

Broken Wings

Henry James

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1

Conscious as he was of what was between them, though perhaps less conscious than ever of why there should at that time of day be anything, he would yet scarce have supposed they could be so long in a house together without some word or some look. It had been since the Saturday afternoon, and that made twenty-four hours. The party five-and-thirty people, and some of them great was one in which words and looks might more or less have gone astray. The effect, none the less, he judged, would have been, for her quite as for himself, that no sound and no sign from the other had been picked up by either. They had happened, both at dinner and at luncheon, to be so placed as not to have to glare or to grin across; and for the rest they could each, in such a crowd, as freely help the general ease to keep them apart as assist it to bring them together. One chance there was, of course, that might be beyond their control. He had been the night before half surprised at not finding her his 'fate' when the long procession to the dining-room solemnly hooked itself together. He would have said in advance recognising it as one of the sharp 'notes' of Mundham that, should the gathering contain a literary lady, the literary lady would, for congruity, be apportioned to the arm, when there was a question of arms, of the gentleman present who represented the nearest thing to literature. Poor Straith represented 'art', and that, no doubt, would have been near enough had not the party offered for choice a slight excess of men. The representative of art had been of the two or three who went in alone, whereas Mrs Harvey had gone in with one of the representatives of banking.

It was certain, however, that she would not again be consigned to Lord Belgrove, and it was just possible that he himself should not be again alone. She would be, on the whole, the most probable remedy to that state, on his part, of disgrace; and this precisely was the great interest of their situation they were the only persons present without some advantage over somebody else. They hadn't a single advantage; they could be named for nothing but their cleverness; they were at the bottom of the social ladder. The social ladder, even at Mundham, had as they might properly have been told, as indeed practically they *were* told to end somewhere; which is no more than to say that, as he strolled about and thought of many things, Stuart Straith had, after all, a good deal the sense of helping to hold it up. Another of the things he thought of was the special oddity for it was nothing else of his being there at all, and being there in particular so out of his order and his turn. He couldn't answer for Mrs Harvey's turn. It might well be that she was *in* hers; but these Saturday-to-Monday occasions had hitherto mostly struck him as great gilded cages as to which care was taken that the birds should be birds of a feather.

There had been a wonderful walk in the afternoon, within the limits of the place, to a far-away tea-house; and, in spite of the combinations and changes of this episode, he had still escaped the necessity of putting either his old

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friend or himself to the test. Also it had been all, he flattered himself, without the pusillanimity of his avoiding her. Life was, indeed, well understood in these great conditions; the conditions constituted in their greatness a kind of fundamental facility, provided a general exemption, bathed the hour, whatever it was, in a universal blandness, that were all a happy solvent for awkward relations. It was beautiful, for instance, that if their failure to meet amid so much meeting had been of Mrs Harvey's own contrivance he couldn't be in the least vulgarly sure of it. There were places in which he would have had no doubt, places different enough from Mundham. He felt all the same and without anguish that these were much more *his* places even if she didn't feel that they were much more hers. The day had been warm and splendid, and this moment of its wane with dinner in sight, but as across a field of polished pink marble which seemed to say that wherever in such a house there was space there was also, benignantly, time formed, of the whole procession of the hours, the one dearest to our friend, who on such occasions interposed it, whenever he could, between the set of impressions that ended and the set that began with 'dressing'. The great terraces and gardens were almost void; people had scattered, though not altogether even yet to dress. The air of the place, with the immense house all seated aloft in strength, robed with summer and crowned with success, was such as to contribute something of its own to the poetry of early evening. This visitor, at any rate, saw and felt it all through one of those fine hazes of August that remind you at least, they reminded *him* of the artful gauze stretched across the stage of a theatre when an effect of mystery or some particular pantomimic ravishment is desired.

