



Henry James

Complete Stories 1874–1884

HENRY JAMES

COMPLETE STORIES
1874-1884



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Complete Stories of Henry James

Volume I: 1864-1874

A Tragedy of Error
The Story of a Year
A Landscape Painter
A Day of Days
My Friend Bingham
Poor Richard
The Story of a Masterpiece
The Romance of Certain Old
Clothes
A Most Extraordinary Case
A Problem
De Grey: A Romance
Osborne's Revenge

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Travelling Companions
A Passionate Pilgrim
At Isella
Master Eustace
Guest's Confession
The Madonna of the Future
The Sweetheart of M. Briseux
The Last of the Valerii
Madame de Mauves
Adina

Volume II: 1874-1884

Professor Fargo
Eugene Pickering
Benvolio
Crawford's Consistency
The Ghostly Rental
Four Meetings
Rose-Agathe
Daisy Miller: A Study
Longstaff's Marriage
An International Episode

The Pension Beaurepas
The Diary of a Man of Fifty
A Bundle of Letters
The Point of View
The Siege of London
The Impressions of a Cousin
Lady Barberina
Pandora
The Author of "Beltraffio"

Volume III: 1884-1891

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The Great Good Place	The Papers
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Miss Gunton of Poughkeepsie	Julia Bride
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The Abasement of the Northmores	“The Velvet Glove”
The Third Person	Mora Montravers
The Special Type	Crapy Cornelia
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HENRY JAMES

WILLIAM L. VANCE
WROTE THE NOTES FOR THIS VOLUME

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Professor Fargo

THE LITTLE TOWN of P—— is off the railway, and reached by a coach drive of twenty-five miles, which the primitive condition of the road makes a trial to the flesh, and the dullness of the landscape a weariness to the spirit. It was therefore not balm to my bruises, physical or intellectual, to find, on my arrival, that the gentleman for whose sake I had undertaken the journey had just posted off in a light buggy for a three days' holiday. After venting my disappointment in a variety of profitless expletives, I decided that the only course worthy of the elastic philosophy of a commercial traveller was to take a room at the local tavern and await his return. P—— was obviously not an exhilarating place of residence, but I had outweathered darker hours, and I reflected that having, as the phrase is, a bone to pick with my correspondent, a little accumulated irritation would arm me for the combat. Moreover, I had been rattling about for three months by rail; I was mortally tired, and the prospect of spending a few days beyond earshot of the steam whistle was not unwelcome. A certain audible, rural hush seemed to hang over the little town, and there was nothing apparently to prevent my giving it the whole of my attention. I lounged awhile in the tavern porch, but my presence seemed only to deepen the spell of silence on that customary group of jaundiced ruminants who were tilting their chairs hard by. I measured thrice, in its length, the dusty plank sidewalk of the main street, counted the hollyhocks in the front yards, and read the names on the little glass door plates; and finally, in despair, I visited the cemetery. Although we were at the end of September, the day was hot, and this youthful institution boasted but a scanty growth of funereal umbrage. No weeping willow, no dusky cypress offered a friendly shelter to the meditative visitor. The yellow grass and the white tombstones glared in the hot light, and though I felt very little merrier than a graveyard ghost, I staid hardly longer than one who should have mistaken his hour. But I am fond of reading country epitaphs, and I promised myself to come back when the sun was lower. On my way

back to the inn I found myself, on a lately opened cross street, face to face with the town hall, and pausing approached its threshold with hopes of entertainment scarcely less ardent than those which, during a journey abroad, had guided my steps toward some old civic palace of France or Italy. There was, of course, no liveried minion to check my advance, and I made my way unchallenged into the large, bare room which occupied the body of the edifice. It was the accustomed theatre of town meetings, caucuses, and other solemn services, but it seemed just now to have been claimed for profaner uses. An itinerant lecturer, of a boisterous type, was unpacking his budget and preparing his *mise en scène*. This seemed to consist simply of a small table and three chairs in a row, and of a dingy specimen of our national standard, to whose awkward festoons, suspended against the blank wall at the rear of the platform, the orator in person was endeavoring to impart a more artistic grace. Another personage on the floor was engaged in scrawling the date of the performance, in red chalk, upon a number of printed handbills. He silently thrust one of these documents at me as I passed, and I saw with some elation that I had a resource for my evening. The latter half of the page consisted of extracts from village newspapers, setting forth the merits of the entertainments. The headings alone, as I remember them, ran somewhat in this fashion:

A MESSAGE FROM THE SPIRIT WORLD.

THE HIGHER MATHEMATICS MADE EASY TO LADIES AND CHILDREN.

A NEW REVELATION! A NEW SCIENCE!

