

Age Of Innocence Script

[At the Theatre in the evening. Newland Archer enters the box. Steps to the front, joining the company of several men, including Larry Lefferts and Sillerton Jackson. Larry looks at stage through pearl opera glasses. Then he swings his opera glasses away from the stage and toward another box. He sees the figure of a woman entering a box across the way. Although the woman, silhouetted against candles, is still indistinct and mysterious to us, he recognizes her and reacts with controlled surprise]

LEFFERTS

Well.

JACKSON

I didn't think the Mingotts would have tried it on.

LEFFERTS

Parading her at the opera like that. Sitting her next to May Welland. It's all very odd.

JACKSON

Well, she's had such an odd life.

LEFFERTS

Will they even bring her to the Beauforts' ball, do you suppose?

JACKSON

If they do, the talk will be little else.

[Archer looks at his companions in the box with just a suggestion of impatience. Then he turns and leaves]

[Archer goes to the box where May Welland is]

ARCHER

May. Mrs. Welland. Good evening.

MRS. WELLAND

Newland. You know my niece Countess Olenska.

[Archer bows with the suggestion of reserve. Countess Olenska replies with a nod. Newland sits beside May and speaks softly]

ARCHER

I hope you've told Madame Olenska.

MAY

(teasing)

What?

ARCHER

That we're engaged. I want everybody to know. Let me announce it this evening at the ball.

MAY

If you can persuade Mamma. But why should we change what is already settled?

[Archer has no answer for this that is appropriate for this time and place. May senses his frustration and adds, smiling. . .]

MAY

But you can tell my cousin yourself. She remembers you.

ELLEN

(Countess Olenska)

I remember we played together. Being here again makes me remember so much.

[She gestures out across the theatre]

ELLEN

I see everybody the same way, dressed in knickerbockers and pantalettes.

[Archers sits beside her]

ELLEN

You were horrid. You kissed me once behind a door. But it was your cousin Vandy, the one who never looked at me, I was in love

with.

ARCHER

Yes, you have been away a very long time.

ELLEN

Oh, centuries and centuries. So long I'm sure I'm dead and buried, and this dear old place is heaven.

[As they end, the voice of the narrator fades up]

[In another box, Mrs. Julius Beaufort

(Regina)

draws up her opera cloak about her shoulders. As she does this and leaves the box, we hear. . .]

NARRATOR

It invariably happened, as everything happened in those days, in the same way. As usual, Mrs. Julius Beaufort appeared just before the Jewel Song and, again as usual, rose at the end of the third act and disappeared. New York then knew that, a half-hour later, her annual opera ball would begin.

[Street outside the theatre

(14th Street)

at night. A line of carriages drawn up in front of the Academy of Music. Mrs. Beaufort climbs in a carriage at the front of the line and drives away]

NARRATOR

Carriages waited at the curb for the entire performance. It was widely known in New York, but never acknowledged, that Americans want to get away from amusement even more quickly than they want to get to it.

[Ballroom at the Beaufort House]

NARRATOR

The Beauforts' house was one of the few in New York that possessed a ballroom. Such a room, shuttered in darkness three hundred and sixty-four days of the year, was felt to compensate for whatever was regrettable in the Beaufort past. Regina Beaufort came from an old South Carolina family, but her husband Julius, who passed for an Englishman, was known to have dissipated habits, a bitter tongue and mysterious antecedents. His marriage assured him a social position, but not necessarily respect.

[Ballroom at the Beaufort House during the ball. An orchestra plays and dancers swoop by. Archer enters and hands his cape and hat to a servant, greets another guest and accepts several pair of dancing gloves. Archer climbs the stairs and greets Regina Beaufort]

NARRATOR

The house had been boldly planned. Instead of squeezing through a narrow passage to get to the ballroom one marched solemnly down a vista of enfiladed drawing rooms seeing from afar the many-candled

lusters reflected in the polished parquetry and beyond that the depths of a conservatory where camellias and tree ferns arched their costly foliage over seats of black and gold bamboo. But only by actually passing through the crimson drawing room could one see "Return of Spring," the much-discussed nude by Bougeureau, which Beaufort had had the audacity to hang in plain sight. Archer had not gone back to his club after the Opera, as young men usually did, but had walked for some distance up Fifth Avenue before turning back in the direction of the Beauforts'. He was definitely afraid that the family might be going too far and would bring the Countess Olenska. He was more than ever determined to "see the thing through," but he felt less chivalrously inclined to defend the Countess after their brief talk at the opera.

[Archer enters the ballroom. The first man he sees is Larry Lefferts, deep in conversation with an attractive young woman]

NARRATOR

On the whole, Lawrence Lefferts was the foremost authority on "form" in New York. On the question of pumps versus patent-leather Oxfords, his authority had never been disputed.

[Archer continues through the party. Holding court and amusing a group of older women is Sillerton Jackson]

NARRATOR

Old Mr. Sillerton Jackson was as great an authority on "family" as Lawrence Lefferts was on "form." In addition to a forest of family trees, he carried a register of the scandals and mysteries

that had smouldered under the unruffled surface of society for the past fifty years.

[Archer continues moving through the party. Julius Beaufort crosses in front of him, conversing with a guest]

GUEST

(in mid-discussion)

But I didn't see you there this evening. Madame Nilsson was in such splendid voice.

BEAUFORT

(snide)

The usual splendor, I'm sure.

NARRATOR

Julius Beaufort had speedily made a name for himself in the world of affairs. His secret, all were agreed, was the way he carried things off. His social obligations and the rumors that perpetually swirled around him, all were borne easily before him.

[May Welland is surrounded by gleeful friends who are obviously reacting to her engagement announcement. Archer and May are in another room behind a tall screen of ferns and camellias. Archer kisses May's hand]

MAY

You see, I told all my friends. Just as you asked.

ARCHER

Yes, I couldn't wait. Only wish it hadn't had to be at a ball.

MAY

Yes, I know. But after all, even here we're alone together aren't we?

ARCHER

Always. The worst of it is. . .

[He takes a quick look around the room
no one's nearby]

ARCHER

. . . that I want to kiss you and I can't.

[He does it anyways which pleases and surprises May. They walk to a sofa, which affords a bit of privacy, and sit]

MAY

Did you tell Ellen, as I asked you?

ARCHER

No. I didn't have the chance after all.

MAY

She's my cousin, if others know before she does. . . It's just that she's been away forso long that she's rather sensitive.

ARCHER

Of course I'll tell her, dearest. But I haven't seen her yet.

MAY

She decided not to come at the last minute.

ARCHER

At the last minute?

MAY

She was afraid her dress wasn't smart enough. We all thought it was so lovely, butshe asked my aunt to take her home.

ARCHER

Oh well.

[Archer smiles, May smiles back. They get up and go back to the ballroom to dance]

[In a sitting room the next day. Mrs. Manson Mingott is admiring a large thick sapphire set in invisible claws]

MRS. MINGOTT

Very handsome. Very liberal. In my time a cameo set in pearls was thought to besufficient.

MRS. WELLAND

It's the new setting. Of course it shows the stone beautifully, but it looks bare old-fashioned eyes.

MRS. MINGOTT

I hope you don't mean mine, my dear. I like all the novelties. But it's the hand that sets off the ring, isn't it, my dear Mr. Archer? My hands were modeled in Paris by the great Rochee. He should do May's.

[She reaches out for May's hand]

MRS. MINGOTT

Her hand is tempered. It's these modern sports that spread the joints. But the skin is white.

(staring straight at Archer)

And when's the wedding to be?

MRS. WELLAND

(a little flustered)

Oh. . .

ARCHER

(jumping in)

As soon as ever it can. If only you'll back me up, Mrs. Mingott.

MRS. WELLAND

(recovering)

We must give them time to know each other a little better, mamma.

MRS. MINGOTT

Know each other? Everybody in New York has always known everybody. Don't wait till the bubble's off the wine. Marry them before Lent. I may catch pneumonia any winter now, and I want to give the wedding breakfast.

NARRATOR

Mrs. Manson Mingott was, of course, the first to receive the required betrothal visit. Much of New York was already related to her, and she knew the remainder by marriage or by reputation. Though brownstone was the norm, she lived magisterially within a large house of controversial pale cream-colored stone, in an inaccessible wilderness near the Central Park.

NARRATOR

The burden of her flesh had long since made it impossible for her to go up and downstairs. So with characteristic independence she had established herself on the ground floor of her house. From her sitting room, there was an unexpected vista of her bedroom.

NARRATOR

Her visitors were startled and fascinated by the foreignness of

this arrangement, which recalled scenes in French fiction. This was how women with lovers lived in the wicked old societies. But if Mrs. Mingott had wanted a lover, the intrepid woman would have had him too.

NARRATOR

But she was content, at this moment in her life, simply to sit in a window of her sitting room, waiting calmly for life and fashion to flow northward to her solitary doors, for her patience was equalled by her confidence.

[Archer, May and Mrs. Welland are saying their goodbyes as they get ready to leave. Ellen Olenska and Julius Beaufort enter as they leave]

MRS. MINGOTT

Beaufort! This is a rare favor.

BEAUFORT

Unnecessarily rare, I'd say. But I met Countess Ellen in Madison Square, and she was good enough to let me walk home with her.

MRS. MINGOTT

This house will be merrier now that she's here. Push up that tuffet. I want a good gossip.

[Ellen looks at Archer with a questioning smile]

ARCHER

(laughing shyly)

Of course you already know. About May and me. She scolded me for not telling you at the opera.

ELLEN

Of course I know. And I'm so glad. One doesn't tell such news first in a crowd.

[Ellen holds her hand out to Archer]

ELLEN

Good-bye. Come and see me some day.

[Outside the Mingott House. Archer follows May and her mother into their waiting carriage]

MRS. WELLAND

It's a mistake for Ellen to be seen parading up Fifth Avenue with Julius Beaufort at the crowded hour. The very day after her arrival.

[The carriage pulls away from the curb]

[Dining Room at the Archer House in the evening. Archer is having dinner with his mother Adeline, sister Janey and Sillerton Jackson]

NARRATOR

Mrs. Archer and her daughter Janey were both shy women and shrank from society. But they liked to be well informed of its doings.

JACKSON

(in the midst of holding forth)

Certain nuances escape Beaufort.

MRS. ARCHER

Oh, necessarily. Beaufort is a vulgar man.

ARCHER

Nevertheless, no business nuances escape him. Most of New York trusts him with its affairs.

MRS. ARCHER

My grandfather Newland always used to say to mother, "Don't let that fellow Beaufort be introduced to girls. "But at least he's had the advantage of associating with gentlemen. Even in England, they say. It's all very mysterious.

NARRATOR

As far back as anyone could remember, New York had been divided into two great clans. Among the Mingotts you could dine on canvasback duck, terrapin and vintage wines. At the Archers, you could talk about Alpine scenery and "The Marble Faun" but receive tepid Veuve Cliquot without a year and warmed-up croquettes from

Philadelphia.

JANEY

And the Countess Olenska. . . was she at the ball too?

MRS. ARCHER

I appreciate the Mingotts wanting to support her, and have her at the opera. I admire their esprit de corps. But why my son's engagement should be mixed up with that woman's comings and goings I don't see.