Should he, in fact, have to pair with Mrs Harvey for dinner it would be a shame to him not to have addressed her sooner; and should she, on the contrary, be put with someone else the loss of so much of the time would have but the greater ugliness. Didn't he meanwhile make out that there were ladies in the lower garden, from which the sound of voices, faint, but, as always in the upper air of Mundham, exceedingly sweet, was just now borne to him? She might be among them, and if he should find her he would let her know he had sought her. He would treat it frankly as an occasion for declaring that what had happened between them or rather what had *not* happened was too absurd. What at present occurred, however, was that in his quest of her he suddenly, at the turn of an alley, perceived her, not far off, seated in a sort of bower with the Ambassador. With this he pulled up, going another way and pretending not to see them. Three times already that afternoon he had observed her in different situations with the Ambassador. He was the more struck accordingly when, upward of an hour later, again alone and with his state unremedied, he saw her placed for dinner next his Excellency. It was not at all what would have been at Mundham her right seat, so that it could only be explained by his Excellency's direct request. She *was* a success! This time Straith was well in her view and could see that in the candlelight of the wonderful room, where the lustres were, like the table, all crystal and silver, she was as handsome as anyone, taking the women of her age, and also as 'smart' as the evening before, and as true as any of the others to the law of a marked difference in her smartness. If the beautiful way she held herself for decidedly it *was* beautiful came in a great measure from the good thing she professionally made of it all, our observer could reflect that the poor thing *he* professionally made of it probably affected his attitude in just the opposite way; but they communicated neither in the glare nor in the grin that he had dreaded. Still, their eyes did now meet, and then it seemed to him that her own were strange.

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She, on her side, had her private consciousness, and quite as full a one, doubtless, as he, but with the advantage that, when the company separated for the night, she was not, like her friend, reduced to a vigil unalloyed. Lady Claude, at the top of the stairs, had said, "May I look in in five minutes if you don't mind?" and then had arrived in due course and in a wonderful new beribboned gown, the thing just launched for such occasions. Lady Claude was young and earnest and delightfully bewildered and bewildering, and however interesting she might, through certain elements in her situation, have seemed to a literary lady, her own admirations and curiosities were such as from the first promised to rule the hour. She had already expressed to Mrs Harvey a really informed

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enthusiasm. She not only delighted in her numerous books, which was a tribute the author had not infrequently met, but she even appeared to have read them—an appearance with which her interlocutress was much less acquainted. The great thing was that she also yearned to write, and that she had turned up in her fresh furbelows not only to reveal this secret and to ask for direction and comfort, but literally to make a stranger confidence, for which the mystery of midnight seemed propitious. Midnight was, indeed, as the situation developed, well over before her confidence was spent, for it had ended by gathering such a current as floated forth, with everything in Lady Claude's own life, many things more in that of her adviser. Mrs Harvey was, at all events, amused, touched, and effectually kept awake; and at the end of half an hour they had quite got what might have been called their second wind of frankness and were using it for a discussion of the people in the house. Their primary communion had been simply on the question of the pecuniary profits of literature as the producer of so many admired volumes was prepared to present them to an aspirant. Lady Claude was in financial difficulties and desired the literary issue. This was the breathless revelation she had rustled over a mile of crimson velvet corridor to make.

"Nothing?" she had three minutes later incredulously gasped. "I can make nothing at all?" But the gasp was slight compared with the stupefaction produced in her by a brief further parley, in the course of which Mrs Harvey had, after a hesitation, taken her own plunge. "*You make so little wonderful you!*" And then, as the producer of the admired volumes simply sat there in her dressing-gown, with the saddest of slow head-shakes, looking suddenly too wan even to care that it was at last all out: "What, in that case, is the use of success and celebrity and genius? *You have no success?*" She had looked almost awestruck at this further confession of her friend. They were face to face in a poor human crudity, which transformed itself quickly into an effusive embrace. "You've had it and lost it? Then when it has been as great as yours one *can* lose it?"

"More easily than one can get it."