GREAT MORAL AND SCIENTIFIC COMBINATION.

PROFESSOR FARGO, THE INFALLIBLE WAKING MEDIUM AND
MAGICIAN, CLAIRVOYANT, PROPHET, AND SEER!

COLONEL GIFFORD, THE FAMOUS LIGHTNING
CALCULATOR AND MATHEMATICAL REFORMER!

This was the substance of the programme, but there were a great many incidental *floriture* which I have forgotten. By the time I had mastered them, however, for the occasion, the individual who was repairing the tattered flag, turned round, perceived me, and showed me a countenance which could belong only to an "infallible waking medium." It was not, indeed, that Professor Fargo had the abstracted and emaciated

aspect which tradition attributes to prophets and visionaries. On the contrary, the fleshy element in his composition seemed, superficially, to enjoy a luxurious preponderance over the spiritual. He was tall and corpulent, and wore an air of aggressive robustness. A mass of reddish hair was tossed back from his forehead in a leonine fashion, and a lustrous auburn beard diffused itself complacently over an expansive but by no means immaculate shirt front. He was dressed in a black evening suit, of a tarnished elegance, and it was in keeping with the festal pattern of his garments, that on the right forefinger of a large, fat hand, he should wear an immense turquoise ring. His intimate connection with the conjuring class was stamped upon his whole person; but to a superficial glance he might have seemed a representative of its grosser accomplishments. You could have fancied him, in spangled fleshings, looking down the lion's mouth, or cracking the ring-master's whip at the circus, while Mlle. Josephine jumped through the hoops. It was his eyes, when you fairly met them, that proved him an artist on a higher line. They were eyes which had peeped into stranger places than even lions' mouths. Their pretension, I know, was to pierce the veil of futurity; but if this was founded, I could only say that the vision of Ezekiel and Jeremiah was but another name for consummate Yankee shrewdness. They were, in a single word, the most impudent pair of eyes I ever beheld, and it was the especial sign of their impudence that they seemed somehow to undertake to persuade you of their disinterested benevolence. Being of a fine reddish brown color, it was probable that several young women that evening would pronounce them magnificent. Perceiving, apparently, that I had not the rustic physiognomy of a citizen of P——, Professor Fargo deemed my patronage worth securing. He advanced to the cope of the platform with his hands in his pockets, and gave me a familiar nod.

“Mind you come to-night, young man!” he said, jocosely imperious.

“Very likely I shall,” I answered. “Anything in the world to help me through an evening at P——.”

“Oh, you won't want your money back,” the Professor rejoined. “Mine is a first-class entertainment; none of your shuffling break-downs. We are perfect, my friends and I, in our

respective parts. If you are fond of a good, stiff, intellectual problem, we'll give you something to think about." The Professor spoke very slowly and benignantly, and his full, sonorous voice rolled away through the empty hall. He evidently liked to hear it himself; he balanced himself on his toes and surveyed the scene of his impending exploits. "I don't blow my own trumpet," he went on; "I'm a modest man; you'll see for yourself what I can do. But I should like to direct your attention to my friend the Colonel. *He's* a rare old gentleman to find in a travelling show! The most remarkable old gentleman, perhaps, that ever addressed a promiscuous audience. You needn't be afraid of the higher mathematics; it's all made as pretty as a game of billiards. It's his own daughter does the sums. We don't put her down in the bills, for motives of delicacy; but I'll tell you for your private satisfaction that she is an exquisite young creature of seventeen."

It was not every day that I found myself in familiar conversation with a prophet, and the opportunity for obtaining a glimpse of the inner mechanism of the profession was too precious to be neglected. I questioned the Professor about his travels, his expenses, his profits, and the mingled emotions of the itinerant showman's lot; and then, taking the bull by the horns, I asked him whether, between ourselves, an accomplished medium had not to be also a tolerable conjurer? He leaned his head on one side and stood stroking his beard, and looking at me between lids shrewdly half closed. Then he gave a little dry chuckle, which expressed, at my choice, compassion either for my disbelief in his miracles or for my faith in his urbanity.

"I confess frankly," I said, "that I'm a skeptic. I don't believe in messages from the spirit world. I don't believe that even the depressing prospect of immortality is capable of converting people who talked plain sense here on earth into the authors of the inflated platitudes which people of your profession pretend to transmit from them. I don't believe people who have expressed themselves for a lifetime in excellent English can ever be content with conversation by raps on the dinner table. I don't believe that you know anything more about the future world than you do about the penal code of China. My impression is that you don't believe so yourself. I

can hardly expect you, of course, to take the wind out of your own sails. What I should vastly like you to do is, to tell me *viva voce*, in so many words, that your intentions are pure and your miracles genuine."