JACKSON

Well, in any case, she was not at the ball.

MRS. ARCHER

At least she had that decency.

[Jackson glances at the portraits of the Archer family antecedents on the wall, and fixes on one of a well-fed, slightly flush older man. He looks over at Archer, who is watching him with bemused understanding]

JACKSON

(can't resist)

Ah, how your grandfather appreciated a good meal, Newland.

JANEY

I wonder if she wears a round hat or a bonnet in the afternoon.
The dress she wore to the opera was so plain and flat. . .

MRS. ARCHER

Yes, I'm sure it was in better taste not to go to the ball.

ARCHER

I don't think it was a question of taste, mother. May said the
countess decided her dress wasn't smart enough.

MRS. ARCHER

Poor Ellen. We must always remember what an eccentric bringing-up
Medora Mansongave her. What can you expect of a girl who was
allowed to wear black satin at her coming-out ball?

JANEY

It's odd she should have kept such an ugly name as Ellen when she
married the Count. I should have changed it to Elaine.

ARCHER

Why?

JANEY

I don't know. It sounds more. . . Polish.

MRS. ARCHER

It certainly sounds more conspicuous. And that can hardly be what
she wishes.

ARCHER

(argumentative)

Why not? Why shouldn't she be conspicuous if she chooses? She made an awful marriage, but should she hide her head as if it were her fault? Should she go slinking around as if she'd disgraced herself? She's had an unhappy life, but that doesn't make her an outcast.

JACKSON

I'm sure that's the line the Mingotts mean to take.

ARCHER

I don't have to wait for their cue, if that's what you mean, sir.

MRS. ARCHER

(trying to cool things out)

I'm told she's looking for a house. She means to live here.

JANEY

I hear she means to get a divorce.

ARCHER

I hope she will.

[In the study at the Archer House. Jackson and Archer light up cigars]

JACKSON

There are the rumors, too.

ARCHER

I've heard them. About the secretary?

JACKSON

He helped her get away from the husband. They say the Count kept her practically aprisoner.

(shrugs)

Certainly, the Count had his own way of life.

ARCHER

You knew him?

JACKSON

I heard of him at Nice. Handsome, they say, but eyes with a lot of lashes. When hewasn't with women he was collecting china. Paying any price for both, I understand.

ARCHER

Then where's the blame? Any one of us, under the same circumstances, would havehelped the Countess, just as the secretary did.

JACKSON

He was still helping her a year later, then, because somebody met them livingtogether at Lausanne.

ARCHER

(reddening slightly)

Living together? Well why not? Who has the right to make her life over if shehasn't? Why should we bury a woman alive if her husband prefers to live withwhores?

JACKSON

Oh, it's hardly a question of entombment. The Countess is here, after all. Or doyou believe that women should share the same freedoms as men?

ARCHER

(with some force)

I suppose I do. Yes, I do.

JACKSON

Well, apparently Count Olenski also takes a similarly modern view. I've never heardof him lifting a finger to get his wife back.

[Montage. Of heavy vellum envelopes, written in beautiful calligraphy, being passed from hand to hand and delivered on silver plates; of invitations being drawn from the envelopes]

NARRATOR

Three days later, the unthinkable happened. Mrs. Manson Mingott sent outinvitations summoning everyone to a "formal dinner. "Such an occasion demanded themost careful consideration. It required the appropriate plate. It also called forthree extra footmen, two

dishes for each course and a Roman punch in the middle. The dinner, New York read on the invitation, was "to meet the Countess Olenska. "And New York declined.

[Drawing room at the Archer house during the day]

MRS. ARCHER

"Regret. "Unable to accept. "Without a single explanation or excuse. Even some of our own. No one even cares enough to conceal their feeling about the Countess. This is a disgrace. For our whole family. And an awful blow to Catherine Mingott.

NARRATOR

They all lived in a kind of hieroglyphic world. The real thing was never said or done or even thought, but only represented by a set of arbitrary signs. These signs were not always subtle, and all the more significant for that. The refusals were more than a simple snubbing. They were an eradication.

MRS. ARCHER

Don't tell me all this modern newspaper rubbish about a New York aristocracy. This city has always been a commercial community, and there are not more than three families in it who can claim an aristocratic origin in the real sense of the word. Even dear Mr. Welland made his money in enterprise. So.

(looking at them with resolution)

We will take up this matter with the van der Luydens.

[She starts for the door]

MRS. ARCHER

You should come with me, Newland. Louisa van der Luyden is fond of you, and ofcourse it's on account of May we're doing this.

ARCHER

Of course.

MRS. ARCHER

If we don't all stand together, there'll be no such thing as society left.

[in the Drawing room at the van der Luyden House. Henry and Louisa van der Luyden are sitting with Newland and his mother]

HENRY

And all this, you think, was due to some intentional interference by. . .

ARCHER

. . . Larry Lefferts, yes sir. I'm certain of it.

LOUISA

But why?

ARCHER

Well. Excuse me but. . .

LOUISA

Please, go on.

ARCHER

Larry's been going it harder than usual lately. Some service person in their village or someone, and it's getting noticed. Whenever poor Gertrude Lefferts begins to suspect something about her husband, Larry starts making some great diversionary fuss to show how moral he is. He's simply using Countess Olenska as a lightning rod.

LOUISA

Extraordinary.

HENRY

Not at all, my dear, I'm afraid.

MRS. ARCHER

We all felt this slight on the Countess should not pass without consulting you.

HENRY

Well, it's the principle that I dislike. I mean to say, as long as a member of a well-known family is backed by that family, it should be considered final.

LOUISA

It seems so to me.

HENRY

So with Louisa's permission. . . and with Catherine Mingott's, of course. . . we are giving a little dinner for our cousin the Duke of St. Austrey, who arrives next week on the Russia. I'm sure Louisa will be glad as I am if Countess Olenska will let us include her among our guests.

[In the hallway and drawing room at the van der Luyden House]

NARRATOR

The occasion was a solemn one and the Countess Olenska arrived rather late. Yet she entered without any appearance of haste or embarrassment the drawing room in which New York's most chosen company was somewhat awfully assembled.

[Servants open the drawing room doors for Ellen. Henry and Louisa van der Luyden bring Ellen around the room making introductions.
]

[In the dining room at the van der Luyden House]

NARRATOR

The van der Luydens stood above all the city's families. They dwelled in a kind of super-terrestrial twilight, and dining with them was at best no light matter. Dining there with a Duke who was their cousin was almost a religious solemnity. The Trevenna George II plate was out. So was the van der Luyden Lowestoft, from the East India Company, and the Dagonet Crown Derby. When the

van der Luydens chose, they knew how to give a lesson.

[In the drawing room at the van der Luyden House. Ellen Olenska is having a conversation with the Duke as Archer watches. Ellen then gets up and approaches Archer]

NARRATOR

It was not the custom in New York drawing rooms for a lady to get up and walk away from one gentleman in order to seek the company of another. But the Countess did not observe this rule.

ELLEN

I want you to talk to me about May.

ARCHER

You knew the Duke before?

ELLEN

From Nice. We used to see him every winter. He's very fond of gambling and used to come to our house a great deal. I think he's the dullest man I ever met. But he's admired here. I suppose he must seem the very image of traditional Europe. Can I tell you, though. . .

(mock conspiratorial)

. . . what most interests me about New York? It's that nothing has to be traditional here. All this blind obeying of tradition. . . somebody else's tradition. . . is thoroughly needless. It seems stupid to have discovered America only to make it a copy of another country. Do you suppose Christopher Columbus would have

taken all that trouble just to go to the opera with Larry
Lefferts?

ARCHER

(laughs)

I think if he knew Lefferts was here the Santa Maria would never
have left port.

ELLEN

And May. Does she share these views?

ARCHER

If she does, she'd never say so.

ELLEN

Are you very much in love with her?

ARCHER

As much as a man can be.

ELLEN

Do you think there's a limit?

ARCHER

If there is, I haven't found it.

ELLEN

Ah, it's really and truly a romance, then. Not in the least

arranged.

ARCHER

Have you forgotten? In our country we don't allow marriages to be arranged.

ELLEN

Yes, I forgot, I'm sorry, I sometimes make these mistakes. I don't always remember that everything here is good that was. . . that was bad where I came from.

ARCHER

I'm so sorry. But you are among friends here, you know.

ELLEN

Yes, I know. That's why I came home.

[May and her mother enter the room]

ELLEN

You'll want to be with May.

ARCHER

(looking at the men around May)

She's already surrounded. I have so many rivals.

ELLEN

Then stay with me a little longer.

ARCHER

Yes.

[They are interrupted by Henry van der Luyden and a guest]

HENRY

Countess, if I may. Mr. Urban Dagonet.

[Archer gets up to leave and Ellen holds her hand out to him]

ELLEN

Tomorrow then. After five. I'll expect you.

ARCHER

Tomorrow.

[Louisa joins Archer]

LOUISA

It was good of you to devote yourself to Madame Olenska so unselfishly, dear Newland. I told Henry he really must rescue you. I think I've never seen May looking lovelier. The Duke thinks her the handsomest woman in the room.

[In the drawing room at Ellen's house the next day. Archer is waiting for Ellen to return]

MAID

Verra, verra.

[A carriage with Julius Beaufort and the Countess arrives and the Countess gets out and enters the house]

ELLEN

Do you like this odd little house? To me it's like heaven.

ARCHER

(reaching for the right compliment)

You've arranged it delightfully.

ELLEN

Yes. Some of the things I managed to bring with me. Little pieces of wreckage. At least it's less gloomy than the van der Luydens', and not so difficult to be alone.

ARCHER

(smiles)

I'm sure it's often thought the van der Luydens' is gloomy, though I've never heard it said before. But do you really like to be alone?

ELLEN

As long as my friends keep me from being lonely.

[She sits near the fire and motions him to sit in an armchair near where he's standing]

ELLEN

I see you've already chosen your corner. This is the hour I like best, don't you?

ARCHER

I was afraid you'd forgotten the hour. I'm sure Beaufort can be very intriguing.

ELLEN

He took me to see some houses. I'm told I must move, even though this street seems perfectly respectable.

ARCHER

Yes, but it's not fashionable.

ELLEN

Is fashion such a serious consideration?

ARCHER

Among people who have nothing more serious to consider.

ELLEN

And how would these people consider my street?

ARCHER

(lightly, disparagingly)

Oh, well, fleetingly, I'm afraid. Look at your neighbors.

Dressmakers. Birdstuffers. Cafe owners.

ELLEN

(smiling)

I'll count on you to always let me know about such important things.

ARCHER

The van der Luydens do nothing by halves. All New York laid itself out for you lastnight.

ELLEN

It was so kind. Such a nice party.

[Archer wants to impress on her the importance of the van der Luydens' gesture]

ARCHER

The van der Luydens are the most powerful influence in New York society. And they receive very seldom, because of cousin Louisa's health.

ELLEN

Perhaps that's the reason then.

ARCHER

The reason?

ELLEN

For their influence. They make themselves so rare.

[Her observation intrigues him.]

ELLEN

But of course you must tell me.

ARCHER

No, it's you telling me.

ELLEN

Then we can both help each other. Just tell me what to do.