Lady Claude continued to marvel. "But you do so much—and it's so beautiful!" On which Mrs Harvey simply smiled again in her handsome despair, and after a moment found herself again in the arms of her visitor. The younger woman had remained for a little a good deal arrested and hushed, and had, at any rate, sensitive and charming, immediately dropped, in the presence of this almost august unveiling, the question of her own thin troubles. But there are short cuts at that hour of night that morning scarce knows, and it took but little more of the breath of the real to suggest to Lady Claude more questions in such a connection than she could answer for herself. "How, then, if you haven't private means, do you get on?"

"Ah! I don't get on."

Lady Claude looked about. There were objects scattered in the fine old French room. "You have lovely things."

"Two."

"Two?"

"Two frocks. I couldn't stay another day."

"Ah, what is *that*? I couldn't either," said Lady Claude soothingly. "And you have," she continued, in the same spirit, "your nice maid"

"Who's indeed a charming woman, but my cook in disguise!" Mrs Harvey dropped.

"Ah, you *are* clever!" her friend cried, with a laugh that was as a climax of reassurance.

"Extraordinarily. But don't think," Mrs Harvey hastened to add, "that I mean that that's why I'm here."

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Her companion candidly thought. "Then why are you?"

"I haven't the least idea. I've been wondering all the while, as I've wondered so often before on such occasions, and without arriving at any other reason than that London is so wild."

Lady Claude wondered. "Wild?"

"Wild!" said her friend, with some impatience. "That's the way London strikes."

"But do you call such an invitation a blow?"

"Yes crushing. No one else, at all events, either," Mrs Harvey added, "could tell you why I'm here."

Lady Claude's power to receive and it was perhaps her most attaching quality was greater still, when she felt strongly, than her power to protest. "Why, how can you say that when you've only to see how everyone likes and admires you? Just look at the Ambassador," she had earnestly insisted. And this was what had precisely, as I have mentioned, carried the stream of their talk a good deal away from its source. It had therefore not much further to go before setting in motion the name of Stuart Straith, as to whom Lady Claude confessed to an interest good-looking, distinguished, 'sympathetic', as he was that she could really almost hate him for having done nothing whatever to encourage. He had not spoken to her once.

"But, my dear, if he hasn't spoken to *me!*"

Lady Claude appeared to regret this not too much for a hint that, after all, there might be a difference. "Oh, but *could* he?"

"Without my having spoken to him first?" Mrs Harvey turned it over. "Perhaps not; but I couldn't have done that." Then, to explain, and not only because Lady Claude was naturally vague, but because what was still visibly most vivid to her was her independent right to have been 'made up' to: "And yet not because we're not acquainted."

"You know him, then?"

"But too well."

"You mean you don't like him?"

"On the contrary, I like him to distraction."

"Then what's the matter?" Lady Claude asked with some impatience.

Her friend hesitated but a moment. "Well, he wouldn't have me."

"Have' you?"

"Ten years ago, after Mr Harvey's death, when, if he had lifted a finger, I would have married him."

"But he didn't lift it?"

"He was too grand. I was too small by *his* measure. He wanted to keep himself; he saw his future."

Lady Claude earnestly followed. "His present position?"

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"Yes everything that was to come to him; his steady rise in value."

"Has it been so great?"

"Surely his situation and name. Don't you know his lovely work and what's thought of it?"

"Oh yes, I know. That's why " But Lady Claude stopped. After which: "But if he's still keeping himself?"

"Oh, it's not for me," said Mrs Harvey.

"And evidently not for *me*. Whom then," her visitor asked, "does he think good enough?"

"Oh, these great people!" Mrs Harvey smiled.

"But *we're* great people you and I!" And Lady Claude kissed her good night.

"You mustn't, all the same," the elder woman said, "betray the secret of *my* greatness, which I've told you, please remember, only in the deepest confidence."

