

The Introducers

Edith Wharton

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PART I

I

AT nine o'clock on an August morning Mr. Frederick Tilney descended the terrace steps of Sea Lodge and strolled across the lawn to the cliffs.

The upper windows of the long white facade above the terrace were all close-shuttered, for at nine o'clock Newport still sleeps, and he who is stirring enough to venture forth at that unwonted hour may enjoy what no wealth could buy a little later the privilege of being alone.

Though Mr. Tilney's habits of life, combined with the elegance of his appearance, declared him to be socially disposed, he was not insensible to the rarer pleasures of self-communion, and on this occasion he found peculiar gratification in the thought of having to himself the whole opulent extent of turf and flower border between Ochre Point and Bailey's Beach. The morning was brilliant, with a blue horizon line pure of fog, and such a sparkle on every leaf and grass blade, and on every restless facet of the ever-moving sea, as would have tempted a less sophisticated fancy to visions of wet bows and a leaping stern, or of woodland climbs up the course of a mountain stream.

But it was so long since Mr. Tilney had found a savor in such innocent diversions, that the unblemished fairness of the morning suggested to him only a lazy well-being associated with escape from social duties, and the chance to finish the French novel over which he had fallen asleep at three o'clock that morning.

It was odd how he was growing to value his rare opportunities of being alone. He who in his earlier years had depended on the stimulus of companionship as the fagged diner-out depends on the fillip of his first glass of champagne, was now beginning to watch for and cherish every momentary escape from the crowd. It had grown to such a passion with him, this craving to have the world to himself, that he had overcome the habit of late rising, and learned to curtail the complications of his toilet, in order to secure a half hour of solitude before he was caught back into the whizzing social machinery.

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"And talk of the solitude of the desert, it's nothing to the Newport cliffs at this hour," he mused, as he threw himself down on a shaded seat invitingly placed near the path which follows the shore. "Sometimes I feel as if the sea, and the cliffs, and the skyline out there, were all a part of the stupid show—the expensive stage setting of a rottenly cheap play—to be folded up and packed away with the rest of the rubbish when the performance is over; and it's good to come out and find it here at this hour, all by itself, and not giving a hang for the ridiculous goings-on of which it happens to be made the temporary background. Well—there's one comfort: none of the other fools really see it—it's here only for those who seek it out at such an hour—and as I'm the only human being who does, it's here only for me, and belongs only to me, and not to the impenetrable asses who think they own it because they've paid for it at so many thousand dollars a foot!"

And Mr. Tilney, throwing out his chest with the irrepressible pride of possessorship, cast an eye of approval along the windings of the deserted path which skirted the lawn of Sea Lodge and lost itself in the trim shrubberies of the adjoining estate.

"Yes—it's mine—all mine—and this is the only real possessorship, after all! No fear of intruders at this hour—no need of warning signposts, and polite requests to keep to the path. I don't suppose anybody ever walked along this path at my hour, and I don't care who walks here for the rest of the day!" But at this point his meditations were interrupted by the sight of a white gleam through the adjacent foliage; and a moment later all his theories as to the habits of his neighbors had been rudely shattered by the appearance of a lady who, under the sheltering arch of a wide lace sunshade, was advancing indolently toward his seat.

"Why, you've got my bench!" she exclaimed, passing before him, with merriment and indignation mingling in her eyes as sun and wind contended on the ripples behind her.

"Your bench?" echoed Tilney, rising at her approach, and dissembling his annoyance under a fair pretense of hospitality. "If ever I thought anything on earth was mine, it's this bench."

The lady, who was young, tall and critical-looking, drew her straight brows together and smilingly pondered his assertion.

"I suppose you thought that because it happens to stand in the grounds of Sea Lodge instead of Cliffwood—we haven't any benches, by the way; but my theory is a little different, as it happens. I think things belong only to the people who know how to appreciate them."

"Why, so do I—if the bench isn't mine, at least the theory is!" Tilney protested.

"Well, it's mine too, and it makes the bench mine, you see," the young lady argued with earnestness, "because hitherto I've been the only person who appreciated sitting on it at this hour."

"Ah, hitherto, perhaps—but not since I arrived here last week. I haven't missed a morning," Tilney declared.

She smiled. "That explains the misunderstanding. I've been away for a week, and before that no one ever ever sat on my bench at this hour."

"And since then no one has ever ever sat on my bench at this hour; but, my dear Miss Grantham," Tilney gallantly concluded, "I shall be only too honored if you will make the first exception to this rule by sitting on it in my company this morning."

Miss Grantham was evidently a young lady of judicial temper, for she weighed this assertion as carefully as the other, before answering, with a slight tinge of condescension: "I don't know that you have any more right to ask me to sit on my bench, than I have to ask you to sit on yours, but for my part I am magnanimous enough to

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assume just for once that it's ours."