ARCHER

There are so many people already to tell you what to do.

ELLEN

They're all a little angry with me, I think. For setting up for myself.

ARCHER

Still, your family can advise you. . . show you the way.

ELLEN

Is New York such a labyrinth? I thought it was so straight up and down, like Fifth Avenue, with all the cross-streets numbered and big honest labels on everything.

ARCHER

Everything is labeled. But everybody is not.

ELLEN

There are only two people here who make me think they can help and understand. You and Mr. Beaufort.

ARCHER

(reacts to mention of Beaufort)

I understand. Just don't let go of your old friends' hands so quickly.

ELLEN

Then I must count on you for warnings, too.

ARCHER

All the older women like and admire you. They want to help.

ELLEN

Oh, I know, I know. But only if they don't hear anything unpleasant. Does no one here want to know the truth, Mr. Archer? The real loneliness is living among all these kind people who only ask you to pretend.

[She puts her hands to her face and sobs. Archer goes to her quickly, bending over her]

ARCHER

No, no, you musn't. Madame Olenska. Ellen.

ELLEN

No one cries here, either? I suppose there's no need to.

[On the street near a florist shop. Archer is walking home from Ellen's and enters the flower shop]

FLORIST

Oh, Mr. Archer, good evening. We didn't see you this morning, and weren't sure whether to send Miss Welland the usual. . .

ARCHER

The lilies-of-the-valley, yes. We'd better make it a standing order.

[He notices a cluster of yellow roses]

ARCHER

And those roses. I'll give you another address.

[He draws out a card and places it inside the envelope, on which he starts to write Ellen's name and address. He stops and removes his card and hands the clerk an empty envelope]

ARCHER

They'll go at once?

[At the aviary the next day]

MAY

It's wonderful to wake every morning with lilies-of-the-valley in my room. It's like being with you.

ARCHER

They came late yesterday, I know. Somehow the time got away from me.

MAY

Still, you always remember.

ARCHER

I sent some roses to your cousin Ellen, too. Was that right?

MAY

Very right. She didn't mention it at lunch today, though. She said she'd gotten wonderful orchids from Mr. Beaufort and a whole hamper of carnations from Cousin Henry van der Luyden. She was so very delighted. Don't people send flowers in Europe?

[Later in the aviary]

MAY

Well, I know you do consider it a long time.

ARCHER

Very long.

MAY

But the Chivers were engaged for a year and a half. Larry
Lefferts and Gertrudewere engaged for two. I'm sure Mama expects
something customary.

ARCHER

Ever since you were little your parents let you have your way.
You're almosttwenty-two. Just tell your mother what you want.

MAY

But that's why it would be so difficult. I couldn't refuse her
the very last thingshe'd ever ask of me as a little girl.

ARCHER

Can't you and I just strike out for ourselves, May?

MAY

(laughing lightly)

Shall we elope?

ARCHER

If you would.

MAY

You do love me, Newland. I'm so happy.

ARCHER

Why not be happier?

MAY

I couldn't be happier, dearest. Did I tell you I showed Ellen the ring you chose? She thinks it's the most beautiful setting she ever saw. She said there was nothing like it in the rue de la Paix. I do love you, Newland. Everything you do is so special.

[Inside the dining room at the Letterblair House that night]

LETTERBLAIR

Countess Olenska wants to sue her husband for divorce. It's been suggested that she means to marry again, although she denies it.

ARCHER

I beg your pardon, sir. But because of my engagement, perhaps one of the other members of our firm could consider the matter.

LETTERBLAIR

But precisely because of your prospective alliance. . . and considering that several members of the family have already asked for you. . . I'd like you to consider the case.

ARCHER

It's a family matter. Perhaps, it's best settled by the family.

LETTERBLAIR

Oh their position is clear. They are entirely, and rightly, against a divorce. But Countess Olenska still insists on a legal opinion. But really, what's the use of a divorce? She's here, he's there and the whole Atlantic's between them. As things go,

Olenki's acted generously. He's already returned some of her money without being asked. She'll never get a dollar more than that. Although I understand she attaches no importance to the money, other than the support it provides for Medora Manson. Considering all that, the wisest thing really is to do as the family says. Just let well enough alone.

ARCHER

I think that's for her to decide.

[In the library at the Letterblair House]

LETTERBLAIR

Have you considered the consequences if the Countess decides for divorce?

ARCHER

Consequences for the Countess?

LETTERBLAIR

For everyone.

ARCHER

I don't think the Count's accusations amount to anything more than vague charges.

LETTERBLAIR

It will make for some talk.

ARCHER

Well I have heard talk about the Countess and her secretary. I heard it even before I read the legal papers.

LETTERBLAIR

It's certain to be unpleasant.

ARCHER

Unpleasant!

LETTERBLAIR

Divorce is always unpleasant. Don't you agree?

ARCHER

Naturally.

LETTERBLAIR

Then I can count on you. The family can count on you. You'll use your influence against the divorce?

ARCHER

I can't promise that. Not until I see the Countess.

LETTERBLAIR

I don't understand you, Mr. Archer.

[Archer pulls out one of his cards and starts to write a message on the back]

LETTERBLAIR

Do you want to marry into a family with ascandalous divorce suit hanging over it?

ARCHER

I don't think that has anything to do with the case.

[Archer finishes the note]

ARCHER

Can someone take this for me, please. To the Countess.

[In the foyer at Ellen's house. Ellen and Julius Beaufort enter from the drawing room]

BEAUFORT

Three days at Skuytercliff with the van der Luydens? You'd better take your fur anda hot water bottle.

ELLEN

Is the house that cold?

BEAUFORT

No, but Louisa is. Join me at Delmonicos Sunday instead. I'm having a nice oystersupper, in your honor. Private room, congenial company. Artists and so on.

ELLEN

That's very tempting. I haven't met a single artist since I've been here.

ARCHER

I know one or two painters I could bring to see you, if you'd allow me.

BEAUFORT

Painters? Are there any painters in New York?

ELLEN

(smiling)

Thank you. But I was really thinking of singers, actors, musicians. Dramaticartists. There were always so many in my husband's house.

(to Beaufort)

Can I write tomorrow and let you know? It's too late to decide this evening.

BEAUFORT

Is this late?

ELLEN

Yes, because I still have to talk business with Mr. Archer.

BEAUFORT

Oh. Of course, Newland, if you can persuade the Countess to change her mind about Sunday, you can join us too.

[In the drawing room at Ellen's house]

ELLEN

You know painters, then? You live in their milieu?

ARCHER

Oh, not exactly.

ELLEN

But you care for such things?

ARCHER

Immensely. When I'm in Paris or London I never miss an exhibition. I try to keep up.

ELLEN

I used to care immensely too. My life was full of such things. But now I want to cast off all my old life. . . to become a complete American and try to be like everybody else.

ARCHER

You'll never be like everybody else.

ELLEN

Don't say that to me, please. I just want to put all the old things behind me.

ARCHER

I know. Mr. Letterblair told me.

ELLEN

Mr. Letterblair?

ARCHER

Yes, I've come because he asked me to. I'm in the firm.

ELLEN

You mean it's you who'll manage everything for me? I can talk to you? That's somuch easier.

ARCHER

Yes. . . I'm here to talk about it. I've read all the legal papers, and the letterfrom the Count.

ELLEN

It was vile.

ARCHER

But if he chooses to fight the case, he can say things that might be unpleas. . . mightbe disagreeable to you. Say them publicly, so that they could be damaging evenif. . .

ELLEN

If?

ARCHER

Even if they were unfounded.

ELLEN

What harm could accusations like that do me here?

ARCHER

Perhaps more harm than anywhere else. Our legislation favors divorce. But our social customs don't.

ELLEN

Yes. So my family tells me. Our family. You'll be my cousin soon. And you agree with them?

ARCHER

If what your husband hints is true, or you have no way of disproving it. . . yes. What could you possibly gain that would make up for the scandal.

ELLEN

My freedom. Is that nothing?

ARCHER

But aren't you free already? It's my business to help you see things just the way the people who are fondest of you see them, all your friends and relations. If I didn't show you honestly how they judge such questions, it wouldn't be fair of me, would it?

ELLEN

No. It wouldn't be fair. Very well. I'll do as you wish.

ARCHER

I do. . . I do want to help you.

ELLEN

You do help me.

[Archer stands up]

ELLEN

Good night, cousin.

[Theatre night in the Beaufort box. Everyone is chatting as
Archer enters the room]

LEFFERTS

It's fascinating. Every season the same play, the same scene, the
same effect on the audience.

[Archer is making his greetings and Lefferts turns to him]

LEFFERTS

Remarkable isn't it, Newland?

ARCHER

These actors certainly are. They're even better than the case in
London.

BEAUFORT

You see this play even when you travel? I'd travel to get away from it.

[Archer sits behind Ellen while Sillerton Jackson continues to regale Regina Beaufort with details of the latest social news]

JACKSON

It was a reception at Mrs. Struthers'. Held on the Lord's day, but with champagne and singing from the tabletops. People say there was dancing.

REGINA

(a bit intrigued)

A real French Sunday, then.

[Ellen turns to Archer]

ELLEN

Do you think her lover will send her a box of yellow roses tomorrow morning?

ARCHER

(surprised)

I was. . . I was thinking about that, too. The farewell scene. .

.

ELLEN

Yes, I know. It touches me as well.

ARCHER

Usually, I leave after that scene. To take the picture away with me.

ELLEN

I had a letter from May. From St. Augustine.

ARCHER

They always winter there. Her mother's bronchitis.

ELLEN

And what do you do while May is away?

ARCHER

(a little defensive)

I do my work.

ELLEN

I do want you to know. What you advised me was right. Things can be so difficult sometimes. . . And I'm so grateful.

[Montage]

NARRATOR

The next day, Newland Archer searched the city in vain for yellow roses. From his office he sent a note to Madame Olenska asking to call that afternoon and requesting a reply by messenger. There was

no reply that day. Or the next. And when yellowroses were again available, Archer passes them by. It was only on the third daythat he heard from her, by post, from the van der Luydens' country home.

[On a country road during the day]

ELLEN

"I ran away the day after I saw you at the play, and these kind friends have takenme in. I wanted to be quiet and think things over. I feel so safe here. Iwish. . . that you were with us. Yours sincerely. . . "

[At the law office during the day]

NARRATOR

He had a still outstanding invitation from the Lefferts' for a weekend on the Hudsonand he hoped it was not too late to reply. Their house was not far from the van derLuydens.

[On a country road during the day. Archer is sees Ellen and catches up to her]

ARCHER

I came to see what you were running away from.

ELLEN

I knew you'd come

ARCHER

That shows you wanted me to.

ELLEN

Cousin May wrote she asked you to take care of me.

ARCHER

I didn't need to be asked.

ELLEN

Why? Does that mean I'm so helpless and defenseless? Or that women here are soblessed they never feel need?

ARCHER

What sort of need?

ELLEN

Please don't ask me. I don't speak your language.

[They walk past an old house with squat walls and small square windows]

ELLEN

Henry left the old Patroon house open for me. I wanted to see it.

[Inside the Patroon House]

ARCHER

When you wrote me, you were unhappy.