Her tone had a quiet purity of bitterness that for a moment longer held her friend, after which Lady Claude had the happy inspiration of meeting it with graceful gaiety. "It's quite for the best, I'm sure, that Mr Straith wouldn't have you. You've kept yourself too; you'll marry yet an ambassador!" And with another good night she reached the door. "You say you don't get on, but you do."

"Ah!" said Mrs Harvey with vague attenuation.

"Oh yes, you do," Lady Claude insisted, while the door emphasised it with a little clap that sounded through the still house.

3

The first night of *The New Girl* occurred, as everyone remembers, three years ago, and the play is running yet, a fact that may render strange the failure to be widely conscious of which two persons in the audience were guilty. It was not till afterward present either to Mrs Harvey or to Stuart Straith that *The New Girl* was one of the greatest successes of modern times. Indeed if the question had been put to them on the spot they might have appeared much at sea. But this, I may as well immediately say, was the result of their having found themselves side by side in the stalls and thereby given most of their attention to their own predicament. Straith showed that he felt the importance of meeting it promptly, for he turned to his neighbour, who was already in her place, as soon as her identity had come distinct through his own arrival and subsidence. "I don't quite see how you can help speaking to me now."

Her face could only show him how long she had been aware of his approach. "The sound of your voice, coming to me straight, makes it indeed as easy for me as I could possibly desire."

He looked about at the serried rows, the loaded galleries and the stuffed boxes, with recognitions and nods; and this made between them another pause, during which, while the music seemed perfunctory and the bustle that, in a London audience, represents concentration increased, they felt how effectually, in the thick, preoccupied medium, how extraordinarily, they were together.

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"Well, that second afternoon at Mundham, just before dinner, I was very near forcing your hand. But something put me off. You're really too grand."

"Oh!" she murmured.

"Ambassadors," said Stuart Straith.

"Oh!" she again sounded. And before anything more could pass the curtain was up. It came down in due course and achieved, after various intervals, the rest of its movements without interrupting, for our friends, the sense of an evening of talk. They said when it was down almost nothing about the play, and when one of them toward the end put to the other, vaguely, "Is a this thing going?" the question had scarce the effect of being even relevant. What was clearest to them was that the people about were somehow enough taken up to leave them at their ease but what taken up with they but half made out. Mrs Harvey had, none the less, mentioned early that her presence had a reason and that she ought to attend, and her companion had asked her what she thought of a certain picture made at a given moment by the stage, in the reception of which he was so interested that it was really what had brought him. These were glances, however, that quickly strayed strayed, for instance (as this could carry them far), in its coming to one of them to say that, whatever the piece might be, the real thing, as they had seen it at Mundham, was more than a match for any piece. For it was Mundham that *was*, theatrically, the real thing; better for scenery, dresses, music, pretty women, bare shoulders, everything even incoherent dialogue; a much bigger and braver show, and got up, as it were, infinitely more 'regardless'. By Mundham they were held long enough to find themselves, though with an equal surprise, quite at one as to the special oddity of their having caught each other in such a plight. Straith said that he supposed what his friend meant was that it was odd *he* should have been there; to which she returned that she had been imputing to him exactly that judgement of her own presence.

"But why shouldn't *you* be?" he asked. "Isn't that just what you *are*? Aren't you, in your way like those people a child of fortune and fashion?"

He got no more answer to this for some time than if he had fairly wounded her; he indeed that evening got no answer at all that was direct. But in the next interval she brought out with abruptness, taking no account of some other matter he had just touched, "Don't you really know?"

She had paused.

"Know what?"

Again she went on without heeding. "A place like Mundham is, for me, a survival, though poor Mundham in particular won't, for me, have survived that visit for which it's to be pitied, isn't it? It was a glittering ghost since laid! of my old time."

Straith at this almost gave a start. "Have *you* got a new time?"

"Do you mean that you have?"

"Well," said Straith, "mine may now be called middle-aged. It seems so long, I mean, since I set my watch to it."