Tilney bowed his thanks and seated himself at her side. "I realize how magnanimous it is of you," he returned, "for, just as you came round the corner, I was saying to myself that this bench was really the only thing in the world I could call my own "

"And now I've taken half of it away from you! But then," she rejoined, "you've taken the other half from me; and as I was under the same delusion as yourself, we are both in the same situation, and had better accommodate ourselves as best we can to the diminished glory of joint ownership."

"It would be ungrateful of me to reject so reasonable a proposal; but in return for my consent, would you mind telling me how you happen to attach such excessive importance to the ownership of this bench?"

"It isn't the bench alone it's the bench and the hour. They are the only things I have to myself."

Tilney met her lovely eyes with a look of intelligence. "Ah, that's surprising very surprising."

"Why so?" she exclaimed, a little resentfully.

"Because it's so exactly my own feeling."

Miss Grantham smiled and caressed the folds of her lace gown. "And is it so surprising that we should happen to have the same feelings?"

"Not in all respects, I trust; but I never suspected you of an inclination for solitude."

She returned his scrutiny with a glance as penetrating. "Well, you don't look like a recluse yourself; yet I think I should have guessed that you sometimes have a longing to be alone."

"A longing? Good heavens, it's a passion, it's becoming a mania!"

"Ah, how well I understand that. It's the only thing that can tear me from my bed!"

"I confess one doesn't associate you with the sunrise," he said, letting his glance rest with amusement on the intricate simplicity of her apparel.

"And you!" she smiled back at him. "If our friends were to be told that Fred Tilney and Belle Grantham were to be found sitting on the cliffs at nine o'clock in the morning, the day after the Summerton ball "

"And that they had come there, not to meet each other, but to escape from every one else "

"Oh, there's the point: that's what makes it interesting. If we're in the same box why shouldn't we be on the same bench?"

"It requires no argument to convince me that we should. But are we in the same box? You see I've just come, and when I saw you last night I supposed you were stopping with the Summertons."

She shook her head. "No, I'm next door, at Cliffwood, for the summer."

"At Cliffwood? With the Bixbys?" He glanced at the fantastic chimneys and profusely carved gables which made the neighboring villa rise from its shrubberies like a piece montee from a flower-decked dish.

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"Well, why not, if you're at Sea Lodge with Mr. Magraw?"

"Oh, I'm only a poor itinerant devil "

"And what am I but a circulating beauty? Didn't you know I'd gone into the business too? I hope you won't let professional jealousy interfere with our friendship."

"I'm not sure that I can help it, if you've really gone into the business. But when I last saw you where was it? oh, in Athens "

"Things were different, were they not?" she interposed. "I was sketching and you were archaeologizing do you remember that divine day at Delphi? Not that you took much notice of me, by the way "

"Wasn't one warned off the premises by the report that you were engaged to Lord Pytchley?"

She colored, and negligently dropped her sunshade between her eyes and his. "Well, I wasn't, you see and my sketches were not good enough to sell. So I've taken to this kind of thing instead. But I thought you meant to stick to your digging."

He hesitated. "I was very keen about it for a time; but I had a touch of the sun out in Greece that summer; and a rich fellow picked me up on his steam yacht and carried me off to the Black Sea and then to a salmon river in Norway. I meant to go back, but I dawdled, and the first thing I knew they put another chap in my place. And now I'm Hutchins Magraw's secretary."

He sat staring absently at the distant skyline, and perceiving that he was no longer conscious of her presence she quietly shifted her sunshade and let her eyes rest for a moment on his moody profile.

"Yes that's what I call it, too. I'm Mrs. Bixby's secretary or Sadie's, I forget which. But how much writing do you do?"

"Well, not much. The butler attends to the invitations."

"I merely keep an eye on Sadie's spelling, and see that she doesn't sign herself 'lovingly' to young men. Mrs. Bixby has no correspondents, and the dinner invitations are engraved."

"And what are your other duties?"

"Oh, the usual things reminding Mrs. Bixby not to speak of her husband as Mr. Bixby, not to send in her cards when people are at home, not to let the butler say 'fine claret' in a sticky whisper in people's ears, not to speak of town as 'the city,' and not to let Mr. Bixby tell what things cost. Mrs. Bixby takes the bit in her teeth at times, but Sadie is such a dear adaptable creature that, when I've broken her of trying to relieve her callers of their hats, I shall really have nothing left to do. That habit is hard to eradicate, because she is such a good girl, and it was so carefully inculcated at her finishing school."

Tilney reflected. "Magraw is a good fellow too. There's really nothing to do except to tone him down a little as you say, one feels as if one didn't earn one's keep."

She flashed round upon him instantly. "Ah, but I didn't say that. I said the ostensible duties were easy but how about the others?"

He looked at her a little consciously. "What do you mean by the others?"