ELLEN

Yes. But I can't feel unhappy when you're here.

ARCHER

I can't be here long.

ELLEN

I know. But I'm a little impulsive. I live in the moment when I'm happy.

ARCHER

Ellen. If you really wanted me to come. . . if I'm really to help you. . . you must tell me what you're running from.

[She doesn't answer. He keeps looking out the window. Then he feels her, coming up behind him. Her arms are around his neck, hugging him. He turns. . . and sees her as she really is, still in the chair. He looks back out the window and sees Julius Beaufort coming up the path to the house]

ARCHER

Ah!

[He laughs and Ellen quickly moves to his side. She looks out the window and sees Beaufort. She steps back startled]

ARCHER

Is he what you were running from? Or what you expected?

ELLEN

I didn't know he was here.

[Archer walks to the front door and throws it open]

ARCHER

Hello, Beaufort! This way! Madame Olenska was expecting you.

[Beaufort enters with assurance, addressing his remarks to Ellen]

BEAUFORT

Well, you certainly led me a bit of a chase, making me come all this way just to tell you I'd found the perfect little house. It's not on the market yet, so you must take it at once.

[There is uncomfortable silence. Beaufort finally takes notice of Archer]

BEAUFORT

Well, Archer. Rusticating?

[In the study at the Archer House at night. Archer is unpacking books from a carton]

NARRATOR

That night he did not take the customary comfort in his monthly

shipment of books from London. The taste of the usual was like
cinders in his mouth, and there were moments when he felt as if he
were being buried alive under his future.

[In the bedroom at Ellen's house. Ellen is writing a note to
Archer]

ELLEN

"Newland. Come late tomorrow. I must explain to you. "

[In the study at the Archer House. Archer reads the note]

[In the garden at St. Augustine. Archer sees May sitting and
approaches]

MAY

Newland! Has anything happened?

ARCHER

Yes. I found I had to see you.

[Archer sits down and starts kissing her. His gentleness turns
more insistent. She responds at first, but then draws back, a
little startled]

ARCHER

What is it?

MAY

Nothing.

ARCHER

Tell me what you do all day.

MAY

(brightening)

Well, there are a few pleasant people from Philadelphia and Baltimore who were picnicking at the inn. The Merry's are planning to lay out a lawn tennis court. . .

ARCHER

But I thought. . . I came here because I thought I could persuade you to break away from all that. To advance our engagement.

[He reached for her hand]

ARCHER

Don't you understand how much I want to marry you? Why should we dream away another year?

MAY

I'm not sure I do understand. Is it because you're not certain of still feeling the same way about me?

ARCHER

God, I. . . maybe. . . I don't know.

MAY

Is there someone else?

ARCHER

Someone else? Between you and me?

MAY

Let's talk frankly, Newland. Sometimes I've felt a difference in you, especially since our engagement.

[He starts to protest. She hurries on]

MAY

If it's untrue then it won't hurt to talk about it. And if it's true. . . why shouldn't we talk about it now? You might have made a mistake.

ARCHER

If I'd made some sort of mistake, would I be down here asking you to hurry our marriage?

MAY

I don't know. You might. It would be one way to settle the question. At Newport, two years ago, before we were. . . promised. . . everyone said there was. . . someone else for you. I even saw you sitting together with her once, I think. On a verandah, at a dance. When she came back into the house, her face was sad, and I felt sorry for her. Even after, when we were engaged, I could see

how she looked.

ARCHER

Is that what you've been concerned about? That's long past.

MAY

Then is there something else?

ARCHER

Of course not.

MAY

(rushing on)

Whatever it may have been, Newland, I couldn't have my happiness made out of a wrong to somebody else. We couldn't build a life on a foundation like that. If promises were made. . . or pledges. . . if you said something to the. . . the person we've spoken of. . . if you feel in some way pledged to her. . . and there's any way you can fulfill your pledge. . . even by her getting a divorce. . . Newland, don't give her up because of me!

ARCHER

There are no pledges. There are no promises that matter.

[May looks as if a great weight had been taken from her]

ARCHER

That is all I've been trying to say. There is no one between us, May. There is nothing between us. That is precisely my argument

for marrying quickly.

NARRATOR

He could feel her dropping back to inexpressive girlishness. Her conscience had been eased of its burden. It was wonderful, he thought, how such depths of feeling could co-exist with such an absence of imagination.

[In the drawing room at Mrs. Mingott's House. Mrs. Mingott and Archer are having tea and talking]

MRS. MINGOTT

And did you succeed?

ARCHER

No. But I'd still like to be married in April. With your help.

MRS. MINGOTT

Well, you're seeing the Mingott way. When I built this house the family reacted as if I was moving to California. Now you're challenging everyone.

ARCHER

Is this really so difficult?

MRS. MINGOTT

The entire family is difficult. Not one of them wants to be different. And when they are different they end up like Ellen's

parents. Nomads. Continentalwanderers. Or like dear Medora,
dragging Ellen about after they died, lavishingher with an
expensive but incoherent education. Out of all of them, I don't
believethere's one that takes after me but my little Ellen.

(smiling)

You've got a quick eye. Why in the world didn't you marry her?

ARCHER

(laughs)

For one thing, she wasn't there to be married.

MRS. MINGOTT

No, to be sure. And she's still not. The Count, you know. He's
sent a letter.

ARCHER

No, I didn't know.

MRS. MINGOTT

Mr. Letterblair says the Count wants Ellen back. On her own
terms.

ARCHER

I don't believe it.

MRS. MINGOTT

The Count certainly does not defend himself. I will say that. And
Ellen would begiving up a great deal to stay here. There's her
old life. Gardens at Nice withterraces of roses. Jewels, of

course. Music and conversation. She says she goes unnoticed in Europe, but I know that her portrait has been painted nine times. All that, and the remorse of a guilty husband. Ellen says she cares for none of it, but still. These are things that must be weighted.

ARCHER

I would rather see her dead.

MRS. MINGOTT

(shrewdly)

Would you? Would you really? We should remember marriage is marriage. And Ellen is still a wife.

[Behind Mrs. Mingott, the doors open and Ellen enters]

MRS. MINGOTT

Ellen, see who's here.

ELLEN

Yes, I know.

(to Archer)

I went to see your mother to ask where you'd gone. Since you never answered my note.

MRS. MINGOTT

Because he was in such a rush to get married, I'm sure. Fresh off the train and straight here. He wants me to use all my influence,

just to marry his sweetheart sooner.

ELLEN

Well surely, Granny, between us we can persuade the Wellands to do as he wishes.

MRS. MINGOTT

There, Newland, you see. Right to the quick of the problem. Like me.

(to Ellen)

I told him he should have married you.

ELLEN

And what did he say?

MRS. MINGOTT

Oh, my darling, I leave you to find that out.

[Archer who has done his best to abide this teasing, now rises to go]

[In the doorway at the Mingott House]

ARCHER

(quietly)

When can I see you?

[In the hallway at Ellen's house that evening. The maid opens the door and takes Archer's coat. She hangs it and picks up a large

bouquet of crimson roses, with purple pansies at their base and starts to carry them toward the drawing room]

ELLEN

Natasia, take those to that nice family down the street. And come right back. The Struthers' are sending a carriage for me at seven.

[She holds her hand out to Archer]

ELLEN

Who's ridiculous enough to send me a bouquet? I'm not going to a ball. And I'm not engaged.

[In the drawing room at Ellen's house]

ELLEN

I'm sure Granny must have told you everything about me.

ARCHER

She did say you were used to all kinds of splendors we can't give you here.

ELLEN

Well, I'll tell you. In almost everything she says there's something true, and something untrue. Why? What has she been telling you?

ARCHER

I think she believes you might go back to your husband. I think she believes you might at least consider it.

ELLEN

A lot of things have been believed of me. But if she thinks I would consider it, that also means she would consider it for me. As Granny is weighing your idea of advancing the marriage.

ARCHER

(under pressure)

May and I had a frank talk in Florida. Probably our first. She wants a long engagement to give me time. . .

ELLEN

Time to give her up for another woman?

ARCHER

If I want to.

ELLEN

That's very noble.

ARCHER

Yes. But it's ridiculous.

ELLEN

Why? Because there is no other woman?

ARCHER

No. Because I don't mean to marry anyone else.

ELLEN

This other woman. . . does she love you, too?

ARCHER

There is no other woman. I mean, the person May was thinking of.
. . . was never. . .

(slowly)

. . . she guessed the truth. There is another woman. But not the
one she thinks.

[He sits down beside her and takes her hands, unclasping them.

She gets up and moves away from him]

ELLEN

Don't make love to me. Too many people have done that.

ARCHER

I've never made love to you. But you are the woman I would have
married if it hadbeen possible for either of us.

ELLEN

Possible? You can say that when you're the one who's made it
impossible.

ARCHER

I've made it. . .

ELLEN

Isn't it you who made me give up divorcing? Didn't you talk to me, here in this room, about sacrifice and sparing scandal because my family was going to be your family? And I did what you asked me. For May's sake. And for yours.

ARCHER

But there were things in your husband's letter. . .

ELLEN

I had nothing to fear from that letter. Absolutely nothing. You were just afraid of scandal for yourself, and for May.

[Ellen starts crying]

ARCHER

Ellen. No. Nothing's done that can't be undone. I'm still free. You can be, too.

[He's holding her. He kisses her and she kisses him back passionately. She breaks away and they stare at each other. Then she shakes her head]

ARCHER

No! Everything is different. Do you see me marrying May now?

ELLEN

Would you ask her that question? Would you?

ARCHER

I have to ask her. It's too late to do anything else.

ELLEN

You say that because it's easy, not because it's true.

ARCHER

This has changed everything

ELLEN

No. The good things can't change. All that you've done for me, Newland, that I never knew. Going to the van der Luydens because people refused to meet me. Announcing your engagement at the ball so there would be two families standing behind me instead of one. I never understood how dreadful people thought I was.

(She sees him looking at her questioningly)

ELLEN

Granny blurted it out one day. I was stupid, I never thought. New York seemed so kind and glad to see me. But there was no one as kind as you. They never knew what it meant to be tempted. But you did. You understood. You hated happiness brought by disloyalty and cruelty and indifference. I'd never known that before, and it's better than anything I've known.

[She speaks in a very low voice. Suddenly he kneels. The tip of

her satin shoe shows under her dress. He kisses it. She bends over him]

ELLEN

Newland. You couldn't be happy if it meant being cruel. If we act any other way I'll be making you act against what I love in you most. And I can't go back to that way of thinking. Don't you see? I can't love you unless I give you up.

[Archer springs to his feet]

ARCHER

And Beaufort, with his orchids? Can you love him? (furious)
May is ready to give me up!

ELLEN

(quietly)

Three days after you pleaded with her to advance your engagement she will give you up?

ARCHER

She refused! That gives me the right. . .

ELLEN

The right? The same kind of ugly right as my husband claims in his letters?

ARCHER

No, of course not! But if we do this now. . . afterward, it will

only be worse foreveryone if we. . .

ELLEN

(almost screaming)

No, no, no!

[They look at each other for a moment more. Then Ellen picks up a bell and rings for the maid. The maid enters carrying Ellen's cloak and hat, and a telegram]

ELLEN

I won't be going out tonight after all.