"Oh, I haven't even a watch!" she returned with a laugh. "I'm beyond watches." After which she added: "*We might* have met more or, I should say perhaps, have got more out of it when we *have* met."

"Yes, it has been too little. But I've always explained it by our living in such different worlds."

Mrs Harvey had an occasional incoherence. "Are you unhappy?"

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He gave her a singular smile. "You said just now that you're beyond watches. I'm beyond unhappiness."

She turned from him and presently brought out: "I ought absolutely to take away *something* of the play."

"By all means. There's certainly something *I* shall take."

"Ah, then you must help me give it me."

"With all my heart," said Straith, "if it *can* help you. It's my feeling of our renewal."

She had one of the sad, slow head-shakes that at Mundham had been impressive to Lady Claude. "That won't help me."

"Then you must let me put to you now what I should have tried to get near enough to you there to put if I hadn't been so afraid of the Ambassador. What has it been so long our impossibility?"

"Well, I can only answer for my own vision of it, which is which always was that you were sorry for me, but felt a sort of scruple of showing me that you had nothing better than pity to give."

"May I come to see you?" Straith asked some minutes after this.

Her words, for which he had also awhile to wait, had, in truth, as little as his own the appearance of a reply. "Are you unhappy really? Haven't you everything?"

"You're beautiful!" he said for all answer. "Mayn't I come?"

She hesitated.

"Where is your studio?"

"Oh, not too far to reach from it. Don't be anxious; I can walk, or even take the bus."

Mrs Harvey once more delayed. Then she answered: "Mayn't I rather come there?"

"I shall be but too delighted."

It was said with promptness, even precipitation; yet the understanding, shortly after, appeared to have left between them a certain awkwardness, and it was almost as if to change the subject and relieve them equally that she suddenly reminded him of something he had spoken earlier. "You were to tell me why in particular you had to be here."

"Oh yes. To see my dresses."

"Yours!" She wondered.

"The second act. I made them out for them drew them."

Before she could check it her tone escaped. "You?"

"I." He looked straight before him. "For the fee. And we didn't even notice them."

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"I didn't," she confessed. But it offered the fact as a sign of her kindness for him, and this kindness was traceably what inspired something she said in the draughty porch, after the performance, while the footman of the friend, a fat, rich, immensely pleased lady, who had given her a lift and then rejoined her from a seat in the balcony, went off to make sure of the brougham. "May I do something about your things?"

"Do something'?"

"When I've paid you my visit. Write something about your pictures. I do a correspondence," said Mrs Harvey.

He wondered as she had done in the stalls. "For a paper?"

"The *Blackport Banner*. A 'London Letter'. The new books, the new plays, the new twaddle of any sort a little music, a little gossip, a little 'art'. You'll help me I need it awfully with the art. I do three a month."

"*You* wonderful you?" He spoke as Lady Claude had done, and could no more help it again than Mrs Harvey had been able to help it in the stalls.

"Oh, as you say, for the fee!" On which, as the footman signalled, her old lady began to plunge through the crowd.

4

At the studio, where she came to him within the week, her first movement had been to exclaim on the splendid abundance of his work. She had looked round charmed so struck as to be, as she called it, crushed. "You've such a wonderful lot to show."

"Indeed I have!" said Stuart Straith.

"That's where you beat *us*."

"I think it may very well be," he went on, "where I beat almost everyone."

"And is much of it new?"

He looked about with her. "Some of it is pretty old. But my things have a way, I admit, of growing old extraordinarily fast. They seem to me in fact, nowadays, quite 'born old'."

She had the manner, after a little, of coming back to something. "You *are* unhappy. You're *not* beyond it. You're just nicely, just fairly and squarely, in the middle of it."

"Well," said Straith, "if it surrounds me like a desert, so that I'm lost in it, that comes to the same thing. But I want you to tell me about yourself."