The Professor remained silent, still caressing his prophetic beard. At last, in a benevolent drawl, "Have you got any dear friend in the spirit land?" he asked.

"I don't know what you call the spirit land," I answered. "Several of my friends have died."

"Would you like to see 'em?" the Professor promptly demanded.

"No, I confess I shouldn't!"

The Professor shook his head.

"You've not a rich nature," he rejoined blandly.

"It depends on what you call rich. I possess on some points a wealth of curiosity. It would gratify me peculiarly to have you say outright, standing there on your own platform, that you're an honest man."

It seemed to give him pleasure to trifle with my longing for this sensation. "I'll give you leave," he said, for all answer, "to tie my hands into the tightest knot you can invent—and then I'll make your great-grandfather come in and stop the clock. You know I couldn't stop a clock, perched up on a mantel shelf five feet high, with my heels."

"I don't know," said I. "I fancy you're very clever."

"Cleverness has nothing to do with it. I've great magnetism."

"You'd magnetize my great-grandfather down from heaven?"

"Yes, sir, if I could establish communication. You'll see to-night what I can do. I'll satisfy you. If I don't, I shall be happy to give you a private sitting. I'm also a healing medium. You don't happen to have a toothache? I'd set you down there and pull it right out, as I'd pull off your boot."

In compliment to this possibility, I could only make him my bow. His, at least, was a "rich nature." I bade him farewell, with the assurance that, skeptic as I was, I would applaud him impartially in the evening. I had reached the top of the hall, on my way out, when I heard him give a low, mellifluous whistle. I turned round, and he beckoned to me to return. I

walked back, and he leaned forward from the platform, uplifting his stout forefinger. "I simply desire to remark," he said, "that I'm an honest man!"

On my return to the hotel I found that my impatience for the Professor's further elucidation of his honesty made the interval look long. Fortune, however, assisted me to traverse it at an elastic pace. Rummaging idly on a bookshelf in the tavern parlor, I found, amid a pile of farmers' almanacs and Methodist tracts, a tattered volume of "Don Quixote." I repaired to my room, tilted back my chair, and communed deliciously with the ingenious *hidalgo*. Here was "magnetism" superior even to that of Professor Fargo. It proved so effective that I lost all note of time, and, at last on looking at my watch, perceived that dinner must have been over for an hour. Of "service" at this unsophisticated hostelry there was but a rigidly democratic measure, and if I chose to cultivate a too elegant absence of eagerness for beefsteak pie and huckleberry pudding, the young lady in long, tight ringlets and short sleeves, who administered these delicacies in the dining-room, was altogether too haughty a spirit to urge them on my attention. So I sat alone and ate them cold. After dinner I returned for an hour to La Mancha, and then strolled forth, according to my morning's vow, to see the headstones in the cemetery cast longer shadows. I was disappointed in the epitaphs; they were posterior to the age of theological *naïveté*. The cemetery covered the two opposed sides of a hill, and on walking up to the ridge and looking over it, I discovered that I was not the only visitor. Two persons had chosen the spot for a quiet talk. One of them was a young girl, dressed in black, and seated on a headstone, with her face turned toward me. In spite of her attitude, however, she seemed not to perceive me, wrapt as she was in attention to her companion—a tall, stout fellow, standing before her, with his back to me. They were at too great a distance for me to hear their talk, and indeed in a few minutes I began to fancy they were not speaking. Nevertheless, the young girl's eyes remained fixed on the man's face; he was holding her spellbound by an influence best known to himself. She was very pretty. Her hat was off, and she was holding it in her lap; her lips were parted, and her eyes fixed intently on her companion's face. Suddenly

she gave a bright, quick smile, made a rapid gesture in the air, and laid her forefinger on her lips. The movement, and the manner of it, told her story. She was deaf and dumb, and the man had been talking to her with his fingers. I would willingly have looked at her longer, but I turned away in delicacy, and walked in another direction. As I was leaving the cemetery, however, I saw her advancing with her companion to take the path which led to the gate. The man's face was now turned to me, and I straightway recognized it, in spite of the high peaked white hat which surmounted it. It was natural enough, I suppose, to find Professor Fargo in a graveyard; as the simplest expedient for ascertaining what goes on beyond the tomb might seem to be to get as close as possible to the hither cope of it. Besides, if he was to treat the townsfolk to messages from their buried relatives, it was not amiss to "get up" a few names and dates by the perusal of the local epitaphs. As he passed me, however, and flourished his hand in the air by way of salutation, there was a fine absence in his glance of any admission that he had been caught cheating. This, too, was natural enough; what surprised me was that such a vulgar fellow should be mated with so charming a companion. She gave me as she passed the trustfully unshrinking glance of those poor mortals who are obliged to listen, as one may say, with their eyes. Her dress was scanty and simple, but there was delicacy in her mobile features. Who was she, and how had *he* got hold of her? After all, it was none of my business; but as they passed on, walking rather briskly, and I strolled after them, watching the Professor's ponderous tread and the gliding footfall of the young girl, I began to wonder whether he might not be right—might not, in truth, have that about him which would induce the most venerable of my ancestors to revert from eternity and stop the clock.

