. Her eyes said, ‘You see why I am here,’ and his answered, ‘I would not for the world have wanted you to stay away.’

‘You know my niece, Countess Olenska?’ Mrs Welland asked as she shook hands with her future son-in-law.

Newland greeted Ellen Olenska politely, and then sat down beside May. In a low voice he said, ‘I hope you’ve told Madame Olenska that we’re engaged? I want everybody to know – I want you to announce it this evening at the ball.’

May’s face turned pink, and she looked at him with shining eyes. ‘If you can persuade Mother,’ she said, ‘but why change the date we agreed for the announcement?’ She saw his answer in his eyes and added, smiling confidently now, ‘Tell my cousin yourself – I give you permission. She says you used to play together when you were children.’



*Newland rose and seated himself at Countess Olenska's side.*

She made way for him by pushing back her chair, and Newland rose and seated himself at Countess Olenska's side.

'We *did* use to play together, didn't we?' the Countess asked, turning her serious eyes to his. 'You were a bad boy, and kissed me once behind a door.' She looked out over the audience. 'Ah, how this brings my childhood back to me – I see everybody here in short trousers and pretty little dresses,' she added in her almost foreign accent, her eyes returning to his face.

The young man was shocked that she should make jokes about New York's most important people, who were, at this moment, passing judgement on her. He answered a little stiffly, 'Yes, you have been away a very long time.'

'Oh, centuries and centuries,' she said, 'so long that I'm sure I'm dead and buried, and this dear old place is heaven.'

And this, for reasons Newland could not explain, seemed an even less polite way of describing New York society.

**T**hat night most of New York was expected to attend the Beauforts' ball. The Beauforts were one of the few families to own a house with a ballroom, and this fact helped New Yorkers to forget certain uncomfortable things about Julius Beaufort. The question was, who *was* Beaufort? He had arrived from nowhere to build up a fortune for himself in banking, but he was a man with bad habits, a bitter tongue and a mysterious past. Regina Beaufort, indeed, belonged to one of America's oldest families. As a penniless young beauty, she had been introduced to New York society by her cousin, Medora Manson, and had made what people thought was a most foolish marriage to Julius Beaufort.

Foolish or not, only two years after her marriage, it was agreed that her house was the most luxurious and comfortable in New York. Growing younger and blonder and more beautiful each year, she was the queen of Beaufort's palace, and drew all the world there without lifting her jewelled little finger. Some people whispered that it was Beaufort himself who trained all the servants, taught the cook new dishes, chose the plants for the gardens, and invited the guests. But to the world he gave the appearance of a carefree man of wealth, who just happened to be present at his wife's brilliant parties.

Newland Archer arrived a little late at the ball, as fashionable young men usually did. He had been thinking hard during his walk from the opera. Now he was beginning to fear that the Mingotts might go too far – that, in fact, they might be under old Grandmother Mingott's orders to bring Countess Olenska to the ball. That, thought Archer, would be

a serious mistake.

As he entered the ballroom, he could see Mrs Welland and her daughter standing opposite him. Surrounding May Welland was a small group of young men and girls, and from the handshaking, laughing and smiles, it was clear that she had announced her engagement. Newland paused a moment. He had wanted the announcement to be made, but he would have preferred it to be done at a quieter time, not in the heat and noise of a crowded ballroom. He was glad to see that May shared this feeling. Her eyes met his and their look said, ‘Remember, we’re doing this because it’s right.’

He made his way towards her, and after receiving warm congratulations from many of the group, he drew his fiancée into the middle of the dance floor and put his arm around her waist.

‘Now we won’t have to talk,’ he said, smiling into her clear eyes, as they started dancing. She made no answer, but her lips trembled into a smile. ‘Dear,’ whispered Newland, pressing her to him. What a new life it was going to be, with this whiteness, this beauty, this goodness at his side!

When the dance was over, the couple sat down in a quiet corner, and Newland pressed her hand to his lips.

‘You see, I made the announcement, as you asked me to,’ she said.

‘Yes, I couldn’t wait,’ he answered, smiling. ‘Only I wish it didn’t have to be at a ball.’

‘Yes, I know.’ She looked at him intelligently. ‘But after all, even here we’re alone together, aren’t we?’

‘Oh, dearest – always!’ Newland cried.

Clearly she was always going to understand, she was always going to say the right thing. He continued happily, ‘The worst of it is that I want to kiss you and I can’t.’ But looking quickly round, he could see there was no one nearby, and so he placed a kiss lightly on her lips. She sat silent, and the world lay like a sunlit valley at their feet.

‘Did you tell my cousin Ellen?’ she asked a moment later, in a dream-like voice.

He remembered that he had not wanted to speak of such things to the strange foreign woman, and had to lie. 'I didn't have the chance in the end.'

'Ah.' She looked disappointed, but continued, 'You must, because I didn't either. She's been away so long that she's rather sensitive, and might feel hurt if we didn't tell her.'

Newland looked at her lovingly. 'Dearest! Of course I'll tell her.' He looked anxiously towards the crowded ballroom. 'But I haven't seen her yet. Has she come?'

'No, at the last minute she decided her dress wasn't good enough for a ball, so she didn't come.'

'Oh, well,' said Newland, secretly delighted. Nothing about his fiancée pleased him more than her determination not to see anything unpleasant, like the real reason for her cousin's absence.

**D**uring the next day Newland and May, with May's mother, paid their first social visits as an engaged couple. At old Mrs Mingott's house, they discovered that Countess Olenska was out. But just as their visit came to an end and they were preparing to leave, she returned, followed by the unexpected figure of Julius Beaufort. And in the hall, while May and her mother were putting on their coats, Newland realized that the Countess was looking at him with a questioning smile.

'Of course you know already – about May and me,' he said to her, with a shy laugh. 'I meant to tell you last night.'

The smile passed from Countess Olenska's eyes to her lips; she looked younger, more like the playful Ellen Mingott of his boyhood. 'Of course I know, yes. And I'm so glad.' She held out her hand. 'Goodbye. Come and see me some day,' she added, still looking at Newland.

On their way home, none of them mentioned Ellen Olenska, but Newland knew Mrs Welland was thinking, 'It's a mistake for Ellen to be seen, so soon after her arrival, with Julius Beaufort.' The young man himself was thinking, 'And she ought to know that an engaged man doesn't spend his time visiting married women. But perhaps that's acceptable

in the circles she's been moving in.' He thanked heaven he was a New Yorker, and about to marry one of his own kind.

## CHAPTER 2

### NEWLAND HAS DOUBTS

The next evening old Mr Sillerton Jackson came to have dinner with the Archers. Newland's mother, Adeline Archer, had long been a widow, and did not often go into society, but she liked to be well informed about what was going on. Her old friend Sillerton Jackson used to study people's lives with a collector's patience and a scientist's attention to detail. So whenever anything happened that Mrs Archer wished to know about, she asked Mr Jackson to dinner.

In a perfect world, Mr Jackson would have hoped for Mrs Archer's food to be a little better. But after all, you couldn't have everything. If you had dinner with the Mansons or the Lovell Mingotts, who cared about eating and clothes and money, you ate the finest food and drank the best wines. On the other hand, if you were invited by the Archers or the van der Luydens, who had no time for the coarser kinds of pleasure, you could talk about the Swiss Alps and the most recent books. So when a friendly command came from Mrs Archer, Mr Jackson, who liked to find the best in every situation, would say to his sister Sophy, 'I over-ate last time I went to Mrs Mingott's – it'll do me good to eat a bit less at Adeline's.'

Mrs Archer and her unmarried daughter Janey lived on the ground floor of the family house, while Newland had the whole of the first floor to himself. Mother and daughter spent all their time together, reading or sewing in their beautifully furnished sitting room, or occasionally travelling, in search of the scenery or works of art they both admired so much. The long habit of living together in such closeness had given them similar interests, the same vocabulary, and even the

same way of beginning a sentence with ‘Mother thinks’ or ‘Janey thinks’, when each of them wanted to give an opinion that was, in fact, their own.

They looked almost like sisters, both tall, pale, and a little round-shouldered, with long noses and sweet smiles. As the years passed, however, Mrs Archer’s black silks were stretched more tightly round her thickening waist, while Miss Archer’s brown and purple dresses hung more loosely on her virgin figure.

Mother and daughter loved each other deeply, and admired and respected Newland. This admiration secretly pleased him, and he loved them for it; he considered it a good thing for a man to be respected and obeyed in his own house.

Newland had his own reasons for staying at home that evening. He knew old Jackson would talk about Ellen Olenska, and of course Mrs Archer and Janey wanted to hear what he had to tell. All three would be a little embarrassed by Newland’s presence, now that his future connection to the Mingott family had been announced, and the young man waited with amused curiosity to see what effect this would have on their conversation.

Mrs Archer began indirectly, by talking about Mrs Struthers, a guest whom New York society had been surprised to see at the Beauforts’ ball. ‘It’s a pity she was invited,’ she said gently, ‘but Julius Beaufort insisted, I hear.’

‘Beaufort will never understand what is and is not acceptable,’ said Mr Jackson, cautiously inspecting the fish, and wondering for the thousandth time why Mrs Archer’s cook always burnt it.

‘Oh, of course Beaufort is not a gentleman,’ said Mrs Archer. ‘And Mrs Struthers is ...’ She looked briefly at Janey and paused. There were facts that were not suitable for an unmarried woman to know – or at least, to discuss in public.