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"I don't know how far you live up to your duties, but I'm horribly conscientious about mine. And of course what we're both paid for is to be introducers," she said.

"Introducers?" He colored slightly and, flinging his arm over the back of the bench, turned to command a fuller view of her face. "Yes, that is what we're paid for, I suppose."

"And that's what I hate about it, don't you?"

"Uncommonly," he assented with emphasis.

It isn't that the Bixbys are not nice people they are, deep down, you know or at least they would be, if they were leading a real life among their real friends. But the very fact that one is abetting them to lead a false life, and renounce and deny their past, and impose themselves on people who wouldn't look at them if it were not for their money, and who rather resent their intrusion as it is well, if one oughtn't to be paid well for doing such a job as that, I don't know what it is to work for my living!"

Tilney continued to observe with appreciation the dramatic play of feature by means of which she expressed her rising disgust at her task; but when she ended he merely said in a detached tone: "It's charming how you've preserved your illusions."

"My illusions? Why, I haven't enough left for decency!"

"Oh, yes, you have. About the Bixbys, and what they would be if one hadn't egged them on. Why not say to yourself that, if they were not vulgar at heart, they would never have let themselves be taken in by this kind of humbug?"

"Is that what you say about Mr. Magraw?"

"I've told you that Magraw is a good fellow. But when I ran across him he was simply aching to see the show, and all I've done is to get him a seat in the front row."

"Yes but are you not expected to do something more for him?"

"Something more in what line?"

"Well, I think the Bixbys expect me to make a match for Sadie."

"The deuce they do! Well, we'll marry her to my man."

Miss Grantham uttered a cry of dismay. "Don't suggest it even in joke! Don't you see what a catastrophe it would be?"

"Why should it be a catastrophe?"

"Don't you really see? In the first place we should both be out of a job, and in the second, I should earn the everlasting enmity of the Bixbys. What they want for Sadie is not money but position. Mrs. Bixby tells me that every day."

Tilney received this in meditative silence: then he said with a slight laugh: "Well, if position is all they want, why don't you choose me as your candidate?"

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Miss Grantham did not echo his laugh; she simply concentrated her gaze on his with a slowly deepening interest before answering: "It's a funny idea but I believe they might do worse."

Tilney's hilarity increased.

"At any rate," she continued, without noticing it, "there's one thing that you and no one else can do for them, and I really believe that Mrs. Bixby, in her present mood, would be capable of rewarding you with her daughter's hand."

"Good heavens! Then I should have to take a look at Miss Bixby before doing it."

"Oh, Sadie's charming. Didn't you notice her last night at the ball? I managed to smuggle her in, though I couldn't get the others invited. What Mrs. Bixby wants," Miss Grantham earnestly continued, "what she's absolutely sickening for at this moment, is to have Sadie invited to Aline Leicester's little Louis XV. dance to-morrow night. And you are the only person in Newport who can do it. I didn't even have a chance to try for the very day my invitation came I happened to meet Aline, and she said at once: 'Belle, I see the Bixbys in your eye; but I don't see them in my ballroom.' After that, I tried a little wire-pulling, but it simply made her more obstinate you know her latest pose is to snub the new millionaires; and you are the only person who can persuade her to make an exception for the Bixbys. Aline's family feeling is tremendously strong, and every one knows you are her favorite cousin."

Tilney listened attentively to this plea; but when it had ended he said, with a discouraging gesture: "I was just going to try to get an invitation for Magraw!"

"Lump them together, then it will be just as easy; and if you should want Mr. Bixby to do anything for you such as putting you on to a good tip "

"Thanks, but I've been put on to too many good tips. If it weren't for the good tips I've had, I should be living like a gentleman on my income."

"Well, you'll make Mrs. Bixby think you the most eligible young man in Newport. And if you could persuade Aline to ask Sadie to the dinner before the dance "

"Comme vous y allez! What would be my return for that?"

She rose with a charming gesture. "Who knows, after all? Perhaps only the pleasure of doing me a very great favor."

"That settles it. I'll do what I can. But how about getting your costumes at such short notice?"

"Oh, we cabled out to Worth on the chance." She held out her hand for good-by. "If only there were something I could do for you!"

"Well, there is, as it happens," he rejoined with a smile. "If I succeed in my attempt, let Magraw dance the cotillon with you at Aline's."

She hesitated, visibly embarrassed. "I should be delighted, of course. I'm engaged already, but that's nothing. Only I'm going to be horribly frank the Bixbys are rather a heavy load, and I'm not sure I can carry your friend too!"

"Oh, yes, you can. That's my reason for asking you. You see, I really can't help Magraw much. It takes a woman to give a man a start. Aline will say, 'Oh, bring him, if you choose' but when he comes she won't take any notice

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of him, or introduce him to any of the nice women. He was too shy to go to the Summertons' last night—he's really very shy under his loudness—so Aline's dance will be his first appearance in Newport; and if he's seen dancing the cotillon with you, at a little southerie like that, with only a handful of people in the room, why, he's made, and my hard work is over for the season."