She had continued at first to move about, and had taken out a pocket-book, which she held up at him. "This time I shall insist on notes. You made my mind a blank about that play, which is the sort of thing we can't afford. If it hadn't been for my fat old lady and the next day's papers!" She kept looking, going up to things, saying, "How wonderful!" and "Oh, your *way*!" and then stopping for a general impression, something in the whole charm. The place, high, handsome, neat, with two or three pale tapestries and several rare old pieces of furniture, showed a perfection of order, an absence of loose objects, as if it had been swept and squared for the occasion and made

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almost too immaculate. It was polished and cold – rather cold for the season and the weather; and Stuart Straith himself, buttoned and brushed, as fine and as clean as his room, might at her arrival have reminded her of the master of a neat, bare ship on his deck awaiting a cargo. "May I see everything? May I 'use' everything?"

"Oh no; you mayn't by any means use everything. You mayn't use half. *Did* I spoil your 'London Letter'?" he continued after a moment.

"No one can spoil them as I spoil them myself. I can't do them – I don't know how, and don't want to. I do them wrong, and the people want such trash. Of course they'll sack me."

She was in the centre, and he had the effect of going round her, restless and vague, in large, slow circles. "Have you done them long?"

"Two or three months – this lot. But I've done others, and I know what happens. Oh, my dear, I've done strange things!"

"And is it a good job?"

She hesitated, then puffed, prettily enough, an indifferent sigh. "Three–and–ninepence. Is that good?" He had stopped before her, looking at her up and down. "What do you get," she went on, "for what you do for a play?"

"A little more, it would seem, than you. Four–and–sixpence. But I've only done, as yet, that one. Nothing else has offered."

"I see. But something *will*, eh?"

Poor Straith took a turn again. "Did you like them – for colour?" But again he pulled up. "Oh, I forgot; we didn't notice them!"

For a moment they could laugh about it. "I noticed them, I assure you, in the *Banner*. 'The costumes in the second act are of the most marvellous beauty.' That's what I said."

"Oh, that will fetch the managers!" But before her again he seemed to take her in from head to foot. "You speak of 'using' things. If you'd only use yourself – for my enlightenment. Tell me all."

"You look at me," said Mrs Harvey, "as with the wonder of who designs *my* costumes. How I dress on it, how I do even what I still do on it, is *that* what you want to know?"

"What has happened to you?" Straith asked.

"How do I keep it up?" she continued, as if she had not heard him. "But I *don't* keep it up. *You* do," she declared as she again looked round her.

Once more it set him off, but for a pause once more almost as quick. "How long have you been ?"

"Been what?" she asked as he faltered.

"Unhappy."

She smiled at him from a depth of indulgence. "As long as you've been ignorant – that what I've been *wanting* is your pity. Ah, to have to know, as I believed I did, that you supposed it would wound me, and not to have been able to make you see that it was the one thing left to me that would help me! Give me your pity now. It's all I

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want. I don't care for anything else. But give me that."

He had, as it happened at the moment, to do a smaller and a usual thing before he could do one so great and so strange. The youth whom he kept for service arrived with a tea-tray, in arranging a place for which, with the sequel of serving Mrs Harvey, seating her and seeing the youth again out of the room, some minutes passed.

"What pity could I dream of for you," he demanded as he at last dropped near her, "when I was myself so miserably sore?"

"Sore?" she wondered. "But you were happy then."

"Happy not to have struck you as good enough? For I didn't, you know," he insisted. "You had your success, which was so immense. You had your high value, your future, your big possibilities; and I perfectly understood that, given those things, and given also my very much smaller situation, you should wish to keep yourself."

"Oh, oh!" She gasped as if hurt.

"I understand it; but how could it really make me 'happy'?" he asked.

She turned at him as with her hand on the old scar she could now carry. "You mean that all these years you've really not known?"

"But not known what?"

His voice was so blank that at the sound of it, and at something that looked out from him, she only found another "Oh, oh!" which became the next instant a burst of tears.