‘Mrs Struthers is a woman who once lived as a—’ Mr Jackson, catching sight of Janey, whose eyes were wide with interest, stopped, then went on, ‘Until Lemuel Struthers came

along, and – in the end – married her.' He left a little pause before and after the words 'in the end', and the pauses were full of meaning.

'Oh well, so many people behave badly nowadays, it doesn't matter,' said Mrs Archer carelessly. In fact, the ladies were not interested in Mrs Struthers, and Mrs Archer chose the moment to ask what she and Janey really wanted to know. 'And Newland's new cousin – Countess Olenska? Was *she* at the ball too?'

Adeline Archer had been very glad to hear of her son's engagement. Young men could do such unexpected, foolish things, and some women would do anything to trap a husband. But Newland had made an excellent choice – May Welland was one of the wealthiest and most beautiful girls in New York, and from a highly respected family. Mrs Archer felt that now she could relax, confident that her only son would live in safe and blameless domesticity for the rest of his life.

However, she thought it was a little unfortunate that his engagement meant he would be related to Madame Olenska, who seemed to have forgotten, if indeed she had ever understood, the importance of following society's rules at all times.

Mr Jackson leaned back in his chair. 'No, she was *not* at the ball,' he said heavily and deliberately.

'Perhaps the Beauforts don't know her,' Janey suggested, looking innocent, though she knew very well that was not true.

'Mrs Beaufort may not, but Beaufort certainly does,' replied Mr Jackson. 'Madame Olenska was seen walking up Fifth Avenue this afternoon with him by the whole of New York.'

'Oh dear!' cried Mrs Archer. 'How could she!'

Janey said, greatly daring, 'I heard she had on a dark blue dress at the opera, perfectly plain and flat – like a night-dress.'

'Janey!' said her mother, shocked, and Janey Archer blushed. 'Anyway,' continued Mrs Archer, 'she showed better

taste in not going to the ball.'

'I don't think it was a question of good taste,' said Newland, wanting to annoy his mother a little. 'May said Ellen intended to go, and then decided her dress wasn't good enough.'

Mrs Archer smiled, pleased to learn her guess was correct. 'Poor Ellen! We must remember how strangely she was brought up by Medora Manson. What can you expect of a girl who was allowed to wear black silk at her very first evening ball?'

Newland suddenly became argumentative. 'She's "poor Ellen" certainly, because she had the bad luck to make a miserable marriage, but I don't see what she has to be ashamed of.'

'People do say that she ...' began Mr Jackson, and stopped, looking at Janey again.

'Oh, I know!' cried Newland. 'They say the secretary helped her to get away from her cruel husband, who kept her more or less a prisoner. Well, what's wrong with that? Which man wouldn't offer his help in a case like that?'

'I hear she intends to get a divorce,' said Janey bravely.

'I hope she will!' cried Newland.

The word 'divorce' fell like a bomb in the calm purity of the Archer dining room. Mrs Archer gave her son a meaningful look, and the young man, conscious of the bad taste of discussing such personal matters in front of the servants, quickly changed the subject.

After dinner, as was the custom, the ladies went up to the sitting room, while Newland took his guest to the library. As Mr Jackson sat down in a comfortable armchair and happily lit one of Newland's excellent cigars, he said, 'You think the secretary just helped her to get away, my dear Newland? Well, he was still helping her a year later then, because someone met them living in Switzerland together.'

Newland reddened. 'Living together? Well, why not? Why shouldn't she start a new life? I hate the idea that a woman of her age should bury herself alive if her husband chooses to

live with other women.' He turned away angrily to light his cigar. 'Women ought to be free, as free as we are,' he added, too irritated to realize the full meaning of his discovery.



*'Which man wouldn't offer his help in a case like that?' cried Newland.*

Mr Sillerton Jackson stretched his feet closer to the fire and whistled in amusement. 'Really, Newland?' he said, with a smile. 'Well, it seems Count Olenski shares your view, because I don't think he's lifted a finger to get his wife back.'

That evening, after Mr Jackson's departure, Newland sat at his desk in the library, looking at the large photograph of May Welland which she had given him. With a new sense of fear he looked at the serious eyes and smiling, innocent mouth of the young creature who would soon be his responsibility. She was the terrifying product of the society he belonged to and believed in – a young girl who knew nothing and expected everything. Suddenly she seemed like a stranger, and he began to realize that marriage was not the safe harbour he had been taught to expect, but a voyage into

unexplored seas.

The arrival of the Countess Olenska had disturbed him, and made him unsure of what was right, for the first time in his well-ordered life. Naturally, he would be a far kinder and more sensitive husband to May than Count Olenski had been to Ellen. But clearly, things could still go wrong in his marriage to May. What could he and she really know of each other, since it was his duty to hide his past from her, and her duty, as a marriageable girl, to have no past to hide? What if they should tire of each other, or annoy each other? He thought about his friends' marriages, and saw none that offered the loving friendship which he had been hoping for with May.

He was sincerely in love, and he knew that doubts were common in young men who were going to be married. He blamed Countess Olenska. Here he was, recently engaged – a moment for pure thoughts and cloudless hopes – and involved in a scandal which could bring all the kinds of problem he would much rather avoid.

**A** few days later the scandal worsened. The Lovell Mingotts, led by old Mrs Manson Mingott, had sent out cards inviting a number of guests to a dinner. The invitations were headed with the words, 'To meet the Countess Olenska'. Forty-eight hours later, the unbelievable had happened: everyone except the Beauforts and Sillerton Jackson had refused the Mingotts' invitation. It was clear that New York society had decided not to meet the Countess Olenska.

When Newland heard of this, he was extremely angry, and persuaded his mother to ask her influential cousin, Louisa van der Luyden, for her support.

The New York of Newland Archer's day was broadly made up of three groups of people. At the bottom were the respectable, ordinary families like the Leffertses or the Jacksons. Above them were the wealthy people of good family like the Mingotts and the Archers. And right at the top were just three families, the Dagonets, the Lannings, and the

van der Luydens, all of whom were related to high-born European families.

Mrs Archer and Newland drove straight to the van der Luydens' large dark house in Madison Avenue. Here Louisa received them in her high-ceilinged sitting room full of solid, old-fashioned furniture, and listened politely to Mrs Archer's story. Her usual answer to any request for help was, 'I shall first have to talk this over with my husband,' but this time she rang for a servant and told him, 'If Mr van der Luyden has finished reading the newspaper, please ask him to be kind enough to come.'

In a few minutes Henry van der Luyden entered the room. He greeted Mrs Archer and congratulated Newland on his engagement. Then he listened quietly as Mrs Archer repeated what she had told his wife. There was a silence while the two almost royal figures considered the situation, the weight of social responsibility lying heavily on their thin, elderly shoulders. Newland and his mother waited respectfully.

Finally Henry van der Luyden spoke. 'As long as a member of a well-known family is supported by that family, their decision should be considered final. I had no idea that people were starting to behave so badly.' He looked at his wife, who bent her head in agreement. 'Newland, you may be aware that Louisa's English cousin, the Duke of St Austrey, is coming to stay with us for a few days. We are inviting a few friends to dinner here, to meet him, and I am sure Louisa will be as glad as I am if Countess Olenska will let us include her among our guests.'

'Thank you so much, Henry—' Mrs Archer began.

'There is nothing to thank me for, dear Adeline. This kind of thing must not happen in New York, and shall not, as long as I can prevent it.' And he guided his guests towards the door.

Two hours later everyone knew that the most respected couple in New York had invited Madame Olenska to dinner the following week, to meet their relation, the Duke of St Austrey.

**I**t was generally agreed in New York that Countess Olenska had ‘lost her looks’. She had been a brilliantly pretty child, who was adopted by her aunt, Medora Manson, after both her parents died young. Poor Medora married three unsuitable husbands, one after the other, and was widowed three times. However, she brought up Ellen as well as she could. They travelled constantly, and it was while travelling in Europe that Ellen met and married Count Olenski. When the marriage ended in disaster, she had returned to her relations in New York, to rest and to forget.

When Newland saw her enter the van der Luydens’ dining room on the evening of the dinner, he disagreed at once with the general opinion of her appearance. She was paler and thinner than when she was younger, but there was a mysterious beauty about her – a sureness in the way she carried her head, an unspoken experience of suffering that lay behind those intelligent eyes. She was the youngest woman present, but the smooth soft faces of the older women seemed almost childlike compared with hers. It frightened Newland to think what had happened to her, to give her eyes like that.

When the men joined the ladies after dinner, the Duke went straight up to the Countess and they talked together like old friends. It was clear she had met him on her travels in Europe. At the end of their conversation, instead of waiting for another gentleman to come and talk to her, which was the custom in New York, she got up and came to sit beside Newland.

‘May is a dear girl – so handsome and intelligent,’ she said, smiling at him. ‘Are you very much in love with her?’

Newland reddened, laughing. ‘As much as a man can be.’

‘How delightful! And you discovered each other yourselves – it wasn’t arranged for you in any way?’

Newland looked at her in disbelief, and asked with a smile. ‘Have you forgotten that in our country we don’t allow our marriages to be arranged for us?’

She blushed, and at once he was sorry for his careless remark.