ARCHER

(sarcastic)

Please don't sacrifice. I have no right to keep you from your friends.

MAID

(in Italian)

This was delivered.

[Ellen takes the envelope, reads it and hands it to Archer]

[In the gardens at St. Augustine]

MAY

"Granny's telegram was successful. Papa and Mama agreed to

marriage after Easter. Only a month? !I will telegraph Newland.
I'm too happy for words and love youdearly. Your grateful cousin
May. "

[In the drawing room at Ellen's house that night. Archer reads
the telegram and crumples it up in disappointment]

[At the photographer's studio. May is posing for pictures]

NARRATOR

There had been wild rumors right up to the wedding day, that Mrs. Mingott wouldactually attend the ceremony. It was known that she had sent a carpenter to measurethe front pew in case it might be altered to accomodate her. But this idea, likethe great lady herself, proved to be unwieldy, and she settled for giving thewedding breakfast. The Countess Olenska sent her regrets - she was travelling withan aunt - but gave the bride and groom an exquisite piece of old lace. Two elderlyaunts in Rhinebeck offered a honeymoon cottage, and since it was thought "veryEnglish" to have a country-house on loan, their offer was accepted. When the houseproved suddenly uninhabitable, however, Henry van der Luyden stepped in to offer anold cottage on his property nearby. May accepted the offer as a surprise for herhusband. She had never seen the house, but her cousin Ellen had mentioned it once. She had said it was the only house in America where she could imagine beingperfectly happy. They travelled to the expected places, which May had never seen. In London, Archer ordered his clothes, and they went to the National Gallery, andsometimes to the theatre.

[In a carriage on the street at night. May is close to Archer on the seat, holding his arm. She has a new attitude of easy intimacy with him]

MAY

I hope I don't look ridiculous. I've never dined out in London.

ARCHER

Englishwomen dress just like everybody else in the evening, don't they?

MAY

How can you even ask that, when they're always at the theatre in old ball-dresses and bare heads.

ARCHER

Well perhaps they save their new dresses for home.

MAY

Then I shouldn't have worn this?

ARCHER

No. You look fine.

(meaning it)

Quite beautiful.

NARRATOR

In Paris, she ordered her clothes. There were trunks of dresses from Worth. They visited the Tuileries.

[At the sculptor's studio the next day. Archer watches as the sculptor Rochee models May's folded hands in marble. May looks up at her husband and smiles]

NARRATOR

Rochee modelled May's hands in marble. And occasionally they dined out.

[In the dining room at Paris House at night. They are having a small formal dinner. May is holding her own, charming everyone. Archer is having a conversation with a fine-boned man whose face is distinguished by a carefully nurtured mustache]

NARRATOR

Archer had gradually reverted to his old inherited ideas about marriage. It was less trouble to conform with tradition. There was no use trying to emancipate a wife who hadn't the dimmest notion that she was not free.

[In the carriage on the street. Archer and May are riding home from the dinner]

ARCHER

We had an awfully good talk. Interesting fellow. We talked about books and things. I asked him to dinner.

MAY

The Frenchman? I didn't have much chance to talk to him, but wasn't he a little common?

ARCHER

Common? I thought he was clever.

MAY

I suppose I shouldn't have known if he was clever.

ARCHER

(quickly, resigned)

Then I won't ask him to dine.

NARRATOR

With a chill he knew that, in future, many problems would be solved for him in this same way.

[The carriage moves down a boulevard of flickering lamps]

NARRATOR

The first six months of marriage were usually said to be the hardest, and after that, he thought, they would have pretty nearly finished polishing down all the rough edges. But May's pressure was already wearing down the very roughness he most wanted to keep. As for the madness with Madame Olenska, Archer trained himself to remember it as the last of his discarded experiments. She remained in his memory simply as the most plaintive and

poignant of a line of ghosts.

[On the Beaufort lawn in Newport. This is the Beauforts' summer cottage a year and a half later. There's a row of men and women standing against a tent. May comes out of the tent and walks past a row of people to an opening. A little later, May is seen slowly raising a bow and arrow, taking careful aim and letting go. Her movements have a classic grace. The crowd applauds her shot. Two of the spectators, Larry Lefferts and Julius Beaufort, watch May admiringly]

LEFFERTS

She's very deft.

BEAUFORT

Yes. But that's the only kind of target she'll ever hit.

[Archer is standing a little in front of them. He reacts angrily to Beaufort's remark, but says nothing. Across the lawn, May makes her final bull's-eye. Archer starts across to join her. May is receiving a winner's pin from a club official as a photographer snaps her picture]

NARRATOR

No one could ever be jealous of May's triumphs. She managed to give the feeling that she would have been just as serene without them.

[May takes Archer's arm as they walk across the lawn together]

NARRATOR

But what if all her calm, her niceness, were just a negation, a curtain dropped in front of an emptiness? Archer felt he had never yet lifted that curtain.

[On Narraganset Avenue in Newport. May and Archer are in an open carriage]

MAY

Has Regina Beaufort been here at all this summer?

ARCHER

I don't know. There's a great deal of gossip. I expect Beaufort will bring Annie Ring here any day.

MAY

Not even he would dare that!

ARCHER

He's reckless in everything. Even his railway speculations are turning bad. But he just answers every rumor with a fresh extravagance.

MAY

I heard he gave Regina pearls worth half a million.

ARCHER

He had no choice.

[At the Mingott House in Newport. May is showing Mrs. Mingott the pin she won in the archery contest
an arrow with a diamond tip, pinned to the front of her linen blouse]

MRS. MINGOTT

Quite stunning. It's Julius Beaufort who donates the club's prizes, isn't it. This looks like him. Of course. And it will make quite an heirloom, my dear. You should leave it to your eldest daughter.

[In the drawing room of the Mingott Newport cottage. May blushes and Mrs. Mingott pinches her arm teasingly]

MRS. MINGOTT

What's the matter, aren't there going to be any daughters? Only boys? What, can't I say that either? Look at her, blushing!

[Archer laughs and Mrs. Mingott calls out. . .]

MRS. MINGOTT

Ellen! Ellen, are you upstairs?

[Archer is startled at the mention of Ellen]

MRS. MINGOTT

She's over from Portsmouth, spending the day with me. It's such a

nuisance. She just won't stay in Newport, insists on putting up with those. . . what's their name. . . Blenkers. But I gave up arguing with young people about fifty years ago. . . Ellen!

MAID

I'm sorry, ma'am, Miss Ellen's not in the house.

MRS. MINGOTT

She's left?

MAID

I saw her going down the shore path.

[Mrs. Mingott turns to Archer]

MRS. MINGOTT

Run down and fetch her, like a good grandson. May can tell me all the gossip about Julius Beaufort. Go ahead. I know she'll want to see you both.

[On the shore path]

NARRATOR

He had heard her name often enough during the year and a half since they had last met. He was even familiar with the main incidents of her life. But he heard all these accounts with detachment, as if listening to reminiscences of someone long dead. But the past had come again into the present, as in those newly

discovered caverns in Tuscany, where children had lit bunches of straw and seen old images staring from the wall.

[Archer walks down the path and sees the pier and house in front of him. He sees a woman with her back to the shore, leaning against a rail. He stops, unable to go on. It's Ellen. She looks out to sea, at the bay furrowed with yachts and sailboats and fishing craft. He does not move. Ellen does not turn. A sailboat glides through the channel between Lime Rock lighthouse and the shore]

NARRATOR

He gave himself a single chance. She must turn before the sailboat crosses the LimeRock light. Then he would go to her.

[He looks to the boat. It glides out on the receding tide between the lighthouse and the shore. He watches as the boat passes the lighthouse. He looks at Ellen, she has not turned. Archer walks away]

[Outside the Mingott House]

MAY

I'm sorry you didn't find her. But I've heard she's so changed.

ARCHER

Changed?

MAY

So indifferent to her old friends. Summering in Portsmouth,
moving to Washington. Sometimes I think we've always bored her. I
wonder if she wouldn't be happier with her husband after all.

ARCHER

(laughs)

I don't think I've ever heard you be cruel before.

[Archer helps her into the carriage]

MAY

Cruel?

ARCHER

Even demons don't think people are happier in hell.

MAY

(placidly)

Then she shouldn't have married abroad.

[She starts to take the reins of the carriage. Archer lifts them
from her]

ARCHER

Let me.

[At the Welland House in Newport the next morning. Archer, Mrs.
Archer, Janey, Mrs. Welland and May are having breakfast]

MRS. WELLAND

The Blenkers. A party for the Blenkers?

JANEY

Who are they?

MAY

The Portsmouth people, I think. The ones Countess Olenska is staying with.

MRS. ARCHER

"Professor and Mrs. Emerson Sillerton request the pleasure. . . Wednesday afternoonclub. . . at 3 o'clock punctually. To meet Mrs. and the the Misses Blenker. RedGables, Catherine Street. "I don't think we can decline.

JANEY

I don't see why, really. He's an archaeologist and he lives here even in winter. He's always taking his poor wife to tombs in the Yucatan instead of to Paris. He'sgot a house full of long-haired men and short-haired women, and. . .

MRS. ARCHER

And he is Sillerton Jackson's cousin.

JANEY

(chastened)

Of course.

MRS. WELLAND

Some of us will have to go.

MAY

I'll go over. And, Janey, why don't you come with me. I'm sure
Cousin Ellen will be there. It will give you a chance to see her.

(to Archer)

Newland, you can find some way to spend the afternoon, can't you?

ARCHER

Oh I think for a change I'll just save it instead of spending it.
Maybe drive to the farm to see about a new horse for the brougham.

[At the Blenker House. Archer drives up, stops and ties up his
team. He walks up to the house. As he gets closer, he sees a box
garden, and something pink just beyond it. It's a pink parasol.
He picks it up and lifts the handle close to his face to smell
its scent. He hears someone coming behind him, closing in
anticipation. He waits for Ellen's touch but hears only a voice
behind him. . .]

KATIE BLENKER

Hello?

[His eyes open and he turns and sees Katie Blenker, an adolescent
girl with open, friendly curiosity. She looks, for an instant,
familiar

Archer thinks that he has been surprised by May]

KATIE BLENKER

I'm sorry, did you ring, I've been asleep in the hammock. . .

ARCHER

I didn't mean to disturb you. Are you Miss Blenker? I'm Newland Archer.

KATIE

I've heard so much about you.

ARCHER

I came up the island to see about a new horse, and I thought I'd call. But the house seemed empty. . .

KATIE

It is empty. They're all at the party. The one the Sillertons are giving for us. Didn't you know?

[He keeps looking at her, not knowing what to say]

KATIE

Everyone's there but me, with my fever, and Countess Olenska. . .
oh, you found my parasol!

[She takes it from his hand]

KATIE

It's my best one. It's from the Cameroons.

ARCHER

(trying to be casual)

The Countess was called away?

KATIE

A telegram came from Boston. She said she might be gone for two days. I do love the way she does her hair, don't you? It reminds me of Sir Walter Scott.

ARCHER

(interrupting her)

You don't know. . . I'm sorry. . . I've got to be in Boston tomorrow. You wouldn't know where she was staying?