She smiled. "If you take a fancy to Sadie, perhaps it's over for life."

"And if you—by George! No, I don't think I want you to dance the cotillon with Magraw."

"Why not? Do you grudge me a comfortable home for my old age?"

He stood gazing at her as though for the first time his eyes took in the full measure of her grace.

"No—but I grudge him even a cotillon with you."

"Ah, you and I were not made to dance cotillons with one another; or do anything together, except conspire at sunrise for each other's material advancement. And that reminds me—I shan't see you again to-day, for we are going to Narragansett on Mr. Bixby's yacht, and to-night we have a dinner at home. But if you succeed with Aline, will you send me a line in the evening?"

He shook his head as they clasped hands once more. "No; but I'll tell you about it here to-morrow morning."

"Very well—I'll be punctual!" she called out to him, as she sped away through the shrubbery.

II.

It was, in fact, Miss Grantham who was first on the scene the next morning; and so eager was she to learn the result of the mission with which she had charged her friend, that, instead of profiting by her few moments of solitude, she sat watching the path and chafing at Mr. Tilney's delay.

When he arrived, politeness restrained the question on her lips; but his first word was to assure her of his success. "You are to bring Miss Bixby to the dinner," he announced.

"Oh, thank you, thank you—you're wonderful!" she exclaimed; "and if there's anything in the world I can do—"
She paused suddenly, remembering her side of the compact, and added with nobility: "If it is of any possible advantage to Mr. Magraw to make my acquaintance, I shall be very glad—"

She had already observed in Tilney a marked depression of manner, which even this handsome reaffirmation of her purpose did not dispel.

"Oh," he merely said, "I did not mean to hold you so closely to your bargain—"
and with that he seated himself at her side, and lapsed into a state of dumb preoccupation.

Miss Grantham suffered this as long as it was possible for a young lady of spirit to endure; then she determined to make Mr. Tilney aware of her presence by withdrawing it.

"I am afraid," she said, rising with a smile, "that, though you welcomed me so handsomely yesterday, my being here seriously interferes with your enjoyment of the hour, and I am going to propose a compromise. Since it is agreed that we are joint proprietors of this bench, and entitled to an equal share of its advantages, and since our sitting on it together practically negatives those advantages, I suggest that we occupy it on alternate mornings

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and to show my gratitude for the favor you have done me, I will set the example by withdrawing to-day."

Tilney met her smile with a look of unrelieved melancholy. "I don't wonder," he said, "that you find solitude less oppressive than my company; but since our purpose in seeking this bench is to snatch an hour's quiet enjoyment, and since enjoyment of any sort is impossible to me to-day, it is obviously you who are entitled to remain here, and I who ought to take myself away." And he held out his hand in farewell.

Miss Grantham detained it in hers. "To have you surrender your rights because you are too miserable to enjoy them, leaves me with no heart to profit by my own; and if you wish me to remain you must stay also, and tell me what it is that troubles you."

She reseated herself as she spoke, and Tilney, with a deprecating gesture, resumed his place at her side.

"My dear Miss Grantham, the subject is too trifling to mention; I was only trying to calculate how long one could live in Venice on a hundred dollars."

"Why in Venice and why a hundred dollars?"

"Because, when my passage is paid, it will be all the ready money I possess, and I have always heard that one could live very moderately in Venice."

Miss Grantham flushed and threw a quick glance at him. "You're not thinking of deserting?" she cried, reproachfully.

The young man returned her look. "Deserting whom?" he inquired.

"Well, me, if you choose! You can't think the comfort it's been to me, since yesterday, to know that there were two of us. I understand now how humane it is to chain convicts together!"

Tilney considered this with a faint smile. "How long have you been at it?" he asked.

"At the Bixbys? I joined them last April in Paris."

"Ah, well I've been six months with Magraw. It wasn't so bad when we were yachting and knocking about the world but since we've taken to society it has become unendurable."

"Yes. I didn't mind ordering the Bixbys' dresses as much as I mind providing opportunities for their wearing them."

"I don't so much mind trotting Magraw about though you know it's nonsense about your having to dance with him this evening "

"No matter about that. What is it that bothers you?"

"The whole preposterous situation. Magraw's the best fellow in the world but there are moments when he takes me for the butler."

"Oh, I know," she sympathized. "Mrs. Bixby "

"That isn't the worst, though: it's the reaction. He took me for the butler yesterday afternoon and in the evening I found a ruby scarf pin on my dressing table."

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But her sympathy was ready for any demand on it. "I know, I know " she reiterated; and then, breaking off, she added with a mounting color: "You know I couldn't go to the dance to-night if Mrs. Bixby didn't pay for my dress."