'Yes, I'd forgotten. You must forgive me if I sometimes make these mistakes. Things were so different, so bad, where I've come from.' She looked down and he saw that her lips trembled.

'I'm so sorry,' he said quickly, 'but you *are* among friends here, you know.'

'Yes, I know. Wherever I go, I have that feeling. That's why I came home. I want to forget everything in my recent past, to become a complete American again, like the Mingotts and the Wellands. Ah, here's May arriving, and you will want to hurry away to her,' she added, but without moving. Her eyes turned back from the door to rest on the young man's face.

The after-dinner guests were now entering the room, and Newland saw May with her mother. 'Oh, she's surrounded by people. She's being introduced to the Duke just now,' he said.

'Then stay with me a little longer,' Madame Olenska said in a low voice, just touching his knee with her finger. It was the lightest touch, but to him it was as exciting as a kiss.

'Yes, let me stay,' he whispered. But just then Mr van der Luyden came up, with a guest who wanted to meet the Countess, so Newland had to give up his seat.

Madame Olenska held out her hand to him, to say goodbye. 'Tomorrow, then, after five – I shall expect you,' she said.

'Tomorrow ...' Newland heard himself repeating, although they had made no arrangement during their conversation.

As he moved away, he saw, waiting to meet the Countess, a number of the couples who had refused to meet her at the Lovell Mingotts', and it proved to him yet again the great influence that the van der Luydens had on New York society.

### CHAPTER 3

## THE COUNTESS CAUSES TROUBLE

The Countess had said, ‘After five,’ and at half past five the next day Newland was ringing the bell of her house in West Twenty-third Street. She had rented it from her aunt Medora, who was travelling again, but it was a strange area to live in – a narrow street of poor-looking houses which needed painting, a street inhabited by dressmakers and writers.

‘The Count must have robbed her of her fortune as well as her dreams,’ Newland thought as he looked around him.

The young man had not had an enjoyable day. He had lunched at the Wellands’, hoping for some time alone with May. He wanted to tell her how beautiful she had looked the night before, and to beg her to bring forward the date of their marriage, which was planned for next autumn. But when he mentioned the idea at lunch, Mrs Welland had just shaken her head at him in hurt surprise, saying, ‘May needs twelve sets of everything, and every piece must be sewn by hand ...’

Then he had been forced to go with the ladies on their afternoon of social visits, calling on several families in turn to announce the engagement. As he left the Wellands’ house, May’s mother called after him, ‘Tomorrow we’ll do the Chiverses and the Dallases.’ And to his horror Newland realized her plan was to visit the friends of both families in alphabetical order, and that they were only in the first quarter of the alphabet. He knew he would not enjoy the next few months.

He had meant to tell May of the Countess’s request – or command, rather – that he should call on her that afternoon,

but in the short time they had been alone, he had had more urgent things to say to May, and the moment for telling her had passed.

The door was opened by a dark-haired servant girl, who did not speak English. She showed him into a sitting room, and disappeared. Newland looked around curiously. The room was unlike any he had known. There were a few pieces of fine old furniture, some Italian-looking pictures, and just two roses in a tall thin vase, perfectly positioned. The room had its own special atmosphere which seemed to wrap around him – even the smell was different, suggesting exotic places like Samarkand in central Asia. ‘How will May furnish our house?’ he thought. ‘Probably in the same purple and yellow as at her parents’. At least I’ll be able to arrange my library as I like.’

After a while he heard a carriage arrive outside, and looking through the curtains he caught sight of Julius Beaufort helping Madame Olenska out. In a few moments she entered the room.

‘How do you like my funny house?’ she asked, showing no surprise at seeing him. ‘To me it’s like heaven.’

‘You’ve arranged it delightfully,’ he said.

‘I suppose what I like is the wonderful feeling of being here in my own country and my own town, of being alone in it.’

‘You like being alone so much?’

‘Yes, as long as my friends prevent me from feeling lonely.’ She sat down, lying back in her chair and putting her hands behind her head. ‘This is the hour I like best, don’t you?’

A sense of his own importance made him say, ‘I was afraid you’d forgotten the time. Beaufort must have been a very interesting companion.’

She looked amused. ‘Why – have you waited long? Mr Beaufort took me to see some houses – my family want me to move to a better area. But what does it matter where one lives?’

‘This street just isn’t fashionable.’

‘Fashionable! Do you all think so much of that? Why not

make one's own fashions? But I suppose I've lived too independently. Now I want to do what you all do. I want to feel cared for and safe.'

He was touched. 'That's what your friends want you to feel.' But he suspected she still did not realize how close to social disaster she had been, before the van der Luydens had saved her. So he said, 'Last night the best families in New York were looking after you.'

'I know, it was such a nice party!' she replied lightly.

These words were hardly adequate, Newland felt, for the social importance of that event.

'The van der Luydens,' he said seriously, 'are the most influential people in New York. Unfortunately, because they are elderly and in poor health, they do not often receive guests.'

'Isn't that the reason for their great influence?' she said thoughtfully. 'It's because they are hardly ever seen.'

He stared at her, and suddenly realized she was right. He laughed, and thought no more about the van der Luydens.

'But you'll explain these things to me, won't you?' Madame Olenska continued. 'You'll tell me all I ought to know?'

'It's you who are telling me, opening my eyes to things I've looked at so long that I no longer really see them.' He wanted to say, 'Don't be seen driving about the streets with Beaufort,' but he was being too deeply drawn into the atmosphere of the room to give advice of that kind. He felt a long way from New York; he was in Samarkand, from where New York looked strangely small and distant, as indeed it would.

The Countess bent over the fire, holding her thin hands out to the flames, and her face seemed pale in the firelight.

'Your family,' Newland added, 'can advise you, especially the older women.'

She shook her head. 'Oh, I know! All my aunts, and my grandmother. But only if they don't hear anything unpleasant! Does no one want to know the truth here, Mr Archer? The real loneliness is living among all these kind people who only ask me to pretend!' She put her head in her

hands and started crying.

‘Madame Olenska! Oh, don’t, Ellen!’ he cried, jumping up and bending over her. He took one of her hands, holding and rubbing it like a child’s, but she soon freed herself and looked up at him with wet eyes.

‘Does no one cry here, either? I suppose there’s no need to, in heaven,’ she said with a laugh.

Newland realized with horror that he had called her ‘Ellen’. The use of first names between young people was only permitted if they were engaged. Somewhere in his mind’s eye he could see the tall white figure of May Welland – she seemed very far away.

Suddenly the servant came in and spoke in Italian to the Countess. She showed in a strange-looking couple – the Duke of St Austrey and Mrs Struthers, a large lady with unnaturally black hair, painted lips, and an expensive fur coat. They had come to invite Madame Olenska to a musical evening at Mrs Struthers’ house on Sunday evening. Madame Olenska accepted with delight, and Mrs Struthers waved a cheerful hand at Newland.

‘And bring your young gentleman with you,’ she said.

Newland escaped as quickly as he could. He had no wish to become involved with the socially unacceptable Mrs Struthers. As he went out into the wintry night, the feeling of Samarkand disappeared. New York was all around him again, and May Welland the loveliest woman in it.

He went straight to a flower shop, to send her the daily box of sweet-smelling white flowers, which he realized he had forgotten to send that morning. While in the shop, he noticed a huge bunch of yellow roses. They were not May’s kind of flower – too rich, too strong, too exotic for her. He gave the assistant the Countess’s address and told him to send them there at once, but he did not like to put his name on the card.

**T**he next day he persuaded May to escape for a walk in the park. It was a sunny winter's day, with snow on the ground, and the cold air brought out the colour in May's lovely face. Newland felt proud to have such beauty walking next to him, and he felt his doubts and worries disappear.

They talked about the flowers he sent her every day, and he confessed that he had sent roses to the Countess. May was delighted he was being so kind to her cousin. Then Newland started talking about their own plans, their future, and Mrs Welland's insistence on a long engagement.

'But aren't we very happy as we are?' May asked, smiling brilliantly up at him.

'We could be even happier. We could be together all the time. We could be travelling.'

'That would be lovely,' she replied. 'But Mother would not understand us wanting to do things so differently from other couples.'

Suddenly he felt quite desperate. Would he ever be able to reach the real May Welland, through the wall of custom and social expectation which divided them? And what if, when he finally broke down the wall, there was nobody there?

'Do we have to do things the way everyone else does?' he cried, almost wildly. 'Can't you and I be different, May?'



*'But aren't we very happy as we are?' May asked.*

Her eyes rested on him with a bright, unclouded admiration. 'But we can't just run away together, can we?' she asked. 'You know, like people in books.'

'Why not - why not - why not?'

She looked a little bored by his insistence. 'I'm not clever enough to argue with you. But that sort of thing is rather - vulgar, isn't it?'

'Are you so much afraid of being vulgar?'

She was clearly shocked by his question. 'Of course I am - and so are you,' she replied sharply. Then, sure of having

found the right way to close the discussion, she went on light-heartedly: ‘Oh, did I tell you that I showed Ellen my ring? She thinks it’s the most beautiful one she ever saw ...’

**A**ll next day he felt depressed. He could see his life stretching tidily ahead of him, with no excitement, no unplanned events, and he was filled with unreasoning horror at the thought of doing the same thing every day at the same hour. The word ‘sameness!’ repeated itself maddeningly inside his head. In the afternoon Janey came to see him in his library. ‘Newland, Mother’s very angry,’ she said. ‘Angry? With whom? About what?’

