"Couldn't we share him?" asked the girl. "He's such a little darling."

Ralph looked at her a moment; she was unexpectedly pretty. "You may have him altogether," he said.

The young lady seemed to have a great deal of confidence, both in herself and in others; but this abrupt generosity made her blush. "I ought to tell you that I am probably your cousin," she murmured, putting down the dog. "And here's another!" she added quickly, as the collie came up.

"Probably?" the young man exclaimed, laughing, "I supposed it was quite settled! Have you come with my mother?"

"Yes, half an hour ago."

"And has she deposited you and departed again?"

"No, she went straight to her room, and she told me that, if I should see you, I was to say to you that you must come to her there at a quarter to seven."

The young man looked at his watch. "Thank you very much; I shall be punctual." And then he looked at his cousin. "You are very welcome here," he went on. "I am delighted to see you."

She was looking at everything, with an eye that denoted quick perception —at her companion, at the two dogs, at the two gentlemen under the trees, at the beautiful scene that surrounded her. "I have never seen anything so lovely as this place," she said. "I have been all over the house; it's too enchanting."

"I am sorry you should have been here so long without our knowing it."

"Your mother told me that in England people arrived very quietly; so I thought it was all right. Is one of those gentlemen your father?"

"Yes, the elder one—the one sitting down," said Ralph.

The young girl gave a laugh. "I don't suppose it's the other. Who is the other?"

"He is a friend of ours—Lord Warburton."

"Oh, I hoped there would be a lord; it's just like a novel!" And then— "Oh you adorable creature!" she suddenly cried, stooping down and picking up the little terrier again.

She remained standing where they had met, making no offer to advance or to speak to Mr. Touchett, and while she lingered in the doorway, slim and charming, her interlocutor wondered whether she expected the old man to come and pay her his respects. American girls were used to a great deal of deference, and it had been intimated that this one had a high spirit. Indeed, Ralph could see that in her face.

"Won't you come and make acquaintance with my father?" he nevertheless ventured to ask. "He is old and infirm—he doesn't have his chair."

"Ah, poor man, I am very sorry!" the girl exclaimed, immediately moving forward. "I got the impression from your mother that he was rather—rather strong."

Ralph Touchett was silent a moment.

"She has not seen him for a year."

"Well, he has got a lovely place to sit. Come along, little dogs."

"It's a dear old place," said the young man, looking sidewise at his neighbour.

"What's his name?" she asked, her attention having reverted to the terrier again.

"My father's name?"

"Yes,"said the young lady, humorously; "but don't tell him I asked you."

They had come by this time to where old Mr. Touchett was sitting and he slowly got up from his chair to introduce himself.

"'My mother has arrived," said Ralph, "and ***this*** is Miss Archer." ***The old man*** placed his two hands ***on her*** shoulders, ***looked at her*** a moment with extreme benevolence, and then gallantly kissed her.

"It is a great pleasure to me to see you here; but I wish you had given us a chance to receive you."

"Oh, we were received," said the girl. "There were about a ***dozen*** servants in ***the*** hall. And there was ***an old*** woman curtsying at the gate."

"We can do better that that-if we have notice!" And the old man stood there, smiling, rubbing his hands, and slowly shaking his head at her. "*But* Mrs. Touchett doesn 't like receptions."

"She went straight to ***her room."***

"*Yes—and* ***locked herself*** in. ***She*** always does that. Well, *I* suppose I shall see her next week." And Mrs. Touchett's husband slowly resumed his former posture. .

"Before that," said Miss Archer. "She is coming down to *dinner—at* eighi o'clock. Don't you forget ***a*** quarter ***to seven,"*** she added, turning with a smile to Ralph.

"What is to happen at a quarter to seven?"

"I am to seen my mother," said Ralph.

"Ah, happy boy!" the old man murmured. "You must sit *down—you* ***must have some tea," he went on, addressing his wife's niece.***

"They gave me some tea in my room the moment I arrived," this young lady answered. "*I* am sorry you are out of health," she added, resting her eyes ***upon her venerable host.***

"Oh, I'm an old man, my dear! it's time for *one* ***to be old. But I shall be the better for having you*** here."