"Oh, the cases are not the same; and it's different for a woman."

"Why are the cases not the same? And why should I not be humiliated by what humiliates you?"

He shrugged his shoulders ironically. "I'm not humiliated by anything that poor Magraw does to me; I'm humiliated by what I do to him!:"

"What you do?"

"Yes. What right have I to behave like a gentleman, and return his scarf pins?"

"At least you do return them? And I can't return the dresses. Oh, it's detestable either way!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, especially when one succumbs to the weakness of hating them instead of one's self. I hate Magraw this morning," he confessed.

She rose with an impatient glance at her watch. "Dear me, I must go. I promised Sadie to see the dressmaker at half-past nine: she's coming to alter our fancy dresses. You see I felt sure you would get Sadie's invitation. I want you to know her," she continued. "She's really a very nice girl. I should like her immensely if I didn't have to accept so many favors from her."

"Ah, you've just expressed my feeling about Magraw. I really should like your opinion of him," he added.

"Well, you shall have it to-morrow morning."

"Here?" he rejoined with sudden interest.

"Why not? You know I mean to dance with him this evening."

The morning after the dance it was Miss Grantham's turn to arrive late at the tryst; and when she did so, it was with the air of having a duty to discharge rather than a pleasure to enjoy.

"Mr. Tilney," she said, advancing resolutely to the bench on which he sat awaiting her, "my only object in coming this morning is "

He rose with extended hand. "To let me thank you, I hope, for the generous way in which you fulfilled your share of the compact? It was awfully good of you to be so nice to Magraw."

She colored vividly, but held his gaze. "As it happens, I liked Mr. Magraw. But if I had known the means you had used to obtain his invitation "

Tilney colored in turn, but they continued to face each other boldly.

"Did Aline betray me? How like a woman!" he exclaimed.

"I can quite understand," Miss Grantham witheringly continued, "the importance you attached to having Mr. Magraw invited to your cousin's dance. You had to make some return for the scarf pin. But to use my name as a

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pretext to tell Aline Leicester that I was trying to marry Mr. Magraw!"

"Oh, I didn't say trying I said you meant to," Tilney corrected.

"As if that made it any better! To let that man think "

"He'll never hear of it; and you don't seem to realize that it's not easy to extract an invitation from Aline."

"I don't know that it was absolutely necessary that Mr. Magraw should receive one!"

Tilney, at this, raised his head with a challenging air. "You appeared to think it absolutely necessary that Miss Bixby should."

"Well I don't see "

"You don't see how I got hers? I dare say you'll think the same method is even more objectionable when the situation is reversed "

She stared at him with growing disapproval. "You don't mean to say that you let Aline think you wanted to marry Sadie Bixby?"

"I told you there was nothing I wouldn't stoop to. I suppose you think that horribly low."

Her stare resolved itself into a faint sound of laughter. "Good heavens, how enchanted Mrs. Bixby will be!"

"The deuce she will but of course the joke can easily be explained."

"To whom? To Mrs. Bixby? I'm glad you think so. I should have said it would be difficult."

"Oh, Mrs. Bixby will never hear of it. I told Aline in the strictest confidence "

"Every one at the dance was congratulating me on my conquest of Mr. Magraw. I don't see why Aline should keep one secret and not the other."

Tilney's brow darkened ominously. "Well, at any rate, I'll soon undeceive Magraw!"

"A thousand thanks. And I suppose you leave it to me to undeceive Sadie? She talked of you all the way home. Of course, you're almost the only decent man she's met."

"Ah, then the remedy is simple enough. You've only to introduce a few others."

"Yes, I've thought of that." Miss Grantham examined him with a cold smile. "But are you quite sure you want me to?"

Tilney met her question with another. "What on earth do you mean?"

"I'm not stupid in such cases, and I could see that Sadie was interested. Did you find her so perfectly impossible?"

"Impossible? I thought her very pretty."

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"That's going to the other extreme but she certainly looked her best last night. Still, before deciding, I should want you to see her by daylight and without the paint "

"Oh, she had on very little paint. One could see her own color through it."

"Yes she has an unfortunate way of getting red "

"At that age I should call it blushing."

Miss Grantham's face grew suddenly stern. "Of course," she said, "I should never forgive myself if you were only trifling with Sadie "

Tilney paused. "But if I were in earnest ?" he suggested.

She gazed at him intently for a moment. "After all, I might be saving her from something worse!"

III.

For two mornings after that Tilney, to his secret regret, had the bench on the cliffs to himself. On the third morning he was detained indoors somewhat later than usual on pressing business of his employer's; and when he emerged from the house he was surprised, and considerably dismayed, to find his seat tenanted by the incongruous figure of Mr. Hutchins Magraw.