‘Your friend Madame Olenska. She was at Mrs Struthers’ party last night, on a Sunday evening, Newland, when people are at church. She went with the Duke and Mr Julius Beaufort.’

When he heard the last name, a senseless anger took hold of Newland, but he controlled himself and just laughed. ‘Well, what of it? I knew she meant to go.’

Janey went pale. ‘You knew she meant to go and you didn’t try to stop her? To warn her?’

‘Stop her? Warn her?’ He laughed again. ‘I’m not engaged to the Countess Olenska!’ The words sounded strange in his ears.

‘Well, I think you’d better come down and speak to Mother.’

In the sitting room Mrs Archer was looking very anxious. ‘I’m so worried the van der Luydens will be offended,’ she said.

‘Why should they be offended?’ Newland asked.

‘Because she went to the house of that vulgar woman.’

‘Well, Mrs Struthers may be vulgar,’ said Newland, ‘but she has good music, and amuses people on Sunday evenings, when the whole of New York is dying of boredom.’

‘Good music? All I know is, there was a woman who got up on a table and sang the things they sing at the places you go to in Paris. There was smoking and champagne.’

'Well, that kind of thing happens in other places, and the world still goes on.'

At this moment in the argument the servant came to the door and announced, 'Mr Henry van der Luyden.'

A visit from this gentleman was such an unusual event that both ladies looked quite frightened, but Newland remained calm.

'Come in, sir,' he said, going forward to greet his relation. 'We were just talking about you – and the Countess Olenska.'

Mrs Archer went pale, and put a hand to her heart.

'Ah – a delightful woman,' replied Mr van der Luyden. 'I have just been to see her. The Duke told me to go and see how cleverly she's arranged her sitting room. And it's true – quite remarkable! I would take Louisa to see the Countess if the area were less unpleasant.' There was dead silence. Mr van der Luyden continued, 'The fact is, between ourselves, I wanted to give her a friendly warning about allowing the Duke, or anyone else, to carry her off to parties with him.'

'Has the Duke been carrying her off to parties?' asked Mrs Archer innocently.

'I'm afraid so, dear Adeline. But Madame Olenska was very grateful for my few words of guidance.'

And so Mrs Archer's anxiety about Ellen Olenska's behaviour was calmed, for the moment, at least.

**T**wo weeks later Newland was sitting doing nothing in the offices of Letterblair, Lamson and Low, the firm of lawyers whom he worked for, when he was called to the private office of the head of the firm, Mr Letterblair. The old man was clearly a little worried. It appeared that the Countess Olenska wished to get a divorce from her husband. Her family, especially old Mrs Manson Mingott, wanted to avoid the scandal this would cause. They had sent a number of papers to Mr Letterblair, asking that Newland Archer, as a future member of the family, should take on the case. They wanted Newland, on behalf of the Letterblair firm, to advise the Countess against divorce.

Newland was at first unwilling to get involved in the Countess's private life. But once he had read the papers, which included letters from her husband, he was so horrified by her suffering at the hands of the Count that he agreed to take on the case. He was determined to give her his support, no matter what she decided to do. So he made an appointment with her, at her house, in order to discuss the case.

## CHAPTER 4

### A SECOND VISIT TO THE COUNTESS

**A**s Newland walked up Fifth Avenue after dinner that evening, he could see a number of carriages outside the Chiverses', where they were having a party for the Duke. He passed the Beauforts' house, and saw Julius himself come out and drive away in his carriage.

'Probably on his way to that new lady friend of his,' thought Newland. All of New York knew about Beaufort's mistresses, and Miss Fanny Ring was the latest in a long line.

He walked on into the narrow street where the Countess lived, surrounded by the houses of painters and writers. He and his family belonged to the part of New York society that believed in the importance of literature and art, but fashionable and wellborn families rarely mixed socially with artists. Newland himself knew many artists and musicians, whom he met in the little bars and clubs which were beginning to open in the back streets, but he would never expect to meet them in a gentleman's house. He imagined that the Countess, whose house was full of books, was used to a much more open society, where writers and artists came and went freely, and that this might be one of the things she would miss from her old life.

He reached her house and was let in by the servant girl, who was smiling mysteriously. In the hall was a fur-lined coat and a silk opera-hat with the letters J.B. in gold on it; it was clear that Julius Beaufort was visiting Madame Olenska. Newland was so angry that he almost left at once. But then he remembered he had not told the Countess he wished to see her privately, so he could not blame her for opening her doors to other visitors.

In the sitting room Beaufort was standing in front of the fire, smiling down at the Countess. She was half lying on a sofa, her head supported on one hand; her sleeve had fallen away to leave her white arm visible up to the elbow. Instead of the usual close-fitting, all-covering silk dress which New York ladies wore when receiving evening visitors, she was wearing a long dress of soft red material, with black fur around the neck and down the front. The effect was certainly pleasing.

'Well, well – three whole days at Skuytercliff!' Beaufort was saying in his loud voice as Newland entered. Skuytercliff was the van der Luydens' country house, just outside New York, and it seemed the Countess was invited there. 'It's a pity – you'll miss the musical evening I've planned for you on Sunday.'

She held out her hand to greet Newland, as she replied to Beaufort. 'Ah, that does tempt me! Except for the other evening at Mrs Struthers', I've not met a single artist since I've been here.'

'I know one or two painters, very nice people, who I could bring to see you if you'd allow me,' said Newland daringly.

'Painters in New York?' asked Beaufort with a laugh. He gave the impression there were none, since he did not buy their pictures. And Madame Olenska said to Newland, 'That would be delightful. But I was thinking of singers, actors, musicians. My husband's house was always full of them.'

Newland felt confused – how could she speak so calmly of her married life? But he was pleased to see she wanted to speak to him privately, because she made it clear to Beaufort that he must leave. And a few minutes later they were alone together.

'So you care for painting, then?' she began by asking.

'Oh yes, enormously. When I'm in Paris or London, I never miss a show. I try to see all the new pictures.'

'My life used to be full of such things too. But now I want to throw off my old life, to become just like everybody else here.'

Newland reddened. ‘You’ll never be like everybody else.’

‘Ah, don’t say that! If you knew how I hate to be different!’ Her face looked dark and sad as she spoke.

He waited a moment and cleared his throat. ‘I know you want – a divorce. Mr Letterblair told me. That’s why I’ve come. You see, I’m in the firm.’

Her eyes brightened. ‘You mean you can manage it for me? I can talk to you instead of to Mr Letterblair? Oh, that will be so much easier! You’ll help me, won’t you?’

‘First ...’ he hesitated, ‘perhaps I ought to know a little more.’

She seemed surprised. ‘You’ve read the papers? You know about my husband’s mistresses? What could be worse than that? Our church allows divorce in such cases.’

‘That’s true, but ...’ Newland was thinking of a letter from the Count he had read, accusing his wife of having had an affair with his secretary. How much truth was there in that? Only Ellen could tell. ‘Of course, you know that if your husband chooses to fight the case, as he threatens to, he can say things ...’

‘Yes?’

‘Things that ... that might be – disagreeable – to you, and say them publicly – even if they aren’t true.’

‘What harm could such accusations, even if he made them publicly, do me here in New York?’

Newland thought, ‘She still knows so little about us!’ He tried to explain. ‘This is a very small world, compared to the one you’ve lived in. Our ideas about marriage and divorce are particularly old-fashioned, especially if the woman has ... put herself, by some unusual behaviour, in a position where – where offensive accusations can be made against her.’

Her head bent down low, and Newland waited, hoping desperately for a little anger, or at least just a word to tell him that no accusation would be true. No word came.

A clock ticked softly in a corner, and the whole room seemed to be waiting silently with Newland.

'Yes,' she whispered at last. 'That's what my family say. And you're one of them, or will be soon. Do you share their view?'

He looked away from her for a moment. How could he say, 'Yes, if what your husband says is true'?

Instead he said gently, 'Is a divorce really worth it, when there's the possibility – the certainty – of a lot of unpleasantness?'

'But my freedom – isn't that worth it?'

'It's my business, you know, to help you to see these things as the people who are fondest of you see them.' He was filling the silence with meaningless talk. He could do nothing else, since she would not or could not say the one word that would have cleared the air, and told him the truth.

Suddenly she stood up. 'Very well, I will do what you wish,' she said.

The blood rushed to his face, and he caught her hands in his. 'I ... I do want to help you,' he said.

'You do help me. Good night, my cousin.'

He bent and kissed her hands, which were cold and lifeless. When she took them away, he turned to the door, found his coat and hat in the hall, and ran out into the winter night, bursting with unspoken words.

**A** week later Newland was at Wallack's theatre, watching one of that season's most popular plays. He had seen it several times, and one particular scene was his favourite. He was watching it now. In a room, two lovers said goodbye, sadly, almost wordlessly, and the man started towards the door. The woman turned away from him to the fireplace and looked down into the fire. She was wearing a long grey dress with long black ribbons falling down her back. At the door her lover turned for one last look at her; then he walked quietly back, lifted one of the ribbons, kissed it, and left the room without her hearing him or changing her position. And on this silent parting the curtain fell.

Newland thought this as fine as anything he had ever seen in the theatres of Paris and London. The silence and the dumb misery of the lovers' goodbye moved him greatly. And it reminded him – he could not have said why – of his goodbye to Madame Olenska after their conversation a week earlier.