[In Boston the next day. Archer is in a park watching a painter. He turns and through the morning sun, see a woman seated a little way in front of him on a bench. Ellen looks up and Archer is beside her]

ELLEN

(startled)

Oh.

(now smiling)

Oh.

ARCHER

I'm here on business. Just got here, actually. You're doing your hair differently.

ELLEN

Only because the maid's not with me. She stayed back in Portsmouth. I'm only herefor two days, it didn't seem worth. . .

ARCHER

You're travelling alone?

ELLEN

(sly)

Yes. Why, do you think it's a little dangerous?

ARCHER

(smiling)

Well, it's unconventional.

ELLEN

I suppose it is. I hadn't thought of it. I've just done something so much moreunconventional. I've refused to take back money that belonged to me.

ARCHER

Someone came with an offer?

[She nods]

ARCHER

What were the conditions?

ELLEN

(simply)

I refused.

ARCHER

(pressing)

Tell me the conditions.

ELLEN

Nothing unbearable, really. Just to sit at the head of his table now and then.

ARCHER

And he wants you back, at any price?

ELLEN

Well, it's a considerable price. At least it's considerable for me.

ARCHER

So you came to meet him.

[She stares, then laughs suddenly]

ELLEN

My husband? Here? No, of course not. He sent someone.

ARCHER

(very careful now)

His secretary?

ELLEN

Yes. He's still here, in fact. He insisted on waiting. In case I changed my mind. They told you at the hotel I was here?

[He nods but says nothing]

ELLEN

You haven't changed, Newland.

ARCHER

(intense)

I had changed, till I saw you again.

ELLEN

Please don't.

ARCHER

Just give me the day. I'll say anything you like. Or nothing. I won't speak unless you tell me to. All I want is some time with you. All I want is to listen to you. I want to get you away from that man. Was he coming to the hotel?

ELLEN

At eleven. Just in case. . .

ARCHER

Then we must leave now. It's been a hundred years since we've met.

ELLEN

Where will we go?

ARCHER

Where?

[He's stumped

emotion has gotten in the way of foresight. He seems addled for a moment. She smiles at him]

ELLEN

Somewhere cool, at any rate.

ARCHER

We'll take the steamboat down to Point Arley. There's an inn.

ELLEN

I'll have to leave a note at the hotel.

[He pulls a note-case from his pocket]

ARCHER

Write it here. I have the paper. . . you see how everything's

predestined? . . . andthis. . . have you seen these. . . the new
stylographic pen. . .

[He hands her the case and pulls out a fountain pen]

ARCHER

Just steady the case on your knee, and I'll get the pen going in
a second. . .

[He bangs the hand holding the pen against the back of the bench]

ARCHER

It's like jerking down the mercury in a thermometer. Now try.

[He hands her then and she writes the note]

[At the Parker House Hotel in Boston]

ARCHER

Shall I take it in?

ELLEN

I'll only be a moment.

[Archer waits for her. Archer sees a man dressed in a distinctly
European fashion. The man doesn't notice Archer but he seems
familiar]

[At the Inn. Archer and Ellen are sitting at a table outside]

ELLEN

Why didn't you come down to the beach to get me the day I was at
Granny's?

ARCHER

Because you didn't turn around. You didn't know I was there. I
swore I wouldn't call you unless you looked around.

ELLEN

But I didn't look on purpose.

ARCHER

You knew?

ELLEN

I recognized the carriage when you drove in. So I went to the
beach.

ARCHER

To get as far away from me as you could.

ELLEN

As I could. Yes.

ARCHER

Well you see, then. It's no use. It's better to face each other.

ELLEN

I only want to be honest with you.

ARCHER

Honest? Isn't that why you always admired Julius Beaufort? He was more honest than the rest of us, wasn't he? We've got no character, no color, no variety. I wonder why you just don't go back to Europe.

ELLEN

I believe it's because of you.

ARCHER

Me? I'm the man who married one woman because another one told him to.

ELLEN

You promised not to say those things today.

ARCHER

I can't keep that promise.

ELLEN

And what about May? What does May feel? That's the thing we've always got to think of, by your own showing.

ARCHER

My showing?

ELLEN

Yes, yours. Otherwise everything you taught me would be a sham.

ARCHER

If you're using my marriage as some victory of ours, then there's no reason on earth why you shouldn't go back. You gave me my first glimpse of a real life. Then you asked me to go on with the false one. No one can endure that.

ELLEN

I'm enduring it.

ARCHER

You too? All this time, you too?

[She doesn't reply]

ARCHER

What's the use? We can't be like this. When will you go back?

ELLEN

I won't. Not yet. Not as long as we both can stand it.

ARCHER

This is not a life for you.

ELLEN

It is. As long as it's part of yours.

ARCHER

And the way I live. . . my life. . . how can it be part of yours?

ELLEN

Don't. . . don't be unhappy.

ARCHER

You won't go back? You won't go back?

ELLEN

I won't go back.

[On the street in New York. Archer is about to enter his office building as a man approaches him. He is the same man that he saw outside the Parker House in Boston]

RIVIERE

(French accent)

It's Mr. Archer, I think?

ARCHER

Yes?

RIVIERE

My name is Reviere. We dined together in Paris last year.

ARCHER

Oh yes. I'm sorry I didn't quite recall. . .

RIVIERE

Quite alright. I had the advantage. I saw you yesterday in Boston.

[Archer is taken aback by this]

[In Archer's office]

ARCHER

I still do not understand why we're speaking.

RIVIERE

I came here on Count Olenska's behalf because I believed. . . in all good faith. . . that it would be best for the Countess to return to him. I met her in Boston and told her all the Count had said. She did me the kindness of listening carefully. But she's changed, Monsieur.

ARCHER

(a tinge of jealous suspicion)

You knew her before?

RIVIERE

I used to see her in her husband's house. The Count would never have trusted my mission to a stranger.

ARCHER

This change. . .

RIVIERE

It may only have been my seeing her for the first time as she is. As an American. And if you're an American of her kind. . . of your kind. . . things are accepted in certain other societies, or at least put up with for the sake of. . . convenience. . . these things become intolerable. She made her marriage in good faith. It was a faith that the Count could not share, and could not understand. So her faith was shattered. And it was only coming back here. . . coming home. . . that restored it. Returning to Europe would mean a life of some comfort. And considerable sacrifice. And also, I would think, no hope. I will fulfill my obligation to the Count and meet with the family. I will tell them what he wishes and suggests for the Countess. But I ask you, Monsieur, to use your own influence with them. I. . . I beg you. . . with all the force I'm capable of. . . not to let her go back.

[Archer looks at him with astonishment. Riviere's eyes fix momentarily on Archer, then look around the room. Archer extends his hand]

ARCHER

Thank you.

[In the dining room at Mrs. Archer's House that evening. Janey, Mrs. Archer, Newland and May, Mrs. Welland and Sillerton Jackson are having a traditional Thanksgiving dinner]

MRS. ARCHER

Well, Boston is more conservative than New York. But I always think it's a safer rule for a lady to lay aside her French dresses for one season. When Old Mrs. Baxter Pennilow died, they found her standing order - forty-eight Worth dresses - still wrapped in tissue paper. When her daughters left off their mourning they wore the first lot to the Symphony without looking in advance of the fashion.

NARRATOR

He had written to her once in Washington. Just a few lines, asking when they were to meet again. And she wrote back

"Not yet. "

JANEY

I think it was Julius Beaufort who started the new fashion by making his wife clapper new clothes on her back as soon as they arrived. I must say, it takes all Regina's distinction not to look like. . .

JACKSON

(helpfully)

Her rivals?

JANEY

. . . like that Annie Ring.

MRS. ARCHER

Careful, dear.

JANEY

Well, everybody knows.

JACKSON

Indeed. Beaufort always put his business around. And now that his business is gone there are bound to be disclosures.

MAY

Gone? Is it that bad?

JACKSON

As bad as anything I've ever heard of. Most everybody we know will be hit, one way or another.

[In the library of the Archer House]

JACKSON

Very difficult for Regina, of course. And it's a pity. . . it's certainly a pity. . . that Countess Olenska refused her husband's offer.

ARCHER

Why, for God's sake?

JACKSON

Well. . . to put it on the lowest ground. . . what's she going to live on now?

ARCHER

Now. . . !

JACKSON

Well, I mean now that Beaufort. . .

ARCHER

What the hell does that mean, sir?

JACKSON

(continuing tranquilly)

Most of her money's invested with Beaufort, and the allowance she's been getting from the family is so cut back. . .

ARCHER

She has something, I'm sure.

JACKSON

Oh I would think a little. Whatever remains after sustaining Medora. But I know the family paid close attention to Monsieur Riviere and considered the Count's offer very closely. Everyone hopes the Countess herself might simply see that living here, on such a small margin. . .

ARCHER

If everyone would rather she be Beaufort's mistress than some decent fellow's wife, you've all gone about it perfectly. She

won't go back.

JACKSON

That's your opinion, eh? Well no doubt you know. I suppose she might still soften Catherine Mingott, who could give her any allowance she chooses. But the rest of the family has no particular interest in keeping Madame Olenska here. They'll simply let her find her own level.

ARCHER

(pause)

Shall we go up and join my mother?

[In the Archer House hallway. May and Archer arrive home and the servants take their coats. Archer and May climb the staircase to the second floor of their house. The lamp that May holds throws deep long shadows on the wall]

ARCHER

The lamp is smoking again. The servants should see to it.

MAY

I'm sorry.

ARCHER

I may have to go to Washington for a few days.

MAY

When?

ARCHER

Tomorrow. I'm sorry, I should have said something before.

MAY

On business?

ARCHER

On business, of course. There's a patent case coming up before the Supreme Court. I just got the papers from Letterblair. It seems. . .

MAY

Never mind. I'm sure it's too complicated. I have enough trouble managing this lamp. But the change will do you good. And you must be sure to go and see Ellen.

[Does she know? He thinks she might]

[In the Archer House. The maid brings a note to Archer and May]

ARCHER

(indicating lamp)

Do something about this, will you, Agnes?

[The maid takes the still smoking lamp, and gives him her lamp.

May looks up from the note]

MAY

Granny's had a stroke.

[In the bedroom at the Mingott House. The servants are carrying Mrs. Mingott out on a heavy chair]

MRS. MINGOTT

A stroke! I told them all it was just an excess of Thanksgiving. Dr. Bencomb acted most concerned and insisted on notifying everyone as if it were the reading of my last testament. But I won't be treated like a corpse when I'm hardly an invalid.

[The servants proceed to carry her to the drawing room]

MRS. MINGOTT

You're very dear to come. But perhaps you only wanted to see what I'd left you.

MAY

Granny, that's shocking!

[The servants set Mrs. Mingott down in the drawing room in her accustomed spot]

MRS. MINGOTT

It was shock that did this to me. It's all due to Regina Beaufort. She came here last night, and she asked me. . .

[As she talks, Archer creates the image in his mind. . .]