Given his patron's unmatutinal habits, and rooted indifference to the beauties of nature, it was impossible to conceive what whim had drawn him to so unlikely a spot at so improbable an hour; and Tilney's first impulse was to approach the seat, and allay his curiosity by direct inquiry. Hardly, however, had he begun to advance when the flutter of a white skirt through the Cliffwood shrubberies caused him to retreat abruptly into the covert of lilac bushes edging the lawn. It was by a mere accident, of course, that an unknown female, wearing a white gown, happened to be walking along the path from that particular direction. The path was open to the public, and there was no reason to assume any coincidence between

Tilney drew a sharp breath. Mr. Magraw had risen and was advancing in the direction of the approaching petticoat; and as it was impossible for him to recognize its wearer from where he sat, it was obvious that he expected some one, and that the invisible female was no casual stroller drawn forth by the beauty of the morning. The next moment this conjecture was unpleasantly confirmed; for Miss Grantham emerged from the shrubbery, and placed her hand in Mr. Magraw's without perceptible surprise. He, then, had also been expected; and she had actually had the effrontery to select, as the scene of their tryst, the seat which, by every right of friendship, should have been kept sacred to her conversations with Fred Tilney!

"The idea of telling him about my bench!" Resentment of her perfidy was for the moment uppermost in Tilney's breast, or was, at any rate, the only sentiment to which he chose to give explicit expression. But other considerations surged indignantly beneath it wonder at woman's unaccountableness, disgust at her facility, disappointment, above all, that this one little episode, saved from the wreckage of many shattered illusions, should have had so premature and unpoetic an ending.

"Magraw if only it hadn't been Magraw!"

He had meant to turn away and reenter the house; but a feeling of mingled curiosity and wretchedness kept him rooted in his hiding place, while he followed with his eyes the broad swaggering back of Mr. Hutchins Magraw, as it attended Miss Grantham's slender silhouette across the lawn.

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"I hadn't realized how disgustingly fat the man has grown. One would think a fellow with that outline would know better than to rig himself out in a check a foot square, and impale his double chin on the points of that preposterous collar! It's odd how little the most fastidious women notice such details. If they did, fewer men would make themselves ridiculous. Why are they standing there, looking up at the house? Perhaps, after all, it was an accident, their meeting. No they're making straight for the bench by George, I believe they were looking at the house to make sure I wasn't coming! Don't be alarmed, my dear Miss Grantham, I've no desire to interfere with your amusements. I see now, though, why Magraw was in such a hurry to have me balance his bank book this morning. Just a dodge to keep me indoors, of course. It's beastly bad taste, anyhow, to make a poor devil like me go over a bank book with such an indecently big balance. That's the kind of thing that makes a man turn socialist. Why the devil should Magraw have all those millions while I well, to be sure, poor devil, he needs them all to make up for his other deficiencies. I'd like to see how long Belle Grantham would share that bench with him if it weren't for his bank account! It must be hard work to talk to Magraw at nine o'clock in the morning. I wonder what the deuce she's saying to him?"

The two objects of Tilney's contemplation had by this time settled themselves on the seat which their observer still chose to call his own, and something in their attitudes seemed to announce that theirs was no transient alighting, but the deliberate installation which precedes an earnest talk.

"Well, she could talk to anybody, at any hour of the day or night! That's her trade, poor girl, as much as it is mine. Only I can't see why she should give Magraw my particular hour. Now that I've given him such a good start they've plenty of other chances of meeting. But perhaps she's afraid of competition, and wants to clinch the business by this morning interview. Poor girl! How she must hate it at heart! I'll do her the justice to say that if she had enough to keep body and soul together she'd never look at a Magraw. But if this hand-to-mouth life is hard on a man it's ten times worse for a woman and her day is over sooner, too. Poor girl! No wonder she shrinks at the idea of growing old in such a trade. To see people cooling off, and the newcomers crowding her out how can I blame her for being afraid to face such a future? Why, I ought to do what I can to help her but to help her to Magraw! Bah there's something rotten in our social system; but it isn't her fault, and only a primitive ass of a man would be fool enough to blame her, instead of pitying her as a fellow victim."

At this point Miss Grantham started up with an apprehensive gesture with which Tilney was painfully familiar. "She's had to look at her watch to realize how time was flying! She doesn't seem to find it goes so slowly with Magraw. Perhaps my pity's wasted, after all. That's the way she always lingers on after she has said she couldn't possibly stay another minute. Poor Magraw! She's playing him for all she's worth, and I don't suppose he even knows he's on the hook. Oh, I don't blame her not in the least! only I think she might have chosen another place for their meetings. Hardened wretch as I am, I was beginning to have a sentiment for that bench it would never have occurred to me to sit there with Miss Bixby, for instance. It's queer how a woman's taste deteriorates when she associates with common men but I mean to let Miss Grantham know that, though she's welcome to Magraw, she can't have my bench into the bargain!"