She had been looking all round her again—at the lawn, the great trees, the reedy, silvery Thames, the beautiful old house; and while engaged to this survey, she had also narrowly scrutinized her companions; a comprehensiveness of observation easily conceivable on the part of a young woman who was evidently both intelligent and excited. She had seated herself, and had put away the little dog; her white hands, in her lap, were folded upon her black dress; her head was erect, her eye brilliant, her flexible figure turned itself lightly this way and that, in sympathy with the alertness with which she evidently caught impressions. Her impressions were numerous, and they were all reflected in a clear, still smile. "I have never seen anything so beautiful as this," she declared.

"It's looking very well," said Mr. Touchett. "I know the way it strikes you. I have been through all that. But you are very beautiful yourself," he added with a politeness by no means crudely jocular, and with the happy consciousness that his advanced age gave him the privilege of saying such things—even to young girls who might possibly take alarm at them.

What degree of alarm this young girl took need not be exactly measured; she instantly rose, however, with a blush which was not a refutation.

"Oh yes, of course, I'm lovely!" she exclaimed quickly, with a little laugh. "How old is your house? Is it Elizabethan?"

"It's early Tudor," said Ralph Touchett.

She turned toward him, watching his face a little. "Early Tudor? How very delightful! And I suppose there are a great marry others."

"There are many much better ones."

"Don't say that, my son!" the old man protested. "There is nothing better than this."

"I have got a very good ones; I think in some respects it's rather better," said Lord Warburton, who as yet had not spoken, but who had kept an attentive

eye upon Miss Archer. He bent towards her a little, smiling; he had an excellent manner with women. The girl appreciated it in an instant; she had not forgotten that this was Lord Warburton. "I should like very much to show it to you," he added.

"Don't believe him," cried the old man; "don't look at it! It's a wretched old barrack;—not to be compared with this."

"I don't know—I can't judge," said the girl, smiling at Lord Warburton.

In this discussion, Ralph Touchett took no interest whatever; he stood with his hands in his pockets, looking greatly as if he should like to renew his conversation with his newfound cousin.

"Are you very fond of dogs?" he inquired, by way of beginning; and it was an awkward beginning for a clever man.

"Very fond of them indeed."

"You must keep the terrier, you know," he went on, still awkwardly.

"I will keep him while I am here, with pleasure."

"That will be for a long time, I hope."

"You are very kind. I hardly know. My aunt must settle that."

"I will settle it with her—at a quarter to seven." And Ralph looked at his watch again.

"I am glad to be here at all," said the girl.

"I don't believe you allow things to be settled for you."

"Oh yes; if they are settled as I like them."

"I shall settle this as I like it," said Ralph. "It's most unaccountable that we should never have known you."

"I was there—you had only to come and see me."

"There? Where do you mean?"

"In the United States: in New York, and Albany, and other places."

"I have been there—all over, but I never saw you. I can't make it out."

Miss Archer hesitated a moment.

"It was because there had been some disagreement between your mother and my father, after my mother's death, which took place when I was a child. In consequence of it, we never expected to see you."

"Ah, but I don't embrace all my mother's quarrels—Heaven forbid!" the young man cried. "You have lately lost your father?" he went on, more gravely.

"Yes; more than a year ago. After that my aunt was very kind to me; she came to see me, and proposed that I should come to Europe."

"I see," said Ralph. "She has adopted you."

"Adopted me?" The girl stared, and her blush came back to her, together with a momentary look of pain, which gave her interlocutor some alarm. He had underestimated the effect of his words. Lord Warburton, who appeared constantly desirous of a nearer view of Miss Archer, strolled toward the two cousins at the moment, and as he did so, she rested her startled eyes upon him. "Oh, no; she has not adopted me," she said. "I am not a candidate for adoption."

"I beg a thousand pardons," Ralph murmured. "I mean—I meant—" He hardly knew what he meant.

"You meant she has taken me up. Yes; she likes to take people up. She has been very kind to me; but," she added, with a certain visible eagerness of desire to be explicit, "I am very fond of my liberty."