When he had left her, he had the feeling that Count Olenski's accusation was almost certainly true. Ellen was young, she was frightened, she was desperate – what more natural than that she should be grateful to her rescuer? The pity was that, in the law's eyes and the world's, one affair with the secretary made her as wicked as her husband, with his many mistresses. And Newland had explained to her that simple, kind-hearted New York was exactly the place where she could least hope for understanding.

Having to make these facts plain to her, and watching her miserable acceptance of them, had been extremely painful to him. He was glad that he alone knew her secret, which would have horribly embarrassed her relations. And when he told her family she had decided not to ask for a divorce, they were all very grateful to him for sparing them so much unpleasantness.

These thoughts reminded him so strongly of his last talk with Madame Olenska that, as the curtain fell on the lovers' parting, his eyes filled with tears and he stood up to leave the theatre. In doing so, he saw Madame Olenska in a box with the Beauforts and some other people. He had tried to avoid meeting her socially, but now their eyes met, and as Mrs Beaufort waved to him to join them, it was impossible to refuse.

He greeted the Beauforts, but soon found himself sitting beside the Countess. She turned and spoke to him in a low voice.

'Do you think,' she asked, looking towards the stage, 'the lover will send her a bunch of yellow roses tomorrow morning?'

Newland reddened and his heart jumped in surprise. He had visited her only twice and each time had sent her yellow

roses, but without giving his name. She had never mentioned them before. Now the fact that she knew he had sent them, and connected them to the scene they had just watched, filled him with pleasure.

‘I was thinking of that too,’ he said.

To his surprise she blushed, and said after a pause, ‘What do you do when May is away?’

‘I get on with my work,’ he replied, a little annoyed by the question. The Wellands always spent February in Florida, as their doctor considered the warm weather there necessary for Mr Welland’s chest, and they were there now. Newland had realized there was no chance of persuading them to break the habit of a lifetime, so he had not tried. He would have liked to go with them, but he too was tied by custom and habit – no serious-minded young men took holidays in mid-winter.

He was conscious Madame Olenska was looking at him. ‘I understand – that you were right about the divorce,’ she said a little breathlessly. ‘But sometimes – life is difficult.’

‘I know.’

‘And I wanted to tell you that I do feel you were right, and that I’m grateful to you.’ She lifted her opera-glasses quickly to her eyes as she heard Beaufort coming to sit next to her.

Newland stood up, and left the box and the theatre.

The day before, he had received a letter from May, in which she had asked him to be kind to Ellen in her absence. ‘She likes and admires you so much, and although she doesn’t show it, she’s very lonely and unhappy. You’re almost the only person in New York who can talk to her about what she really cares for.’

His wise May – how he loved her for that letter! But he did not want, as an engaged man, to be too obviously the Countess’s defender and companion. She could probably take care of herself better than May imagined – she had several gentlemen around her who would be only too glad to be of assistance. But even so, he never saw her without feeling that, after all, May was right. Ellen Olenska was lonely and she was unhappy.

**T**he next morning Newland searched the flower shops for yellow roses, but found none. As a result of this search, he arrived late at the office, and noticed that his lateness made no difference at all to anyone. He was filled with sudden despair at the uselessness of his life. He was just one of the many young men in the old-fashioned law firms like Mr Letterblair's, who sat at their desks or simply read the newspapers for a certain number of hours every day. They didn't need to earn money, but it was thought that young men should have something to do, and the law, being a profession, was considered to be more suitable work for a gentleman than business. Few of them had any ambition, and over many of them the grey dullness of an empty life was already spreading.

It made Newland cold with fear to think it might be spreading over him too. 'I'll never do anything worthwhile!' he thought angrily. 'And my interest in books and paintings and music, my European travels – will I be able to keep any of that up when I'm married?' He thought about men he knew – men who in their younger days had been full of hopes and dreams, as he was now. 'And what happened to them?' he thought. 'Their lives became nothing more than one long, mindless, comfortable routine of dinners and visits and evening parties.'

From his office he sent a note to Madame Olenska, asking if he could call on her that afternoon, but he received no reply that day or the next. This unexpected silence made him unreasonably angry. On the third morning he received a note from her, and to his surprise it had been posted from Skuytercliff. It said:

*I ran away the day after I saw you at the theatre, and these kind friends are allowing me to stay here as long as I like. I wanted to be quiet, and think things over. I feel so safe here. I wish you were with us. Yours sincerely, Ellen Olenska*

'What is she running away from?' he wondered. 'And why

does she feel the need to be safe? However, she's certainly made an impression on the van der Luydens – they don't usually encourage their visitors to stay longer than a weekend.'

He felt disappointed that she was away. Then he remembered that he had an invitation from the Chiverses to spend this weekend with them at their country house, Highbank, which was not far from Skuytercliff. He wrote a hurried telegram and sent it off at once, accepting the invitation.

## CHAPTER 5

# MAY SURPRISES NEWLAND

**A**t Highbank Newland was a dutiful guest until lunch on Sunday, when he borrowed a carriage and drove over to Skuytercliff.

The van der Luydens' large country house never looked particularly welcoming, and now in the depths of winter it looked even less so. The servant who opened the door explained that Mrs van der Luyden and the Countess were at church. Newland said he would walk to the church to meet the ladies.

And as he walked along the path, he was delighted to see a figure in a red coat coming towards him. He hurried forward, and Madame Olenska stopped short with a smile of welcome.

'Ah, you've come!' she said, giving him her hand. 'Mrs van der Luyden has gone on to visit some friends, so I'm alone.'

The red coat made her look brilliantly pretty, like the Ellen of the old days. He replied, 'I came to see what you were running away from.'

Her smile disappeared, but she answered, 'You'll see soon.' She added, more cheerfully, 'What does it matter, now that you're here to protect me?'

The blood rose to his face and he caught the sleeve of her coat. 'Ellen, what is it? You must tell me.'

'Oh, let's run a race first! My feet are freezing!' And she ran away from him, her red coat bright against the snow. Newland started after her, and they met, laughing, under a tree.

She looked up at him and smiled. 'I knew you'd come.'

'That shows you wanted me to,' he replied, his heart

beating wildly with delight.

They walked along together. The ground seemed to sing under their feet, and there was a mysterious brightness in the air.

'May asked you to take care of me,' she said after a while.



*Ellen looked up at Newland and smiled. 'I knew you'd come.'*

'I didn't need any asking.'

'Ah – what a poor, helpless, defenceless thing you must all think I am! But women here seem not to feel the need.'

He lowered his voice to ask, 'What sort of need?'

'Ah, don't ask me! I don't speak your language.'

He stood still on the path, looking down at her. ‘What did I come for, if I don’t speak yours?’

‘Oh, my friend ...!’ She laid her hand lightly on his arm.

‘Ellen, why won’t you tell me what’s happened?’

‘I will tell you, but where? One can’t be alone for a minute in that enormous house, with servants always in and out of every room! Is there nowhere in an American house where one may be by oneself? You’re all so shy and yet so public at the same time.’

‘Ah, you don’t like us!’ said Newland sadly.

Just then they passed an ancient stone house, called the Patroon’s house, which the first owner of Skuytercliff had built and lived in, three hundred years before. The van der Luydens kept it to show to their visitors as a place of historical interest.

‘What luck!’ cried Ellen. ‘We can go in and have a quiet talk. Someone’s even lit a fire. No one will disturb us there.’

They went in and sat down by a bright fire.

‘When you wrote to me, you were unhappy,’ said Newland, watching her expressive face.

‘Yes, I was. But I can’t feel unhappy when you’re here.’

‘I shan’t be here very long.’ His lips felt stiff with the effort of saying just so much and no more.

‘I know. But I live in the moment when I’m happy. I don’t look ahead.’

The words stole through him like a temptation. He got up and stood looking out through the window, with his back to her. What if she had been running away from *him*, and she had waited to tell him until they were alone together in this secret place?

‘Ellen, please tell me. Tell me who you’re running away from.’

For a long moment she was silent, and in that moment Newland imagined her, almost heard her, stealing up behind him to throw her light arms around his neck. But while he waited, his whole mind and body ready for that wonderful

thing to happen, he saw a heavily-coated man walking along the path to the house. The man was Julius Beaufort.

‘Ah!’ said Newland, bursting into a laugh. ‘So that’s it?’

Madame Olenska ran to his side, slipping her hand into his, but when she saw Beaufort, her face went pale. ‘I didn’t know he was here,’ she whispered. Her hand still held Newland’s, but he drew away from her and, walking into the hall, threw open the door of the little house. ‘Come in, Beaufort, this way! Madame Olenska is expecting you!’ he said.

**D**uring his journey back to New York the next day, Newland thought bitterly of Beaufort. He was clearly the man Ellen was running away from. He was chasing her, and Julius Beaufort only ever had one purpose in mind when chasing pretty women.

The next two or three days went by very slowly. There were moments when Newland felt he was being buried alive under his future. He heard nothing from Ellen until the fourth evening, when a note from her arrived at his house. It said simply:

*Come late tomorrow. I must explain to you. Ellen*

The young man spent all night thinking about the note. There were several ways of answering it. The reply he finally decided on, at sunrise, was to pack a bag with some clothes and jump on a boat which was leaving that day for Florida.