MRS. MINGOTT

. . . she had the effrontery to ask me. . . to back Julius. Not to desert him, she said. To stand behind our common lineage in the Townsend family. I said to her, "Honor's always been honor, and honesty's always been honesty, in Manson Mingott's house, and will be 'till I'm carried out feet first. "And then. . . if you can believe it. . . she said to me. . . "But my name, Auntie. My name's Regina Townsend. "And I said, "Your name was Beaufort when he covered you with jewels, and it's got to stay Beaufort now that he's covered you with shame. "

[Back to the drawing room as Mrs. Mingott finishes her story]

MRS. MINGOTT

So I gave out. Simply gave out. Now family will be arriving from all over expecting a funeral and they'll have to be entertained. I don't know how many notes Bencomb sent out.

ARCHER

If there's any way we can help. . .

MRS. MINGOTT

Well, my Ellen is coming. I expressly asked for her. She arrives this afternoon on the train. If you could fetch her. . .

ARCHER

Of course. If May will send the brougham, I can take the ferry.

MAY

(the slightest pause)

There, you see, Granny. Everyone will be settled.

[Archer and May are leaving Mrs. Mingott's house and entering their carriage]

MAY

I didn't want to worry Granny. But how can you meet Ellen and bring her back if you have to go to Washington yourself this afternoon?

ARCHER

I'm not going. The case is off. Postponed. I heard from Letterblair this morning.

MAY

Postponed? How odd. Mama had a note from him this morning as well. He was concerned about Granny but he had to be away. He was arguing a big patent case before the Supreme Court. You said it was a patent case, didn't you?

ARCHER

Well, that's it. The whole office can't go. Letterblair decided to go this morning.

MAY

Then it's not postponed?

[The blood rises in Archer's face]

ARCHER

No. But my going is.

[At the train station]

NARRATOR

He knew it was two hours by ferry and carriage from the Pennsylvania terminus in Jersey City back to Mrs. Mingott's. All of two hours. And maybe a little more.

[Archer sees Ellen among the disembarking train passengers and motions to her]

ARCHER

You didn't expect me today?

ELLEN

No.

ARCHER

It was Granny Mingott who sent me. She's much better. I nearly went to Washington to see you. We would have missed each other.

[Archer helps Ellen into the carriage]

ARCHER

Did you know. . . I hardly remembered you.

ELLEN

Hardly remembered?

ARCHER

I mean. . . I mean it's always the same. Each time I see you. You happen to me all over again.

ELLEN

Oh yes. I know, I know. For me too.

[Later in the journey]

ARCHER

Your husband's secretary came to see me. The day after we met in Boston.

[She seems surprised]

ARCHER

You didn't know?

ELLEN

No. But he told me he had met you. In Paris, I think.

ARCHER

Ellen. . . I have to ask you. Just one thing.

ELLEN

Yes?

ARCHER

Was it Riviere who helped you get away after you left your husband?

ELLEN

Yes. I owe him a great debt.

ARCHER

(quietly)

I think you're the most honest woman I ever met.

ELLEN

(slight smile)

No. But probably one of the least fussy.

ARCHER

Ellen, We can't stay like this. It can't last.

ELLEN

What?

ARCHER

Our being together and not being together. It's impossible.

ELLEN

You shouldn't have come today.

[Suddenly, she turns and flings her arms around him, pressing him close, kissing him passionately. He returns all her feeling. She suddenly draws away, silent and motionless to the corner of the carriage]

ARCHER

Don't be afraid. Look, I'm not even trying to touch your sleeve. Being like this isn't what I want. I need you with me. I can even just sit still, like this, and look at you.

ELLEN

I think we should look at reality, not dreams.

ARCHER

(desperate)

I just want us to be together.

ELLEN

I can't be your wife, Newland. Is it your idea I should live with you as your mistress?

ARCHER

I want. . . somehow I want to get away with you. Find a world where words like that won't exist.

ELLEN

Oh my dear. . . where is that country? Have you ever been there?
Is there anywhere we can be happy behind the backs of people who
trust us?

ARCHER

I'm beyond caring about that.

ELLEN

No, you're not! You've never been beyond that. I have. I know what
it looks like. A lie in every silence. It's no place for us.

[He looks at her, dazed. Then he reaches for the small cab bell
that signals orders to the coachman. The coach pulls up and
Archer gets out]

ELLEN

Why are we stopping? This isn't Granny's.

ARCHER

No. I'll get out here. You were right. I shouldn't have come
today.

[He closes the door]

[In the library at the Archer House that night. Archer is reading
a book and May is embroidering a soft cushion]

MAY

What are you reading?

ARCHER

Oh, a history. About Japan.

MAY

Why?

ARCHER

I don't know. Because it's a different country.

MAY

You used to read poetry. It was so nice when you read it to me.

[He gets to his feet]

ARCHER

I need some air.

[He goes to the window and opens it and leans out into the cold]

MAY

Newland! You'll catch your death.

ARCHER

Catch my death. Of course.

NARRATOR

But then he realized, I am dead. I've been dead for months and

months. Then it occurred to him that she might die. People did. Young people, healthy people, did. She might die, and set him free.

[May sees him looking at her]

MAY

Newland?

[He walks to her and touches her head]

ARCHER

Poor May.

MAY

Poor? Why poor?

ARCHER

Because I'll never be able to open a window without worrying you.

MAY

I'll never worry if you're happy.

ARCHER

And I'll never be happy unless I can open the windows.

MAY

In this weather?

[On the street at Ellen's house. Ellen is coming down the front steps toward a waiting carriage. As she approaches the carriage door, Archer steps out of the shadows]

ARCHER

I have to see you. I didn't know when you were leaving again.

ELLEN

I'm due at Regina Beaufort's. Granny lent me her carriage.

ARCHER

With all that's happened, you're still going to see Regina Beaufort?

ELLEN

I know. Granny says Julius Beaufort is a scoundrel. But so is my husband, and the family still wants me to go back to him.

[Two figures , illuminated by the glowing street lamps but still a little indistinct in the blowing snow, are walking down the street toward Ellen and Archer]

ARCHER

But you won't go back?

ELLEN

No. Granny's asked me to stay and help care for her. But I think it's me she means to help. She said I've lived too long locked up

in a cage. She's even seen to my allowance.

[The two figures draw nearer, then discretely cross to the other side of the street. As they pass under the streetlight we recognize one of the two men

Larry Lefferts. Archer and Ellen see them and draw a little closer to the sheltering shadow of the carriage]

ARCHER

You won't need my help if you have Granny's.

ELLEN

I will still need your help. If I stay, we will have to help each other.

ARCHER

I have to see you. Somewhere we can be alone.

ELLEN

(smiles)

In New York?

ARCHER

Alone. Somewhere we can be alone. There's the art museum in the park. Half past two tomorrow. I'll be at the door.

[At the Art Museum]

ARCHER

You came to New York because you were afraid.

ELLEN

Afraid?

ARCHER

Of my coming to Washington.

ELLEN

I promised Granny to stay in her house because I thought I would be safer.

ARCHER

Safer from me?

[She bends her head]

ARCHER

Safer from loving me?

ELLEN

(pause)

Shall I come to you once, and then go home?

[He doesn't answer. She gets up and starts out. He catches her by the arm]

ARCHER

Come to me once, then.

[They look at each other almost like enemies]

ARCHER

(pressing)

When? Tomorrow?

ELLEN

(hesitating)

The day after.

[She moves away down the long gallery. He follows her]

ELLEN

No. Don't come any farther than this.

[She hurries to the gallery door, turns, then leaves]

[In the library at the Archer House that night. Archer is at his desk. An envelope addressed to Ellen is near him; his pen is poised over a piece of vellum on which he is writing an address for their rendezvous. A key, to go with the address, is ready to be sealed in the envelope as he looks up, slightly startled as May enters, a little agitated]

MAY

I'm sorry I'm late. You weren't worried, were you?

[He sweeps the key, envelope and address into his desk drawer
before she is near enough to notice]

ARCHER

Is it late?

MAY

Past seven. I stayed at Granny's because cousin Ellen came in. We
had a wonderful talk. She was so dear. Just like the old Ellen.
And Granny's so charmed by her. You do see, though, why sometimes
the family has been annoyed? Going to see Regina Beaufort in
Granny's carriage. . .

[Archer gets up, annoyed at the same old prattle]

ARCHER

Aren't we dining out?

[He starts past her, and she moves forward, almost impulsively.
She throws her arms around him and presses her cheek to his]

MAY

You haven't kissed me today.

[At the Theatre]

NARRATOR

It was the custom, in old New York, for brides to appear in their

wedding dress during the first year or two of marriage. But May, since returning from Europe, had not worn her bridal satin until this evening.

[Archer enters the box and leans over to May]

ARCHER

My head's bursting. Don't tell anyone, but please come home with me.

[May looks at him, then whispers to her mother. Mrs. Welland whispers an excuse to her companion, Mrs. van der Luyden, as May rises and leaves with her husband]

[In the library at the Archer House]

MAY

Shouldn't you rest?

ARCHER

My head's not as bad as that. And there's something important I have to tell you right away. May. . . There's something I've got to tell you. . . about myself. . . Madame Olenska. . .

MAY

(interrupting)

Oh, why should we talk about Ellen tonight?

ARCHER

Because I should have spoken before.

MAY

Is it really worthwhile, dear? I know I've been unfair to her at times. Perhaps we all have. You've understood her better than any of us, I suppose. But does it matter, now that it's all over?

ARCHER

Over? How do you mean, over?

MAY

Why, since she's going back to Europe so soon. Granny approves and understands. She's disappointed, of course, but she's arranged to make Ellen financially independent of the Count. I thought you would have heard today at your offices.

[He stares at her, not really seeing her. There is uncomfortable silence]

ARCHER

It's impossible.

MAY

Impossible? Certainly she could have stayed here, with Granny's extra money. But I guess she's given us up after all.

ARCHER

How do you know that?

MAY

From Ellen. I told you I saw her at Granny's yesterday.

ARCHER

And she told you yesterday?

MAY

No. She sent me a note this afternoon. Do you want to see it?

[May moves to the desk and pulls the note from a small pile of mail on the desk]

MAY

I thought you knew.

[She hold out the note and he takes it]

ELLEN

"May dear, I have at last made Granny understand that my visit to her could be nomore than a visit, and she has been as kind and generous as ever. She sees now thatif I return to Europe I must live by myself. I am hurrying back to Washington topack up, and I sail next week. You must be very good to Granny when I'm gone. . . asgood as you've always been to me. If any of my friends wish to urge me to change mymind, please tell them it would be utterly useless. "

ARCHER

Why did she write this?

MAY

I suppose because we talked things over yesterday.

ARCHER

What things?

MAY

I told her I was afraid I hadn't been fair to her. I hadn't always understood how hard it must have been here. I knew you'd be the one friend she could always count on. And I wanted her to know that you and I were the same. In all our feelings.

(more slowly)

She understood why I wanted to tell her this, I think she understands everything.

[She takes one of his cold hands and presses it quickly to her cheek]

MAY

My head aches, too. Good night, dear.

[In the dining room at the Archer House]

NARRATOR

It was, as Mrs. Archer said to Mrs. Welland, a great event for a young couple to give their first dinner, and it was not to be

undertaken lightly. There was a hired chef, two borrowed footmen, roses from Henderson's, Roman punch and menus on gilt-edged cards. It was considered a particular triumph that the van der Luydens, at May's request, stayed in the city to be present at her farewell dinner for the Countess Olenska.