"Are you talking about Mrs. Touchett?" the old man called out from his chair. "Come here, my dear, and tell me about her. I am always thankful for information."

The girl hesitated a moment, smiling.

"She is really very benevolent," she answered, and then she went over to her uncle, whose mirth was excited by her words.

Lord Warburton ***was*** left standing with Ralph Touchett, to whom in a ***moment he said: "You wished awhile ago to see my idea of an interesting woman. There it is!"***

เนื้อความต่อไปนี้ตัดตอนมาจากบทที่ 18 เป็นตอนที่ อิซาเบล อาร์เชอร์ พบกับ มาดาม เมิร์ล ผู้ที่ทำให้ชะตาชีวิตของเธอต้องเปลี่ยนแปลงไป

It had been occurred to Ralph that under the circumstances Isabel's parting with Miss Stackpole might be of a slightly embarrassed nature, and he went down to the door of the hotel in advance of his cousin, who after a slight delay followed, with the traces of an unaccepted remonstrance, as he thought, in her eyes. The two made the journey to Gardencourt in almost unbroken silence, and the servant who met them at the station had no better news to give them of ***Mr. Touchetta fact which caused Ralph in congratulate himself afresh on Sir Matthew Hope's having promised to come down in the five o'clock train and spend the night. Mrs.Touchettt, he learned, on reaching home, had been constantly with the old man, and was with him at that moment; and this fact made Ralph say*** to himself ***that, after all, what*** his mother wanted was ***simply opportunity. The finest natures were those that shone on large occasions.*** Isabel ***went to her own room, noting, throughout the house, that perceptible hush which precedes a crisis. At the end of an hour, however, she came downstairs in search of her aunt, whom she wished to ask about Mr. Touchett. She went in to the*** library, ***but Mrs. Touchett was not there, and as the weather,*** which ***had*** been ***damp and chill, was now altogether spoiled, it was not probable that she had gone for her usual walk in the grounds. Isabel was on the point of ringing to send an inquiry to her room, when her attention was taken by an unexpected sound-he sound of low music proceeding apparently from the drawing-room.***

She knew that her aunt never touched the piano, and the musician was therefore probably Ralph, who played for his *own* amusement. That he should have resorted to this recreation *at* the present time indicated apparently that his anxiety about his father had been relieved; so that Isabel took her way to the *drawing*-room *with* much alertness. The drawing-room *at* Gardencourt was an apartment of great distances, and as the piano was placed at the end of a furthest removed from the door at which Isabel entered, her arrival was not noticed by the person seated before the instrument. This person was neither Ralph nor his mother, it was a lady whom Isabel immediately saw to be a stranger to herself, although her *back was presented to the door. This back—an ample and well-dressed one—* Isabel contemplated for some moments in surprise. The lady was of course a visitor who had arrived during her absence, and who had *not been* mentioned by either of the servants-one of them her aunt's maid-of whom she had had speech since her return. Isabel had already learned, however, that the British *domestic is not effusive,.* and she was particularly conscious of having been treated with dryness by her aunt's maid, whose offered assistance the *young* lady *from Albanyversed, as young ladies are in Albany, in the very meta- physics of the toilet—had perhaps* made too light of. The arrival of a visitor *was far* from disagreeable to Isabel; she had not yet divested herself of a youthful impression *that each new acquaintance would exert some momentous influence upon her life.* By the time she had made these reflections *she became aware that the lady at the piano* played remarkably well. She was playing something of *Beethoven's—Isabel* knew not what, but she recognized Beethovenand she touched the piano softly and discreetly, but with evident skill. Her touch was that of an artist; Isabel sat *down noiselessly on the nearest chair and waited till the end of the piece. When it* was finished she felt it strong desire to thank the player, and rose from her seat to

do so, *while at the same* time *the* lady at *the* piano turned quickly *round, as if she* had *become aware of her presence.*

"That is very beautiful, and your playing makes it move beautiful still," said Isabel, *with all the young radiance with which she usually uttered a truthful* rapture.