5

She had appeared at first unwilling to receive him at home; but he understood it after she had left him, turning over more and more everything their meeting had shaken to the surface, and piecing together memories that at last, however darkly, made a sense. He was to call on her, it was finally agreed, but not till the end of the week, when she should have finished 'moving' she had but just changed quarters; and meanwhile, as he came and went, mainly in the cold chamber of his own past endeavour, which looked even to himself as studios look when artists are dead and the public, in the arranged place, are admitted to stare, he had plenty to think about. What had come out he could see it now was that each, ten years before, had miserably misunderstood and then had turned for relief from pain to a perversity of pride. But it was himself above all that he now sharply judged, since women, he felt, have to get on as they can, and for the mistake of this woman there were reasons he had, with a sore heart, to acknowledge. She had really found in the pomp of his early success, at the time they used to meet, and to care to, exactly the ground for her sense of failure with him that he had found in the vision of her gross popularity for his conviction that she judged him as comparatively small. Each had blundered, as sensitive souls of the 'artistic temperament' blunder, into a conception not only of the other's attitude, but of the other's material situation at the moment, that had thrown them back on stupid secrecy, where their estrangement had grown like an evil plant in the shade. He had positively believed her to have gone on all the while making the five thousand a year that the first eight or ten of her so supremely happy novels had brought her in, just as she, on her side, had read into the felicity of his first new hits, his pictures 'of the year' at three or four Academies, the absurdest theory of the sort of career that, thanks to big dealers and intelligent buyers, his gains would have built up for him. It looked vulgar enough now, but it had been grave enough then. His long, detached delusion about her 'prices', at

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any rate, appeared to have been more than matched by the strange stories occasionally floated to her and all to make her but draw more closely in on the subject of his own.

It was with each equally that everything had changed everything but the stiff consciousness in either of the need to conceal changes from the other. If she had cherished for long years the soreness of her not being 'good' enough, so this was what had counted most in her sustained effort to appear at least as good as he. London, meanwhile, was big; London was blind and benighted; and nothing had ever occurred to undermine for him the fiction of her prosperity. Before his eyes there, while she sat with him, she had pulled off one by one those vain coverings of her state that she confessed she had hitherto done her best and so always with an eye on himself deceptively to draw about it. He had felt frozen, as he listened, at such likenesses to things he knew. He recognised as she talked, and he groaned as he understood. He understood oh, at last, whatever he had not done before! And yet he could well have smiled, out of their common abyss, at such odd identities and recurrences. Truly the arts were sisters, as was so often said; for what apparently could be more like the experience of one than the experience of another? And she spared him things with it all. He felt that too, just as, even while showing her how he followed, he had bethought himself of closing his lips for the hour, none too soon, on his own stale story. There had been a beautiful intelligence, for that matter, in her having asked him nothing more. She had overflowed because shaken by not finding him happy, and her surrender had somehow offered itself to him as her way the first that sprang up of considering his trouble. She had left him, at all events, in full possession of all the phases through which in 'literary circles' acclaimed states may pass on their regular march to eclipse and extinction. One had but one's hour, and if one had it soon it was really almost a case of choice one didn't have it late. It might, moreover, never even remotely have approached, at its best, things ridiculously rumoured. Straith felt, on the whole, how little he had known of literary circles or of any mystery but his own, indeed; on which, up to actual impending collapse, he had mounted such anxious guard.