[Everyone is seated at the table. Ellen is to Archer's left]

NARRATOR

He guessed himself to have been, for months, the center of countless silently observing eyes and patiently listening ears. He understood that, somehow, this separation between himself and the partner of his guilt had been achieved. And he knew that now the whole tribe had rallied around his wife. He was a prisoner in the center of an armed camp.

JANEY

Regina's not well at all, but that doesn't stop Beaufort from devoting as much time to Annie Ring. . .

[Archer turns to Ellen]

ARCHER

Was the trip from Washington very tiring?

ELLEN

The heat in the train was dreadful. But all travel has its hardships.

ARCHER

Whatever they may be, they're worth it. Just to get away.

[She can't reply]

ARCHER

I mean to do a lot of travelling myself soon.

[Ellen's face trembles. To rescue the moment, he leans toward a man sitting across from him]

ARCHER

Philip, what about you? A little adventure? A long trip? Are you interested? Athens and Smyrna and maybe Constantinople. Then as far East as we can go.

PHILIP

Possibly, possibly.

MRS. VAN DER LUYDEN

But not Naples, Dr. Bencomb says there's a fever.

ARCHER

There's India, too.

PHILIP

You must have three weeks to do India properly.

[In the library at the Archer House. After dinner, the men are gathered in several groups, all smoking cigars]

LEFFERTS

Beaufort may not receive invitations anymore, but it's clear he still maintains a certain position.

PHILIP

Horizontal, from all I've heard.

LEFFERTS

(indignant)

If things go on like this, we'll be seeing our children fighting for invitations to windlers' houses and marrying Beaufort's bastards.

JACKSON

Has he got any?

[Laughter from the group]

GUEST

Careful, there, gentlemen. Draw it mild, draw it mild.

[Archer manages a small smile but is still distracted. Van der Luyden approaches him]

VAN DER LUYDEN

Have you ever noticed? It's the people who have the worst cooks who are always yelling about being poisoned when they dine out. Lefferts used to be a little more adept, I thought. But then, grace is not always required. As long as one knows the steps.

[In the drawing room at the Archer House. May is sitting on a sofa next to Countess Olenska. May sees Archer and her eyes are shining as she gets up. As soon as she is on her feet, Mrs. van der Luyden beckons Ellen to join her across the room. Ellen goes slowly toward Mrs. van der Luyden and another woman joins them. Archer watches this ritual as if it were an elaborate rehearsal for a firing squad]

NARRATOR

The silent organization which held this whole small world together was determined to put itself on record. It had never for a moment questioned the propriety of Madame Olenska's conduct. It had never questioned Archer's fidelity. And it had never heard of, suspected, or even conceived possible, anything at all to the contrary. From the seamless performance of this ritual, Archer knew that New York believed him to be Madame Olenska's lover. And he understood, for the first time, that his wife shared the belief.

[In the front hall. Archer is helping Ellen with her cloak]

ARCHER

Shall I see you to your carriage?

[She turns to him as Mrs. van der Luyden steps forward]

MRS. VAN DER LUYDEN

(casual)

We are driving deal Ellen home.

[Ellen offers her hand to Archer]

ELLEN

Good-bye.

ARCHER

Good-bye. But I'll see you soon in Paris.

ELLEN

Oh. . . if you and May could come. . .

[In the library at the Archer House. May is at the doorway]

MAY

It did go off beautifully, didn't it.

ARCHER

Oh. Yes.

MAY

May I come in and talk it over?

ARCHER

Of course. But you must be very sleepy.

MAY

No. I'm not. I'd like to be with you a little.

ARCHER

Fine.

[They sit in separate chairs near the fire]

ARCHER

(pause)

Since you're not tired and want to talk, there's something I have to tell you. I tried the other night.

MAY

Oh yes, dear. Something about yourself?

ARCHER

About myself, yes. You say you're not tired. But I am. I'm tired of everything. I want to make a break. . .

MAY

You mean give up the law?

ARCHER

Well, maybe. To get away, at any rate. Right away. On a long trip. Go somewhere that's so far. . .

MAY

How far?

ARCHER

I don't know. I thought of India. Or Japan.

[She stands up and walk toward him]

MAY

As far as that? But I'm afraid you can't, dear. . .

(unsteady voice)

. . . not unless you take me with you. That is, if the doctors
will let me go. . . but I'm afraid they won't.

[He stares at her, his eyes nearly wild]

MAY

I've been sure of something since this morning and I've been
longing to tell you. . .

[She sinks down in front of him, puts her face against his knee]

ARCHER

Oh.

MAY

You didn't guess?

ARCHER

No. Of course, I mean, I hoped, but. . .

[He looks away from her]

ARCHER

(quietly)

Have you told anyone else?

MAY

Only Mama, and your mother. And Ellen. You know I told you we'd had a long talk one afternoon. . . and how wonderful she was to me.

ARCHER

Ah.

MAY

Did you mind my telling her, Newland?

ARCHER

Mind? Why should I? But that was two weeks ago, wasn't it? I thought you said you weren't sure till today.

MAY

(face flushed)

No. I wasn't sure then. But I told her I was. And you see. . .

[She looks up at him, moving closer]

MAY

I was right.

[She is very close to him now, expecting to be kissed. Her eyes are wet with VICTORY. Newland is speechless. He desperately looks around the room]

NARRATOR

It was the room in which most of the real things of his life had happened. Their eldest boy, Theodore, too delicate to be taken to church in midwinter, had been christened there. It was here that Ted took his first steps. And it was here that Archer and his wife always discussed the future of all their children. Bill's interest in archaeology. Mary's passion for sport and philanthropy. Ted's inclinations toward "art" that led to a job with an architect, as well as some considerable redecoration. It was in this room that Mary had announced her engagement to the dullest and most reliable of Larry Lefferts' many sons. And it was in this room, too, that her father had kissed her through her wedding veil before they motored to Grace Church. He was a dutiful, loving father, and a faithful husband. When May died of infectious pneumonia after nursing Bill safely through, he had honestly mourned her. The world of her youth had fallen into pieces and rebuilt itself without her ever noticing. This hard bright blindness, her incapacity to recognize change, made her children conceal their views from her, just as Archer concealed his. She

died thinking the world a good place, full of loving and
harmonious households like her own. Newland Archer, in his fifty-
seventh year, mourned his past and honored it.

[a telephone rings and Archer picks it up. At 57, his face shows
the evidence of a full life behind him]

ARCHER

Yes? Hello?

OPERATOR

Chicago wants you.

TED

Dad?

ARCHER

Ted?

TED

I'm just about finished out here, but my client wants me to look
at some gardens before I start designing.

ARCHER

Fine. Where?

TED

Europe. I'll have to sail next Wednesday on the Mauretania.

ARCHER

And miss the wedding?

TED

Annie will wait for me. I'll be back on the first and our wedding's not 'till the fifth.

ARCHER

(affectionate)

I'm surprised you remember the date.

TED

Well, I was hoping you'd join me. I'll need you to remind me of what's important. What do you say? It will be our last father and son trip.

ARCHER

I appreciate the invitation, but. . .

TED

Wonderful. Can you call the Cunard office first thing tomorrow?

[In the Bristol Hotel room in Paris. Archer is sitting on a divan near the window, looking out. Ted is with him]

TED

I'm going out to Versailles with Tourneur. Will you join us?

ARCHER

I thought I'd go to the Louvre.

TED

I'll meet you there later, then. Countess Olenska is expecting us at half-pastfive.

ARCHER

(stunned)

What?

TED

Oh, didn't I tell you. Annie made me swear to do three things in Paris. Get herthe score of the last Debussy songs. Go to the Grand Guignol. And see MadameOlenska. You know she was awfully good to Annie when Mr. Beaufort sent her over tothe Sorbonne. Wasn't the Countess friendly with Mr. Beaufort's first wife orsomething? I think Mrs. Beaufort said that she was. In any case, I called theCountess this morning and introduced myself as her cousin and. . .

ARCHER

You told her I was here?

TED

Of course. Why not? She sounds lovely. Was she?

ARCHER

Lovely? I don't know. She was different.

[At the Louvre in Paris]

NARRATOR

Whenever he thought of Ellen Olenska, it had been abstractly, serenely, like an imaginary loved one in a book or picture. She had become the complete vision of all that he had missed.

ARCHER

(whispering)

But I'm only fifty-seven.

[At Tuileries in Paris. Ted and Archer, deep in conversation, walk through the great gardens on their way to Madame Olenska's]

TED

Did Mr. Beaufort really have such a bad time of it, when he wanted to remarry? No one wanted to give him an inch.

ARCHER

Perhaps because he had already taken so much.

TED

If anyone remembers anymore. Or cares.

ARCHER

Well, he and Annie Ring did have a lovely daughter. You're very lucky.

TED

We're very lucky, you mean.

ARCHER

Yes, that's what I mean.

TED

So considering how that all turned out. . . and considering all the time that's goneby. . . I don't see how you can resist.

ARCHER

Well, I did have some resistance at first to your marriage, I've told you that. . .

TED

No, I mean resist seeing the woman you almost threw everything over for. Only you didn't.

ARCHER

(cautious)

I didn't.

TED

No. But mother said. . .

ARCHER

Your mother?

TED

Yes. The day before she died. She asked to see me alone, remember? She said she knew we were safe with you, and always would be. Because once, when she asked you to, you gave up the thing you wanted most.

ARCHER

She never asked me.

[On the rue du Bac in Paris]

NARRATOR

After a little while he did not regret Ted's indiscretion. It seemed to take an iron band from his heart to know that, after all, someone had guessed and pitied. . . And that it should have been his wife moved him inexpressibly.

TED

The porter says it's the fifth floor. It must be the one with the awnings.

[They both look toward an upper balcony, just above the horse-chestnut trees in the square]

TED

It's nearly six.

[Archer sees an empty bench under a tree]

ARCHER

I think I'll sit a moment.

TED

Do you mean you won't come?

[Archer shrugs]

TED

You really won't come at all?

ARCHER

I don't know.

TED

She won't understand.

ARCHER

Go on, son. Maybe I'll follow you.

TED

But what will I tell her?

ARCHER

(as he sits)

Don't you always have something to say?

TED

I'll tell her you're old-fashioned and you insist on walking up five flights instead of taking the elevator.

ARCHER

(pause)

Just say I'm old-fashioned. That should be enough.

[Ted gives his father a look of affectionate exasperation, then crosses the square and goes into the building. Archer watches him go. Then he looks up at the windows on the fifth floor. A curtain moves, briefly, then falls back into place. Archer has a flashback to the Summer House in Newport. A sailboat starts to sail between the shore and a lighthouse. Ellen, in the summer house, watches it. Her back is to him. The sailboat glides between the shore and the lighthouse. Ellen stands in the last brilliant burst of the setting sun. She starts to move. She turns around and smiles. Back to Paris, a servant starts to roll up the awning. Archer is still on the bench, watching the awning being secured. The servant finishes and goes back inside. Archer remains on the bench, alone in the twilight]

THE END

Special help by [SergeiK](#)