**W**hen he walked down the sandy main street of St Augustine and saw May Welland standing there with the sun in her hair, he wondered why he had waited so long to come. Here was truth, here was reality, here was the life that belonged to him!

‘Newland – has anything happened?’ she asked.

‘Yes – I found I had to see you,’ he replied, and she blushed happily. They sat down on a bench under some orange trees, and he put his arm round her waist and kissed her. It was like drinking from a cool mountain stream on a hot summer’s day.

He explained to May's parents that he had come because he felt he might be getting a cold. Mr Welland understood all anxiety over health only too well, and insisted he should stay at least a week with them, to prevent any possible illness taking hold.

He walked and read and went boating with May in the warm Florida sunshine. All the time he was thinking about their wedding, which seemed unimaginably far away.

The day before he left, they were walking through the orange trees again, when suddenly he burst out, 'Can't you understand, May? I want to make our dreams real! I want you to be my wife, now rather than later, this year rather than next!'

For a moment May was silent. Then, clear-eyed, she looked straight at him. 'I'm not sure I *do* understand. Is it – is it because you're not certain of continuing to care for me?'

Newland was shocked into saying, 'My God – perhaps – I don't know!' Both were silent for a moment.

'If that is it – then, is there someone else? Let us talk honestly, Newland. I've felt a difference in you since our engagement was announced.'

'My dear, what madness!' he managed to say.

'It won't hurt us to talk about it. You could so easily have made a mistake – anyone can.'

'If I had made a mistake of the kind you suggest, is it likely I would be begging you to marry me sooner?'

She thought for a moment. 'Yes,' she said at last. 'You might want to decide the matter, once and for all.'

Her calm intelligence took his breath away, but he could see how painful this was for her. She continued, 'You know, a girl sees more than her parents imagine. I've always known there was someone in your past. I saw her once – her face was sad and I felt sorry for her – and I remembered that when we got engaged.'

'My dear child – is that all? If you only knew the truth!'

'Then there is a truth I don't know?'

'I mean, the truth about that old story.'

'But that's what I want to know. Newland, I couldn't build my happiness on a wrong done to another woman! I understand that when two people really love each other, they might have to go against public opinion. And if you feel yourself in any way – promised to that woman – and if there is any way you can keep your word – even by her getting a divorce, then, Newland, don't give her up because of me!'

He had never admired May so much as at that moment. How brave of her to speak so plainly, and how generous to offer to give him up to his former mistress! But with all her intelligence, she had not seen what was troubling him.

'There was no promise of the kind you think. But I love you for saying that. I mean, every woman's right to her freedom—' He stopped, surprised by the direction his thoughts were taking.

May turned her blushing face towards him, and as he bent to kiss her, he saw her eyes were full of happy tears. For a moment he had seen a woman who could think for herself, a woman who was prepared to break away from society's rules. But the next moment he was disappointed to see the old, dutiful May return. She seemed to be aware of his disappointment, but without knowing what to do about it. They walked silently home.

**T**wo days after his return to New York, Newland called on old Mrs Manson Mingott, to persuade her to use her influence with the Wellands about an early wedding date for him and May. She was amused by his urgency, and agreed to help. The Countess, who was visiting her grandmother, was also there, and listened thoughtfully to this conversation. Newland had a few minutes alone with her, when she walked with him to the front door.

'When can I see you?' he asked in a low voice.

'Whenever you like, but it must be soon if you want to see the little house again. I'm moving next week.'

For a moment he was back again in the exotic atmosphere of her sitting room. 'Tomorrow evening?' he asked.

'Tomorrow, yes, but come early. I'm going out later.'

**I**t was only half-past eight when he arrived at her house. In the sitting room he found Medora Manson, Ellen's aunt, who had just arrived back from a long trip to Cuba. She greeted him, and while they waited for Ellen to join them, told him she had a letter from the Count to give to her niece. 'Yes, my poor, foolish Olenski,' she added, 'all he asks is to take her back as his wife!'

'Good God!' cried Newland, jumping up.

'You are horrified? Of course I do not defend him. But just think what she is giving up if she stays here! Palaces, jewels, art, priceless furniture, music, brilliant conversation – forgive me, my dear young man, but one does not find that here. The truth is, Mr Archer, I have heard of your influence over dear Ellen, and I hoped I might count on your support – to persuade you ...'

'That she ought to go back? I would rather see her dead!' cried the young man violently.

'Ah,' said Mrs Manson calmly. 'Am I to understand you prefer that?' She pointed to a huge bunch of expensive flowers on the sofa, with Beaufort's card just visible. 'After all, marriage is marriage ... and my niece is still a wife ...'

At that moment Ellen appeared in the doorway.

'We were saying, my dear,' smiled Mrs Manson, 'here is something a fond admirer has sent you.'

Madame Olenska turned, saw the flowers, and a silent anger seemed to run through her. She rang for her servant and told her to take them to a neighbour who was ill. 'Take them at once!' she cried. 'I don't want them in the house!' She turned to Newland. 'Mr Archer, my aunt is just leaving. Would you take her to the carriage? I'll leave myself when the carriage comes back.'

When he returned, the Countess was sitting by the fire.

'Your aunt thinks you will go back to your husband,' he said.

'Many cruel things have been believed of me.'

‘Oh Ellen – forgive me – I’m a fool!’

‘I know you have your own troubles. You think the Wellands are unreasonable about your marriage, and of course I agree with you.’ He realized she was changing the subject.

‘Yes. I went south to ask May to shorten the engagement. We had an honest talk, our first, in fact. She thinks my impatience is a bad sign. She thinks it means I want to marry her at once to get away from someone whom I – care for more.’

‘But if she thinks that, why isn’t she in a hurry too?’

‘Because she’s not like that. She’s so much nobler. She has offered to give me up, for the other woman.’

Madame Olenska looked into the fire for some time. Down the quiet street Newland could hear her horses returning.

‘That is noble,’ she said.

‘Yes. But I don’t intend to marry anyone else.’

‘Ah.’ There was another long pause. ‘This other woman – does she love you?’

‘Oh, there’s no other woman. I mean, the person May was thinking of was never—’

‘Then why, after all, are you in such a hurry to marry?’

‘There’s your carriage,’ said Newland.

‘Yes, I should go. I am expected at Mrs Struthers’. I must go where I am invited, or I shall be too lonely.’ She smiled a little.

Newland did not want her to leave. ‘May guessed the truth,’ he said. ‘There *is* another woman – but not the one she thinks.’

She did not answer, and did not move. He sat down beside her and took her hand. But she jumped up and freed her hand.

‘Don’t make love to me! Too many men have done that!’

It was the bitterest thing she could have said to him.

‘I have never made love to you, and I never shall. But you

are the woman I would have married if it had been possible.'

'But it's you who've made it impossible!' she cried.

He stared at her, his mind full of darkness in which there was a single point of blinding light.

'I've made it impossible?'

'You, you, *you*!' Her lips were trembling. 'You made me give up the idea of divorce, to spare my family the publicity, the scandal. And because my family was going to become your family, I did what you told me. I did it for you, and for May!'

'Good God!' he cried. 'And I thought ... oh, don't ask me what I thought!'

She blushed deeply. 'But I do ask you.'

'There were accusations in your husband's letter ...'

'I had nothing to fear from that letter, absolutely nothing! All I feared was to bring scandal on the family, on you and May.'

'Good God!' he cried again, putting his face in his hands.

The silence that followed lay on them like a gravestone, and it seemed to Newland that nothing would ever lift that load from his heart. He did not move, or raise his head from his hands.



*'You are the woman I would have married if it had been possible,' said Newland.*

'At least I loved you!' he said, out of the darkness.

On the other side of the room, he heard a sound like a child crying softly. He ran to her.

'Ellen! What madness is this? Why are you crying? Nothing's done that can't be undone. I'm still free, and you're going to be.' He had her in his arms, her face like a wet flower at his lips. Why, oh why, had he stood for five minutes arguing with her across the room, when just touching her made everything so simple?

She gave him back all his kiss, but after a moment he felt her stiffening in his arms, and she put him aside.

'Ah, my poor Newland – I suppose this had to happen. But it doesn't change things in the least.'

'It changes the whole of life for me.'

'No, it mustn't, it can't. You're engaged to May Welland, and I'm married to the Count.'

Newland stood up. 'Nonsense! It's too late for that sort of thing. We've no right to lie to other people or ourselves.'

'You say that because it's the easiest thing to say at the moment. In reality it's too late to do anything but what we'd both decided on. You see, from the very beginning I realized how kind, how noble you were. Very good people don't impress me – I feel they've never been tempted. But you know, you understand, you've felt the world outside, tempting you with its golden hands – and yet you won't accept happiness bought with cruelty. That's better, nobler, than anything I've ever known.'

She spoke quietly, without tears, and each word burnt its way into Newland's heart. 'Don't let us undo what you've done!' she cried. 'I can't go back now to that other way of thinking. I can't love you unless I give you up.'

They remained, facing each other, divided by the distance her words had created. Suddenly, he was angry. 'And Beaufort? Is he to replace me? You're seeing him this evening, aren't you?'

'I shall not go out this evening,' she said calmly.

'You tell me you're lonely – I've no right to keep you from your friends,' he said bitterly.

'I shan't be lonely now. I *was* lonely, I *was* afraid. But the emptiness and darkness are gone now.'