"You don't think *I* disturbed Mr. Touchettt, *then?" the musician answered, as sweetly as this compliment deserved. "The house is so large, and his room so far away, that I thought I might venture--especially as I played just— just du dout des doigts."*

"She is a Frenchwoman," Isabel said to herself; "she says that as if she were French." And this supposition made the stranger more interesting to our speculative heroine. "I hope my uncle is doing well," Isabel added, "I should think that to hear such lovely music as that would really make him feel better."

The lady gave a discriminating smile.

"I am afraid there are moments in life when even Beethoven has nothing to say to us. We must admit, however, that they are our worst moments."

"I am not in that state now," said Isabel. "On the contrary, I should be so glad if you would play something more."

"If it will give you pleasure-ost willingly." And this obliging person took her place again, and struck a few chords, while struck a few chords, while Isabel Isabel sat down nearer the instrument. Suddenly the stranger stopped, with her hands stopped, with her hands on the keys, half her hands on the keys, half turning and looking over her shoulder at the girl. She was forty years old, and she was not pretty; but she had a delightful expression. "Excuse me," she said; "but are you the niece--the young American ?"

"I am my aunt's niece," said Isabel, with nativé.

The lady at the piano sat still a moment longer, looking over her shoulder with her charming smile.

"That's very well," she said, "we are compatriots."

And then she began to play.

"Ah, then she is not French," Isabel murmured; and as the opposite supposition had made her interesting, it might have seemed that this revelation would have diminished her effectiveness. But such was not the fact; for Isabel, as she listened to the music, found much stimulus to conjecture in the fact that an American should so strongly resemble a foreign woman.

Her companion played in the same manner as before, softly and solemnly, and while she played the shadows deepened in the room. The autumn twilight gathered in, and from her place Isabel could see the rain, which had now begun in earnest, washing the cold-looking lawn, and the wind shaking the great trees. At last, when the music had ceased, the lady got up, and, coming to her auditor, smiling before Isabel had time to thank her again, said: "I am very glad you have come back; I have heard a great deal about you."

Isabel thought her a very attractive person; but she nevertheless said; with a certain abruptness, in answer to this speech: "From whom have you heard about me?"

The stranger hesitated a single moment, and then—"From your uncle," she answered, "I have been three these days, and the first day he let me come and pay him a visit in his room. Then he talked constantly of you."

"As you didn't know me, that must have bored you."

"It made me want to know you. All the more that since then—your aunt being so much with Mr. Touchett—I have been quite alone, and have got rather tired of my own society. I have not chosen a good moment for my visit."

A servant had come in with lamps, and was presently followed by another, bearing the tea-tray. Of the appearance of this repast Mrs. Touchett had apparently been notified, for the now arrive, and addressed herself to the tea-pot. Her greeting to her niece did not differ materially from her manner of raising the lid of his receptacle in order to glance at the contents: in neither act was it becoming to make a show of avidity. Questioned about her husband, she was unable to say that he was better; but the local doctor was with him, and much light was expected from this gentleman's consultation with Sir Matthew Hope.

"I suppose you two ladies have made acquaintance?" she said. "If you have not, I recommend you to do so, for so long as we continue—Ralph and I—to cluster about Mr. Touchett's bed, you are not likely to have much society but each other."

"I know nothing about you but that you are a great musician," Isabel said to the visitor.

"There is a good deal more than that to know," Mrs. Touchett affirmed, in her little dry tone.

"A very little of it, I am sure, will content Miss Archer!" the lady exclaimed, with a light laugh. "I am an old friend of your aunt's—I have lived much in Florence--I am Madame Merle."

She made this last announcement as if she were referring to a person of tolerably distinct identity.

For Isabel, however, it represented but little; she could only continue to feel that Madame Merle had a charming manner.

"She is not a foreigner, in spite of her name," said Mrs. Touchett. "She was born—I always forget where you were born."

"It is hardly worth-while I should tell you then."

"On the contrary," said Mrs. Touchett, who rarely missed a logical point; "if I remembered, your telling me would be quite superfluous."

Madame Merle glanced at Isabel with a fine, frank smile.

"I was born under the shadow of the national banner."

"She is too fond of mystery," said Mrs. Touchett; "that is her great fault."