By this time the couple under observation had completed their lingering adieux, the gentleman returning across the lawn to his house, while the lady retraced her way toward Cliffwood. Tilney remained in concealment while Mr. Magraw strode by within a few feet, the fatuous smile of self-complacency upon his lips; then the young man, emerging behind his patron's back, struck across the lawn and overtook Miss Grantham as she turned into the adjoining grounds.

She paused as she became aware of Tilney's approach, and cast a rapid glance in the direction from which he had come; but he had taken care not to show himself till Magraw had vanished in the shrubberies, and he was quick to note the look of reassurance in Miss Grantham's eyes. She held out her hand, blushing slightly, but self-possessed.

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"J'ai failli attendre!" she quoted with an indulgent smile; and the smile had well-nigh stung her companion to immediate retaliation. But he meditated a subtler revenge, and dissembling his resentment, asked innocently: "Have you been here long?"

"It has certainly seemed so," she replied in the same tone.

"Well, at any rate, my involuntary delay has enabled you to enjoy what you originally came out to seek;" and, in reply to her puzzled glance, he added pointedly: "The pleasures of solitude."

Unmoved by the thrust, she turned a smiling look on him. "But what if you have made them lose their flavor?"

"Then it was almost worth my while to have stayed away!"

She held out her hand. "The experiment was so successful that you need not try it again," she said sweetly. "But time flies, and I must hasten back into captivity."

He detained her hand to ask sentimentally: "I hope you are not losing your taste for freedom?" and she replied, as she hastened away: "Come and see come and see to-morrow!"

He stood in the path where she had left him, and slowly drew from his pocket Mr. Magraw's latest gift a jeweled cigarette case. He took out the cigarettes, transferred them to his pocket, and then, with a free swing of the arm, flung their receptacle into the sea.

"Do you come and see to-morrow!" he muttered, addressing himself to Miss Grantham's retreating figure; then he lit a cigarette, and walked rapidly back to Sea Lodge.

"I shouldn't have thought it of her!" he said as he entered the house.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

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PART II.

IV.

TWO mornings later Tilney, with a beating heart, descended the terrace of Sea Lodge, and once more directed himself toward the bench on the cliff.

He was not only on time, but a few minutes before the hour; yet it was something of a surprise to him to find the bench still untenanted. He seated himself, lit a cigarette with deliberation, and drew from his pocket a note stamped Cliffwood and bearing the date of the previous evening.

"Dear Mr. Tilney,"

it ran, "much as I dislike to intrude upon the solitude which I know you value so highly, I must ask you to spare me a few moments to-morrow morning; and I send this line in advance in order that my coming may not interfere with any other arrangements.

"Yours sincerely,

PART II.

The Introducers

"BELLE GRANTHAM."

Tilney re-read this note with an air of considerable complacency; then he laid it carefully back in his notecase, and rose to meet Miss Grantham as she made her appearance around the curve of the path.

The morning was chilly, and veiled in a slight haze, too translucent to be called a fog, but perceptible enough to cast a faint grayness over sea and sky. Seen in this tempered light, Miss Grantham's face seemed to lose its usual vivacity and be subdued to the influence of the atmosphere; and her manner of greeting Tilney had the same tinge of soberness.

"I must excuse myself," she began, "for again intruding on your privacy "

"My privacy?" Tilney gallantly interposed. "Was it not long since understood between us that the privacy of this spot belongs as much to you as to me?"

"Long since yes," she replied; "but so much has happened in the interval." She paused, and added in a significant tone: "Since I came here yesterday morning, and found you sitting on this bench with Sadie Bixby."

Tilney feigned a successful show of embarrassment. "You came here yesterday morning ?"

"By appointment, as you evidently do not remember," she continued coldly. "It is a mistake one does not make twice, and my only object in asking to see you this morning "

"One moment," Tilney interposed. "Before you go on, I must say in my own defense that I assumed our compact about the use of this seat had been abrogated when I came out the day before yesterday, and found you sharing it with Magraw."

There was no mistaking the effect of this thrust. Her color rose painfully, and she forced a laugh as she replied: "The day before yesterday? Ah, yes that was the morning you were so late. Mr. Magraw saw me from the house, and took pity on my deserted state."

Tilney colored also at this fresh evidence of her duplicity.

"I beg your pardon but does not your memory deceive you? It seemed to me that Magraw was waiting on the bench, and that it was you who took pity if I am not mistaken."

She drew herself up and flashed an outraged glance at him. "You were watching us, then?" she exclaimed.

"Oh watching! I was merely repairing to our seat at my usual hour."

"At your usual hour? But Mr. Magraw told me you were not coming that you would be busy all the morning with some writing " She broke off, seeing herself more deeply involved with each word.