He turned away, with a sense of complete exhaustion.

At that moment the doorbell rang, and a minute later the servant came in with a telegram for the Countess. It said:

GRANDMOTHER'S TELEGRAM SUCCESSFUL. PARENTS AGREE WEDDING AFTER  
EASTER. TOO HAPPY FOR WORDS AND LOVE YOU DEARLY. YOUR GRATEFUL  
MAY

**H**alf an hour later, when Newland unlocked his own front door, he found a similar telegram waiting for him in the hall, saying:

PARENTS AGREE WEDDING TUESDAY AFTER EASTER GRACE CHURCH. SO HAPPY.

LOVE MAY

He started laughing wildly and could not stop. He was making so much noise that his sister came out of her bedroom.

‘Newland, whatever is the matter? It’s very late!’

‘Nothing’s the matter, Janey, except that I’m going to be married in a month!’

Janey fell on his neck and pressed him to her thin chest. ‘Oh, Newland, how wonderful! I’m so glad! But why do you keep on laughing? Do stop, or you’ll wake Mother.’

## CHAPTER 6

# THE WEDDING AND BEYOND

The sun shone weakly down on Grace Church, and a light spring wind blew dust everywhere. Inside the church almost every seat was taken, and in the centre stood the bridegroom and his best man, waiting for the bride to arrive.

Newland was familiar with the preparations necessary for a fashionable New York wedding, as he had often been a best man himself at his friends' weddings. For his own wedding he had obeyed all his best man's commands, following his instructions down to the last detail. It was easier to obey blindly than to think, to doubt, to question. 'I've sent flowers to the eight bridesmaids,' he thought, 'I've written thank-you letters for the wedding presents, paid for the use of the church, and made arrangements for the honeymoon. I think I've done everything.'

'Got the ring all right?' whispered his best man, looking pale. He was feeling the heaviness of the responsibility.

Newland did what he had seen so many bridegrooms do – feel quickly in a jacket pocket – and found the little gold ring, which had *Newland to May, April 22, 1874* written inside.

He looked at the faces he knew so well in the seats all around him. 'How like a first night at the opera,' he thought, 'waiting for the curtain to rise!' He saw his mother and Janey, crying with happiness, he saw Julius Beaufort next to his beautiful wife, he saw Lawrence Lefferts, the expert on 'form'. He wondered how many social mistakes Lefferts' eager eyes would discover during the wedding, and then he suddenly remembered that he too had once thought such

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arm – *give her your arm!*’ whispered the best man, and once more Newland came back to reality. ‘What was it that set me dreaming this time?’ he wondered. Perhaps it was seeing a dark-haired lady at the back of the church, who, when she turned round, was laughably unlike the person he was thinking of.



*The bride, on her father's arm, was already halfway towards him.*

And now he and his wife were getting into the carriage. She turned to him with a brilliant smile and they held hands.

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**A**fter their stay at the Patroon's house, they sailed to Europe to continue their honeymoon. They spent June in Paris, so that May could order new clothes, July in the Swiss mountains, and August in a quiet little town on the northern French coast. Their final two weeks were in London, so that Newland could order *his* clothes. They did not go to the Italian Lakes – thinking about it, Newland could not imagine his bride there. In fact, travelling interested her even less than he had expected.

Newland had decided to behave to May exactly as all his friends behaved to their wives, and to put away his thoughts about freedom for women. There was no use giving freedom to a wife who had not the smallest idea that she was *not* free. He knew that the fineness of May's feeling for him, and her nobility of character, made her a wife of whom he could be proud, but her insistence on obeying the rules of society worried him.

In London, at a dinner party given by some friends of Mrs Archer's, the Carfrys, they met a young Frenchman called Monsieur Rivière. Newland liked him, in spite of his thin, ugly face, and had an interesting conversation about books with him. Later, Newland suggested to May that they could invite the Frenchman to dinner, to continue the conversation.

May was surprised. 'But he's almost like the Carfrys' servant! They pay him to teach French to their nephew! Why would we invite *him* to dinner? Surely not, Newland!'

Newland did not protest, because he did not feel strongly enough about it. He realized, with a sudden cold feeling inside him, that in future many problems would be solved for him in this way, and he tried to find comfort in the old saying that the first six months of marriage were always the most difficult.

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'Where's the Countess Olenska?' she demanded.

'Walking down to the beach, madam,' replied the servant.

The old lady turned to Newland. 'Be a good boy – run and fetch her for me,' she said. He stood up in a kind of dream – he was seeing the little fire-lit sitting room again, and hearing the sound of Ellen's horses returning down the deserted street.

He walked down to the beach, and stopped before he reached the sand. There, in front of him, on a long grassy piece of land, was a wooden summerhouse, with windows and doors open to the warm summer air. Inside the summerhouse stood a lady, looking out to sea. 'Have I just woken up?' wondered Newland. That figure from the past was a dream, and the reality was what was waiting for him away from the beach – his young wife, dinner with the Wellands, summer with the Wellands ... 'What am I? Just a son-in-law and a husband,' he thought.

The figure in the summerhouse had not moved. For a long moment the young man stood there, watching the sailing boats out at sea. The lady seemed to be held by the same sight.

'She doesn't know – she hasn't guessed,' he thought. 'Would I know if she came up behind me, I wonder?' And suddenly he told himself, 'If she doesn't turn before the red sail crosses in front of that rock, I'll go back up to the house.'

The boat with the red sail was moving out to sea with the tide. It moved slowly towards the rock, and then passed it. Newland waited until the sail was a long way past the rock, but still the figure in the summerhouse did not move.

He turned and walked up the hill to the house.

**A**s they drove home in the gathering darkness, May said, 'I'm sorry you didn't find Ellen. I'd have liked to see her again. But perhaps she no longer cares for her friends. I mean, why give up New York and go to Washington? I wonder if she would be happier with her husband, after all.'

Newland burst into an angry laugh. ‘That’s cruel of you – you know she would suffer terribly if she went back to him!’

‘It’s a pity she ever married a foreigner, then,’ said May calmly, sounding very like her mother. Newland did not reply.

That evening, at May’s parents’ home, he felt it was the Welland house, and the life he was expected to live in it, that had become unreal, while the short scene at the beach was as close to him as the blood in his body.

All that night he lay awake at May’s side, watching the moonlight on the carpet, and thinking of Ellen Olenska.

## CHAPTER 7

# NEWLAND IN BOSTON

The next day Newland told May he was going to see about buying a new horse for her carriage, and drove north to Portsmouth. He found the Blenkers' house, but Ellen was not there. The Blenkers told him she had received a telegram the day before, and gone to Boston, where she would be staying at the Parker House Hotel.

When he returned to Newport, he told May he had urgent business in Boston. He was ashamed of the way he was able to lie so easily, but it had to be done. He travelled all night, by boat and train, and arrived in a hot and dirty midsummer Boston.

After having breakfast at a hotel, he sent a messenger to the Parker House Hotel with a note for Countess Olenska. The man returned after ten minutes. ‘The lady was out, sir,’ he said.

‘It must be a mistake!’ thought Newland. ‘How could she be out so early? How stupid of me not to send a note earlier! ’

He went out, and as he started to walk across the park towards Ellen’s hotel, he saw her, sitting on a bench under a tree. Her head was bent low, and she looked quite miserable. He came a step nearer, and she turned and saw him.

‘Oh!’ she said, her face breaking into a slow smile of wonder and happiness, and she made room for him on the bench.

‘I’m here on business – just got here,’ Newland explained. ‘But what on earth are *you* doing here?’ He had really no idea what he was saying; he seemed to be shouting to her across endless distances; he thought she might disappear again

before he could reach her.

'I'm here on business too,' she answered.

'You do your hair differently now,' he said, his heart beating wildly as he looked at her.

'Differently? No, it's the best I can do without my servant.'

'You didn't bring her? You're staying alone at the hotel?'

She looked at him, with a little challenging smile in her eyes. 'Does that seem so dangerous to you?'

'No, not dangerous, but—'

'But unusual? I see, I suppose it is. I hadn't thought of it, because I've just done something so much more unusual.' Her eyes still watched him with a little challenge. 'I've just refused to take back some money – which belonged to me.'

Newland jumped up and moved a step or two away. Then he came back and stood in front of her.

'Someone – has come here to meet you – with this offer?'

'Yes.'

'And you refused, because of the conditions?'

'I refused,' she said after a moment.

He sat down by her again. 'What were the conditions?'

'Oh, they were not demanding. Just to sit at the head of his dinner table now and then.'

There was another silence. Newland was searching for the right words. 'He wants you back – at any price.'

'A considerable price. At least, it's considerable for me.'

'You came to Boston in order to meet him?'

She stared, and then laughed. 'Meet him – my husband? *Here?* He spends his summers in more fashionable places.'

'He sent someone to you, with a letter?'

'Not a letter, just a message. He hardly ever writes to me.'

Newland blushed, thinking of the accusation in the only letter he knew the Count had written to her. 'Why is that?'

'Why should he write? What are secretaries for?'

The young man's blush deepened, and he was about to ask,

'Did he send his secretary, the one you ran away with?' But he stopped, in order to spare Ellen the embarrassment of replying.

'The messenger has insisted on waiting until this evening,' added Madame Olenska, smiling, 'in case I change my mind.'