II.

His handbills had done their office, and the Town Hall, when I entered it that evening, was filled with a solemnly expectant auditory. P—— was evidently for the evening a cluster of empty houses. While my companions scanned the stage for the shadow of coming events, I found ample pastime in

perusing the social physiognomy of the town. A shadow presently appeared in the person of a stout young countryman, armed with an accordion, from which he extracted an ingenious variety of lamentable sounds. Soon after this mysterious prelude, the Professor marshalled out his forces. They consisted, first and foremost, of himself, his leonine *chevelure*, his black dress suit, and his turquoise ring, and then of an old gentleman who walked in gravely and stiffly, without the Professor's portentous salaam to the audience, bearing on his arm a young girl in black. The Professor managed somehow, by pushing about the chairs, turning up the lamps, and giving a twist to the patriotic drapery in the background, to make his audience feel his presence very intimately. His assistants rested themselves tranquilly against the wall. It took me but a short time to discover that the young girl was none other than the companion of the Professor's tour of inspection in the cemetery, and then I remembered that he had spoken in the morning of the gentleman who performed the mathematical miracles being assisted by his daughter. The young girl's infirmity, and her pretty face, promised to impart a picturesque interest to this portion of the exhibition; but meanwhile I inferred from certain ill-suppressed murmurs, and a good deal of vigorous pantomime among the female spectators, that she was found wanting in the more immediate picturesqueness demanded of a young lady attached to a show. Her plain black dress found no favor; the admission fee had justified the expectation of a good deal of trimming and several bracelets. She, however, poor girl, sat indifferent in her place, leaning her head back rather wearily against the wall, and looking as if, were she disposed, she might count without trouble all the queer bonnets among her judges. Her father sat upright beside her, with a cane between his knees and his two hands crossed on the knob. He was a man of sixty-five—tall, lean, pale, and serious. The lamp hanging above his head deepened the shadows on his face, and transformed it into a sort of pictorial mask. He was very bald, and his forehead, which was high and handsome, wore in the lamplight the gleam of old ivory. The sockets of his eyes were in deep shadow, and out of them his pupils gazed straight before him, with the glow of smouldering fire. His high-arched nose cast a long shadow

over his mouth and chin, and two intensified wrinkles, beside his moustache, made him look strangely tragic. With his tragic look, moreover, he seemed strangely familiar. His daughter and the Professor I regarded as old friends; but where had I met this striking specimen of antique melancholy? Though his gaze seemed fixed, I imagined it was covertly wandering over the audience. At last it appeared to me that it met mine, and that its sombre glow emitted a spark of recognition of my extra-provincial and inferentially more discriminating character. The next moment I identified him—he was Don Quixote in the flesh; Don Quixote, with his sallow Spanish coloring, his high-browed, gentlemanly visage, his wrinkles, his moustache, and his sadness.

Professor Fargo's lecture was very bad. I had expected he would talk a good deal of nonsense, but I had imagined it would be cleverer nonsense. Very possibly there was a deeper cleverness in it than I perceived, and that, in his extreme shrewdness, he was giving his audience exactly what they preferred. It is an ascertained fact, I believe, that rural assemblies have a relish for the respectably ponderous, and an honest pride in the fact that they cannot be bored. The Professor, I suppose, felt the pulse of his listeners, and detected treasures of latent sympathy in their solemn, irresponsive silence. I should have said the performance was falling dead, but the Professor probably would have claimed that this was the rapture of attention and awe. He certainly kept very meagrely the promise of his grandiloquent programme, and gave us a pound of precept to a grain of example. His miracles were exclusively miracles of rhetoric. He discoursed upon the earth life and the summer land, and related surprising anecdotes of his intimacy with the inhabitants of the latter region; but to my disappointment, the evening passed away without his really bringing us face to face with a ghost. A number of "prominent citizens" were induced to step upon the platform and be magnetized, but the sturdy agricultural temperament of P—— showed no great pliancy under the Professor's manual blandishments. The attempt was generally a failure—the only brilliant feature being the fine impudence with which the operator lodged the responsibility of the *fiasco* upon what he called his victim's low development. With three or four young