"Ah," exclaimed Madame Merle. "I have great faults, but I don't think that is one of them; it certainly is not the greatest. I came into the world in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. My father was a high officer in the United State Navy, and had a post—a post of responsibility—in that establishment at the time. I suppose I ought to love the sea, but I hate it. That's why I don't return to America. I love the land; the great thing is to love something."

Isabel, is a dispassionate witness, had not been struck with the force of Mrs. Touchett's characterization of her visitor, who had an expressive, communicative, responsive face, by no means of the sort which, to Isabel's mind, suggested a secretive disposition. It was a face that told of a rich nature and of quick and Isabel impulses, and though it had no regular beauty was in the highest degree agreeable to contemplate.

Madame Merle was a tall, fair, plump woman; everything in her person was round and replete, though without those accumulations which minister to indolence. Her features were thick, but there was a graceful harmony among them, and her complexion had a healthy clearness. She had a small grey eye, with a great deal of light in it—an eye incapable of dullness, and according to some people, incapable of tears; and a wide, firm mouth, which, when she smiled, drew itself upward to the left side, in a manner that most people thought very old, some very affected, and a few very graceful. Isabel inclined to range herself in the last category. Madame Merle had thick, fair hair, which was

arranged with picturesque simplicity, and *a large white* hand, *of* a perfect shape a shape *so perfect that its owner, preferring to leave it unadorned, wore no* rings. Isabel had *taken her at first,* as we *have* seen, *for a* Frenchwoman; *but extended observation led her to say to herself that Madame Merle might be a German-a German of rank, a countess, a princess. Isabel would never have supposed that she had been* born *in Brooklyn-though she could doubtless not have justified her assumption that the air of distinction, possessed by Madame Merle is so eminent a degree, was inconsistent with such a birth. It was true that* the national banner had *floated* immediately, over the spot *of* the *lady's* nativity, *and the breezy freedom of the stars and stripes might have shed an influence upon the attitude which she then and there took towards life. And yet Madame Merle had evidently nothing of the fluttered, flapping quality of a morsel of bunting in the* wind; *her deportment expressed the repose and confidence* which *come from a* large *experience. Experience, however, had not quenched her youth; it had simply made her sympathetic and supple. She was in a word a woman of ardent impulses, kept in admirable order. What an ideal combination! thought Isabel.*

She made these reflection while the three ladies *sat at their tea; but this* ceremony was interrupted *before long by the* arrival *of the* great doctor from *London, who had been immediately ushered into the drawing-room. Mrs. Touchett took him off to the library, to confer with him in private; and then Madame Merle and Isabel parted, to meet again at dinner. The idea of seeing more of this interesting* woman *did much to mitigate Isabel's perception of the melancholy that now hung over Gardencourt:*

When she came into the drawing-room before dinner she found the place empty; but in the course of a moment Ralph arrived. His anxiety about his father had been lightened; Sir Matthew Hope's view of his condition was less sombre than Ralph's had been. The doctor recommended that the nurse alone should

remain with the old man for the next three or four hours; so that Ralph, his mother, and the great physician himself were free to dine at table. Mrs. Touchett and Sir Matthew came in; Madame Merle was the last to appear.

Before she came, Isabel spoke of her to Ralph, who was standing before the fire-place.

"Pray who is Madame Merle?"

"The cleverest woman I know, not excepting yourself," said Ralph.

"I thought she seemed very pleasant."

"I was sure you would think her pleasant," said Ralph. "Is that why you invited her?"

"I didn't invite her, and when we came back from London I didn't know she was here. No one invited her. She is a friend of my mother's, and just after you and I went to town, my mother got a note from her. She had arrived in England (she usually lives abroad though she has first and last spent a good deal of time here), and she asked leave to come down for a few days. Madame Merle is a woman who can make such proposals with perfect confidence; she is so welcome wherever she goes. And with my mother there could be no question of hesitation; she is the one person in the world whom my mother very much admires. If she were not herself (which she after all much prefers), she would like to be Madame Merle. It would, indeed, be a great change."

"Well, she is very charming," said Isabel. "And she plays beautifully."

"She does everything beautifully. She is complete."