It was when he went on the Friday to see her that he took in the latest of the phases in question, which might very well be almost the final one; there was at least that comfort in it. She had just settled in a small flat, where he recognised in the steady disposal, for the best, of various objects she had not yet parted with, her reason for having made him wait. Here they had together those two worn and baffled workers a wonderful hour of gladness in their lost battle and of freshness in their lost youth; for it was not till Stuart Straith had also raised the heavy mask and laid it beside her own on the table, that they began really to feel themselves recover something of that possibility of each other they had so wearily wasted. Only she couldn't get over it that he was like herself, and that what she had shrunken to in her three or four simplified rooms had its perfect image in the hollow show of his ordered studio and his accumulated work. He told her everything now, kept as little back as she had kept at their previous meeting, while she repeated over and over, "You wonderful you?" as if the knowledge made a deeper darkness of fate, as if the pain of his having come down at all almost quenched the joy of his having come so much nearer. When she learned that he had not for three years sold a picture "You, beautiful you?" it seemed a new cold breath out of the dusk of her own outlook. Disappointment and despair were in such relations contagious, and there was clearly as much less again left to her as the little that was left to him. He showed her, laughing at the long queerness of it, how awfully little, as they called it, this was. He let it all come, but with more mirth than misery, and with a final abandonment of pride that was like changing at the end of a dreadful day from tight boots to slippers. There were moments when they might have resembled a couple united by some misdeed and meeting to decide on some desperate course; they gave themselves so to the great irony the vision of the comic in contrasts that precedes surrenders and extinctions.

They went over the whole thing, remounted the dwindling stream, reconstructed, explained, understood recognised, in short, the particular example they gave, and how, without mutual suspicion, they had been giving it side by side. "We're simply the case," Straith familiarly put it, "of having been had enough of. No case is perhaps more common, save that, for you and for me, each in our line, it did look in the good time didn't it? as if nobody *could* have enough." With which they counted backward, gruesome as it was, the symptoms of satiety up to the first dawn, and lived again together the unforgettable hours distant now out of which it had begun to glimmer that the truth had to be faced and the right names given to the wrong facts. They laughed at their original

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explanations and the minor scale, even, of their early fears; compared notes on the fallibility of remedies and hopes, and, more and more united in the identity of their lesson, made out perfectly that, though there appeared to be many kinds of success, there was only one kind of failure. And yet what had been hardest had not been to have to shrink, but the long game of bluff, as Straith called it to have to keep up. It fairly swept them away at present, however, the hugeness of the relief of no longer keeping up as against each other. This gave them all the measure of the motive their courage, on either side, in silence and gloom, had forced into its service.

"Only what shall we do now for a motive?" Straith went on.

She thought. "A motive for courage?"

"Yes to keep up."

"And go again, for instance, do you mean, to Mundham? We shall, thank heaven, never go again to Mundham. The Mundhams are over."

"Nous n'irons plus au bois;
Les lauriers sont coupés,"

sang Straith. "It does cost."

"As everything costs that one does for the rich. It's not our poor relations who make us pay."

"No; one must have means to acknowledge the others. We can't afford the opulent. But it isn't only the money they take."

"It's the imagination," said Mrs Harvey. "As they have none themselves "

"It's an article we have to supply? We have certainly to use a lot to protect ourselves," Straith agreed. "And the strange thing is that they like us."

She thought again. "That's what makes it easy to cut them. They forgive."

"Yes," her companion laughed; "once they really don't know you enough !"

"They treat you as old friends. But what do we want now of courage?" she went on.

He wondered. "Yes, after all, what?"

"To keep up, I mean. Why *should* we keep up?"

It seemed to strike him. "I see. After all, why? The courage *not* to keep up "

"We have *that*, at least," she declared, "haven't we?" Standing there at her little high-perched window, which overhung grey housetops, they let the consideration of this pass between them in a deep look, as well as in a hush of which the intensity had something commensurate. "If we're beaten!" she then continued.

"Let us at least be beaten together!" He took her in his arms; she let herself go, and he held her long and close for the compact. But when they had recovered themselves enough to handle their agreement more responsibly, the words in which they confirmed it broke in sweetness as well as sadness from both together: "And now to work!"

THE END

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Broken Wings (Prod. By Tido Vegas). 5 years ago5 years ago. It felt right to release a project like this, it's like i'm finally breaking out of my shell. Producers on the project include Canis Major, Tido Vegas, Evan Stein, HD, Teeo, Thovo, and Donato. All mixed/mastered by the boss @ProducerTyCo.