"Some writing he had given me to do? Precisely," Tilney answered with scorn. "Only, he had underrated either my impatience to see you, or my head for figures or both."

She received this in an embarrassed silence, and softened by her embarrassment he added: "It is not for me to discuss your arrangements; but I confess I wondered a little that you chose our bench as a meeting-place."

She hesitated a moment, and then said in a deprecating tone: "It is the only place where I can see anyone alone!"

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"And you wished to see Magraw alone?"

Their eyes met defiantly, but hers fell first as she answered: "Yes I did wish to."

Tilney bowed ceremoniously. "In that case, of course, nothing remains to be said."

They had both remained standing during this short colloquy, but she now seated herself and signed to him to do the same.

"Yes something remains for me to say; and it was for the purpose of saying it that I asked you to meet me this morning."

Tilney, without replying, placed himself at the opposite end of the bench.

"What I wish to ask," she continued in a decisive tone, "is your object in meeting Miss Bixby here yesterday."

The temerity of the question was so surprising to her companion that for a moment he gazed at her without speaking; then he replied with a faint smile: "If there is any right of priority in such inquiries, perhaps I am entitled to ask first what was your object in meeting Magraw here the day before that."

She repressed her impatience, and returned gently: "The cases are surely not quite alike; but I thought I had already given you my answer."

"That you wished to see him alone? Well, I had the same object in asking Miss Bixby to meet me."

"But you must see that in the case of a young girl especially a girl as inexperienced as Sadie "

Tilney raised his hand with a deprecating gesture. "Are you not falling into the conventional mistake of assuming that a man cannot seek to be alone with a young girl except for the purpose of making love to her?"

"Well, what other purpose ?"

He looked at her calmly. "Then it was to promote that purpose that you asked Magraw to meet you here the day before I met Miss Bixby?"

It was Miss Grantham's turn to color, and she fulfilled the obligation handsomely. "I see no object in such cross-questioning "

"Ah, pardon me, but it was you who began it."

"It was my duty to question you about Sadie. You can't imagine I do it for my pleasure but her parents are too inexperienced to protect her."

"To protect her? Then you consider me hopelessly detrimental ?"

Miss Grantham drew a quick breath. "Why not have told me at once that you wished to marry her? Every one is saying so, of course; but I could not help remembering that your intentions have not always been so "

"Specific?" he suggested ironically.

"Well, you are still unmarried," she observed.

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"Yes," he said musingly. "It takes a pretty varied experience of life to find out that there are worse states than marriage."

Miss Grantham rose with a smile. "Since you have found it out," she said generously, "I can congratulate you with perfect sincerity. Sadie is a dear little creature " "But too good for me? Is that what you meant to add?"

"No, for when you find out how good she is you'll want to be worthy of her."

He received this in silence, but when she held out her hand for good-bye he said: "I wonder if it's not my duty to protect Magraw? He hasn't even an inexperienced parent."

She met his smile steadily, but he felt the sudden resistance of her hand. "Mr. Magraw," she returned, withdrawing it, "would be quite safe if Sadie were."

"If Sadie ?"

She broke into a laugh. "If you're planning to take the bread out of my mouth, I must do something in the way of self-preservation." And as he remained silent, feeling a rather tragic import under her pleasantry, she added wearily: "I can't begin this kind of thing over again I simply can't!"

Tilney's discouraged gesture showed his comprehension of her words. "To whom do you say it?" he exclaimed.

"Well, then, let us drop phrases, and admit frankly that we're trying to marry each other's wards or whatever you choose to call them!"

He did not answer, and she continued, with a kind of nervous animation: "And that we'll do all we can that we honorably can to help each other's plans, and see each other through."

The young man still remained silent, his eyes absently fixed on the line of sea from which the veil of mist was gradually receding; and before he had found a reply a footman, hastening across the lawn from the house, broke in upon his meditations.

"Beg pardon, sir, but Mr. Magraw wishes you to come in immediately, sir, to answer the telephone for him."

Tilney turned abruptly toward his companion. "By heaven, yes, we'll see each other through!" he exclaimed.

Though Tilney and Miss Grantham had parted without any reference to future meetings at the same spot, each was now drawn to the bench on the cliffs by a new motive the not un pardonable desire to see if the other had again extended its hospitality to a third party.

Their mutual reconnoitering did not, for several mornings, carry them farther than the most distant point from which the bench was visible; when, perceiving it to be untenanted, they respectively retreated, without having discovered each other's manoeuvre.

The fifth day, however, was so foggy that distant espionage was impossible; and Tilney's suspicions having been aroused by the unusual amount of correspondence with which his patron had burdened him overnight, he determined to ascertain by direct inspection if the sanctity of the bench had again been violated. It would have been hard to say why, in his own thoughts, he still applied such terms to the possibility of Miss Grantham's resorting to the spot in company with her suitor. Tilney fully acquie