Isabel looked at her cousin a moment. "You don't like her."

"On the contrary, I was once in love with her."

"And she didn't care for you, and that's why you don't like her."

"How can we have discussed such things? Monsieur Merle was then living."

"Is he dead now?"

"So she says."

"Don't you believe her?"

"Yes, because the statement agrees with the probabilities. The husband of Madame Merle would be likely to pass away."

Isabel gazed at her cousin again. "I don't know what you mean. You mean something—that you don't mean. What was Monsieur Merle?"

"The husband of Madame."

"You are very odious. Has she any children?"

"Not the least little child—fortunately."

"Fortunately?"

"I mean fortunately for the child; she would be sure to spell it."

Isabel was apparently on the point of assuring her cousin for the third time that he was odious; but the discussion was interrupted by the arrival of the lady who was the topic of it. She came rustling in quickly, apologizing for being late, fastening a bracelet, dressed in dark blue satin, which exposed a white bosom that was ineffectually covered by a curious silver necklace. Ralph offered her his arm with the exaggerated alertness of a man who was no longer a lover.

Even if this had still been his condition, however, Ralph had other things to think about. The great doctor spent the night at Gardencourt, end returning to London on the morrow, after another consultation with Mr. Touchett's own medical adviser, concurred in Ralph's desire that he should see the patient again on the day following. On the day following Sir Matthew Hope reappeared at Gardencourt, and on this occasion took a less encouraging view of the old man, who had grown worse in the twenty-four hours. His feebleness was extreme, and to his son, who constantly sat by his bedside. It often seemed that his end was at hand. The local doctor, who was a very sagacious man, and in whom Ralph had

secretly more confidence than in his distinguished colleague, was constantly in attendance, and Sir Matthew Hope returned several times to Gardencourt. Mr. Touchett was much of the time unconscious; he slept a great deal; he rarely spoke. Isabel had a great desire to be useful to him, and was allowed to watch with him several times when his other attendants (of whom Mrs. Touchett was not the least regular) went to take rest. He never seemed to know her, and she always said to herself— "Suppose he should die while I am sitting here"; an idea which excited her and kept her awake. Once he opened his eyes for a while and fixed them upon her intelligently, but when she went to him, hoping he would recognize her, he closed them and relapsed into unconsciousness. The day after his, however, he revived for a longer time, but on this occasion Ralph was with him alone. The old man began to talk, much to his son's satisfaction, who assured him that they should presently have him sitting up.

"No, my boy," said Mr. Touchett, "not unless you bury me in a sitting posture, as some of the ancients—was it the ancients?—used to do."

"Ah, daddy, don't talk about that," Ralph murmured. "You must not deny that you are getting better."

"There will be no need of my denying it if you don't say so," the old man answered. "Why should we prevaricate, just at the last? We never pre- varicated before. I have got to die some time, and it's better to die when one is sick than when one is well. I am very sick—as sick as I shall ever be. I hope you don't want to prove that I shall ever be worse than this? That would be too bad. You don't? Well then."

Having made this excellent point he became quiet; but the next time that Ralph was with him he again addressed himself to conservation. The nurse had gone to her supper and Ralph was alone with him, having just relieved Mrs. Touchett, who had been on guard since dinner. The room was lighted only by the

flickering fire, which of late had become necessary, and Ralph's tall shadow was projected upon the wall and ceiling, with an outline constantly varying but always grotesque.

"Who is that with me—is it my son?" the old man asked.

"Yes, it's your son, daddy."

"And is there no one else?"

"No one else."

Mr. Touchett said nothing for a while; and then, "I want to talk a little," he went on.

"Won't it tire you?" Ralph inquired.

"It won't matter if it does, I shall have a long rest. I want to talk about you."

Ralph had drawn nearer to the bed; he sat leaning forward, with his hand on his father's. "You had better select a brighter topic," he said.

"You were always bright; I used to be proud of your brightness. I should like so much to think that you would do something."

"If you leave us," said Ralph, "I shall do nothing but miss you."

"That is just what I don't want; it's what I want to talk about. You must get a new interest."

"I don't want a new interest, daddy. I have more old ones than I know what to do with."