'And you came out here to think things over?'

'I came out for a breath of air. The hotel's too hot. I'm taking the afternoon train back to Portsmouth.'

They sat silent, not looking at each other. Finally she turned her eyes again to his face and said, 'You've not changed.'

He felt like saying, 'I had, until I saw you again,' but instead he stood up suddenly and looked round at the untidy park.

'This is horrible. Why don't we go out in a boat? It will be cooler on the water. We could take the boat to Point Arley and back.' She looked up at him hesitatingly and he went on, 'There won't be many people on the boat. My train for New York doesn't leave until the evening. Why shouldn't we?' Suddenly he broke out, 'Haven't we done all we can?'

'Oh!' she whispered. 'You mustn't say things like that to me.'

'I'll say anything you like; or nothing. What harm can it do to anybody? All I want is to listen to you.'

She took a little gold watch from her pocket.

'Oh, don't think about time!' he cried. 'Give me the day! Come now, at once! It's a hundred years since we last met – it may be another hundred before we meet again.'

Her anxious eyes were on his face. 'Why didn't you come down to the beach to fetch me, the day I was at Grandmother's?'

'Because you didn't look round. I wanted you to look round.' He laughed at the childishness of his behaviour.

'But I *deliberately* didn't look round. I knew it was you. I recognized your carriage when you drove up to the house. So I went down to the beach.'

'To get away from me as far as you could?'

She repeated softly, 'To get away from you as far as I could.'

He laughed again. 'Well, you see it's no use. I may as well tell you that I came here to find you. And I *have* found you. But look here, we must start or we'll miss our boat.'

They went back to the hotel, so that Madame Olenska could leave a note for the messenger. While Newland waited for her, he watched the stream of people passing in and out of the hotel. 'They all look so like each other,' he thought. And then suddenly came a face which was different from the rest – the face of a young man, pale with heat, or worry, or both. 'Probably a foreign businessman,' thought Newland, and then forgot about him.

When she came out, they took a taxi to the harbour, and were soon on a boat moving smoothly out into the open sea. As they left the city behind them, it seemed to Newland they were leaving their old familiar world behind as well. Were they starting on some voyage from which they might never return? He was afraid to ask Madame Olenska if she felt the same – she trusted him to remain calm and not speak of his feelings. There had been days and nights when the memory of their kiss had burned on his lips, and the thought of her had run through him like fire. But now that she was beside him, they seemed to have reached the kind of deeper nearness that a touch or a word might destroy.

When they arrived at Point Arley, the hotel dining room was full of a noisy party of school-teachers on holiday, so Newland asked for a private room, with a view over the sea. There he and Madame Olenska sat down to their lunch, like two old friends who had so much to say to each other ...

They talked of all that had happened in the year and a half since they had met. They talked of ideas and social changes, the narrow minds of New Yorkers, and the reasons why she had decided to move to Washington.

'There are more varieties of people and of opinion there,' she said. 'Our New York friends seem to follow blindly the

old ideas from England. But it seems stupid to have discovered America only to make it into a copy of another country.'

'Ah, it's what I've always told you,' said Newland sadly. 'You don't like us. We're dull. We've no character, no colour. I wonder,' he broke out, 'why you don't go back to him?'

Her eyes darkened, and he expected an angry reply. But she sat in silent thought, and he grew frightened that she might answer that she wondered too.

At last she said, 'I believe it's because of you.'

Newland reddened, but dared not move or speak.

'At least,' she continued, 'it was you who made me understand that under the dullness there are things so fine and sensitive that even those I most cared for in my other life look cheap by comparison. For a long time I've hoped this chance would come – so that I could tell you how you've helped me, what you've made of me ...'

Newland broke in with a laugh. 'And what do you think you've made of *me*? I'm the man who married one woman because another woman told him to.'

'I thought – you promised – not to say such things!'

'Ah – how like a woman! None of you will accept a bad situation, or do anything about it!'

'Is it a bad situation – for May?' she asked in a low voice. 'Because that's what we've always got to think of, isn't it? That's what you've shown me.'

'I've shown you?' he echoed, looking blindly out at the sea.

'If it's not worthwhile,' she said painfully, 'to have given up our wishes, to save other people from misery, then everything I came home for, everything you've taught me, everything that makes my other life look so poor because no one there bothers about it – all these things are a pretence or a dream ...'



*'I believe it's because of you,' said Ellen Olenska.*

'And if it's not worthwhile,' he finished for her, 'there's no reason on earth why you shouldn't go back?'

Her eyes stared desperately into his. 'Oh, is there no reason?'

'Not if you were hoping for the success of my marriage,' he said fiercely. 'My marriage is certainly not worth staying for. Well, what do you expect? You let me see a real life, just for a moment, and at the same time asked me to go on with a false one. It's more than any human being can bear – that's all.'

'Oh, don't say that – when I'm bearing it!' she burst out, her eyes filling with tears.

Newland sat dumbly, staring at her. 'You too – oh, all this time, you too?' She did not answer, but let the tears run

down her face. He was thinking, with a strange sort of happiness, 'Now I shall never again feel completely alone.'

But after a moment he was in despair again. There they were, close together, yet so tied to their separate lives that they might as well be half a world apart.

'What's the use – when you will go back?' he cried out.

She sat without moving. 'Oh, I won't go yet!'

'Not yet? Some time, then? Some time in the future?'

At that she gave him her clearest look. 'I promise you, not as long as you can bear it. Not as long as we can look straight at each other like this.'

He turned to look out at the sea again. What her answer really said was, 'If you lift a finger, you'll drive me back to all the horrors you know of, and all the temptations you half guess.' The thought kept him to his side of the table, safely away from her.

'What a life for you!' he cried.

'Oh, it's bearable – as long as it's a part of yours.'

'And as long as mine's a part of yours?'

'Yes.'

'And that's to be all – for either of us?'

'Well, it is all, isn't it?'

At that he jumped up, forgetting everything but the sweetness of her face. She stood up too, and their hands met. They stood in that way for a long time, looking deep into each other's eyes, reading each other's hearts.

'Don't – don't be unhappy,' she said, with a break in her voice, as she drew her hands away.

And he answered, 'You won't go back – you won't go back?'

'I won't go back,' she said.

In silence they took the boat back to Boston harbour, and Newland left Madame Olenska at the Parker House Hotel.

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*May laid her hand on Newland's. 'Goodbye, dearest,' she said.*

## CHAPTER 9

# ELLEN RETURNS TO NEW YORK

The following evening Newland was waiting at Jersey City station for the Washington train. In his senseless schoolboy happiness he pictured Madame Olenska getting out of the train, then her arm in his as he guided her to the carriage, and then a journey that would go on for ever. He had so much to say to her!

The train came in, and he saw her pale face in the crowd of passengers. They reached each other, their hands met, and he drew her arm through his. ‘This way – I have the carriage,’ he said. After that it all happened as he had dreamed.

‘Do you know,’ he said, as they drove away from the station, ‘I almost couldn’t remember you? How can I explain? *Each time you happen to me all over again.*’

‘Oh, yes, I know! I know! It happens to me too!’

‘Ellen – Ellen – Ellen!’

She made no answer and he sat in silence, watching her as she looked out of the window. How little they knew of each other, after all! The precious moments were slipping away, but he had forgotten everything he meant to say.

‘What a pretty carriage!’ she said, suddenly turning her face from the window. ‘Is it May’s? She sent you to fetch me, then? How kind of her!’

Her mentioning May’s name made him angry, so he burst out, ‘Your husband’s secretary came to see me, you know.’

‘I’m not surprised. He’d met you in England, hadn’t he?’

‘Ellen – I must ask you one thing. Was it Rivière who helped you to get away – when you left your husband?’

‘Yes. I owe him a great debt,’ she replied calmly.

‘I think you’re the most honest woman I ever met!’

‘Oh no – but probably one of the least difficult.’

‘Well – you’ve had to look at things as they are.’

‘Yes – I’ve had to look at wickedness, it’s true.’

‘It hasn’t blinded you?’

‘It doesn’t blind one, but it dries up one’s tears.’

The answer seemed to come from depths of experience beyond Newland’s reach.

‘If you’re not blind, then, you must see this can’t last,’ he said. ‘Our being together – and not together.’

‘No. You shouldn’t have come today,’ and suddenly she turned, threw her arms around him and pressed her lips to his. In a moment she drew away, and they sat silent and unmoving, until Newland started speaking hurriedly.

‘Don’t be afraid of me. A stolen kiss isn’t what I want. Look, I’m not even trying to touch your sleeve. When we’re apart, and I’m looking forward to seeing you, every thought is burnt up in a great flame. But then you come and you’re so much more than I remembered, and what I want of you is so much more than an hour or two, with weeks of thirsty waiting between, that I can sit perfectly still beside you like this, just quietly trusting my dream to come true.’

For a moment she was silent. ‘What do you mean by trusting it to come true?’ she whispered.

‘Why – you know it will, don’t you?’

‘Your dream of you and me together?’ She burst into a sudden hard laugh. ‘You choose a good place to tell me about it!’

‘You mean, in my wife’s carriage? Shall we get out and walk? I don’t suppose you mind a little snow?’

She laughed again, more quietly. ‘No, I don’t want to walk, because I want to see my grandmother as soon as possible. We’ll sit quietly, and we’ll look, not at dreams, but at realities.’