The old man lay there looking at his son; his face was the face of the dying, but his eyes were the eyes of Daniel Touchett. He seemed to be reckoning over Ralph's interests. "Of course you have got; your mother," he said at last. "You will take care of her."

"My mother will always take care of herself," Ralph answered.

"Well," said his father, "perhaps as she grows older she will need a little help."

"I shall not see that. She will outlive me."

"Very likely she will; but that's no reason—" Mr. Touchett let his phrase die away in a helpless but not exactly querulous sigh, and remained silent again.

"Don't trouble yourself about us," said his son. "My mother and I get on very well together, you know."

"You get on by always being apart; that's not natural."

"If you leave us, we shall probably see more of each other."

"Well," the old man observed, with wandering irrelevance, "It cannot be said that my death will make much difference in your mother's life."

"It will probably make more than you think."

"Well, she'll have more money," said Mr. Touchett. "I have left her a good wife's portion, just as if she had been a good wife."

"She has been one, daddy, according to her own theory. She has never troubled you."

"Ah, some troubles are pleasant," Mr. Touchett murmured. "Those you have given me, for instance. But your mother has been less-less-what shall I call it?—less out of the way since I have been ill. I presume she knows I have noticed it."

"I shall certainly tell her so; I am so glad you mention it."

"It won't make any difference to her; she doesn't do it to please me. She does it to please-to please-" And he lay awhile, trying to think why she did it. "She does it to please herself. But that is not what I want to talk about," he added. "It's about you. You will be very well off."

"Yes," said Ralph, "I know that. But I hope you have not forgotten the talk we had a year ago—when I told you exactly what money I should need and begged you to make some good use of the rest."

"Yes, yes, I remember. I made a new will—in a few days, I suppose it was the first time such a thing had happened—a young man trying to get a will made against him."

"It is not against me," said Ralph. "It would be against me to have a large properly to take care of. It is impossible for a man in my state of health to spend much money, and enough is as good as a feast."

"Well, you will have enough—and something over. There will be more than enough for one—there will be enough for two."

"That's too much," said Ralph.

"Ah, don't say that. The best thing, you can do, when I am gone, will be to marry."

Ralph had foreseen what his father was coming to, and his suggestion was by no means novel. It had long been Mr. Touchett's most ingenious way of expressing the optimistic view of his son's health. Ralph had usually treated it humorously but present circumstances made the humorous tone impossible. He simply fell back in his chair and returned his father's appealing gaze in silence.

"If I, with a wife who hasn't been very fond of me, have had a very happy life," said the old man, carrying his ingenuity further still, "what a life might you not have, if you should marry a person different from Mrs. Touchett. There are more different from her than there are like her."

Ralph still said nothing and after a pause his father asked softly—"What do you think of your cousin?"

At this Ralph started, meeting the question with a rather fixed smile. "Do I understand you to propose that I should marry Isabel?"

"Well, that's what it comes to in the end. Don't you like her?"

"Yes, very much." And Ralph got up from his chair and wandered over to the fire. He stood before it an instant and then he stooped and stirred it, mechanically. "I like Isabel very much," he repeated.

"Well," said his father, "I know she likes you. She told me so."

"Did she remark that she would like to marry me?"

"No, but she can't have anything against you. And she is the most charming young lady I have ever seen. And she would be good to you. I have thought in great deal about it."

"So have I," said Ralph, coming back to the bedside again. "I don't mind telling you that."

"You are in love with her, then? I should think you would be. It's as if she came over on purpose."

"No, I am not in love with her; but I should be if—if certain things were different."

"Ah, things are always different from what they might be," said the old man. "If you wait for them to change, you will never do anything. I don't know whether you know," he went on; "but I suppose there is no harm in my alluding to it in such an hour as this; there was some one wanted to marry Isabel the other day, and she wouldn't have him."

"I know she refused Lord Warburton; he told me himself."

"Well, that proves that there is a chance for somebody else."

"Somebody else took his chance the other day in London—and got nothing by it."

"Was it you?" Mr. Touchett asked, eagerly.

"No, it was an older friend; a poor gentleman who came over from America to see about it."