

SYNOPSIS OF THE NOVEL

Isabel Archer is a young woman of many ideas and a strong imagination. It is her good fortune to possess a finer mind than most people and among those who know her well, she enjoys the reputation of being a very superior person.

She reads widely and is eager to learn. She also gives the impression of being very self – confident. Like most intelligent persons, she has her moments of doubt, yet she does her best to hide these, for it is one of her ideas that she should always present her best front to the world.

She sees women who lie, who deceive their friends and their husbands, who try to hurt each other. Her character, she assures herself, will be above such things. It is true that her life up to this point is limited in experience. She grows up safely and comfortably within the circle of her own family. Her mother dies when she is very young. Her father, however, is always affectionate with his children and protects them carefully against whatever evil influences exist in his own life and in the world outside. Once, Isabel's aunt, Lydia, quarrels with Mr. Archer (Isabel's father) and they break their relationship.

Isabel Archer's aunt comes to America after the death of Isabel's father in order to take her niece to Europe. On her arrival in England, Isabel meets her

cousin Ralph, her uncle Mr. Touchett and the great nobleman of the area, Lord Warburton, who immediately falls in love with her. After a short time, Warburton proposes to Isabel, but she turns him down, maintaining that she cherishes her

freedom and independence too much to marry. A short time later, her journalist friend Henrietta Stackpole arrives in England and tells Isabel that her American suitor Caspar Goodwood has followed Isabel to England.

During her visit to London, Isabel encounters Caspar Goodwood, who tries to convince her that she should marry him. Again, Isabel says that she must have time to see the world and make a few independent judgements. She promises Goodwood that that she will discuss the subject again in two years. He leaves, promising to remain in America for this time.

While in London, Isabel hears of the sickness of her uncle. She returns to his home, Gardencourt, where she finds him dying. She also finds another guest, Madame Merle, an old friend of Mrs. Touchett. During the long days when the house is involved with sickness, Isabel and Madame Merle become good friends.

Ralph Touchett knows that his father plans to leave him a huge fortune, but he also knows that he is slowly dying himself and does not need much money. He therefore convinces his father to leave some of his fortune to Isabel.

After Mr. Touchett's death, Isabel becomes a great heiress. She continues to travel with her aunt and they go to Mrs. Touchett's home in Florence, Italy. Here, Madame Merle introduces Isabel to her old friend Gilbert Osmond.

Madame Merle has already instructed Osmond to be nice to Isabel because she thinks that Gilbert should marry her.

After some time, Isabel believes that she is in love with Osmond. She maintains her independence by refusing to listen to any advice. Everyone is opposed to her marrying Osmond because all feel that he is a worthless fortune hunter.

Some years later, Isabel knows that she has made a mistake. Gilbert Osmond, now her husband, has tried to break her independent nature and has tried to make her obey his every wish. He wants Isabel to be as quiet and obedient as his daughter. Pansy, the daughter, has been brought up in a convent and has been taught to obey her father in everything. Thus when the father disapproves of the young man that Pansy is in love with, she must submit to his wishes.

When Isabel receives a letter telling that her cousin Ralph is dying, she wants to go to England to visit him. Osmond opposes the trip because it would not look proper. At this time, Isabel discovers that Pansy is actually the illegitimate child of Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond. She then realizes that her friend Madame Merle tricked her into an imprudent marriage with Osmond, and with this knowledge Isabel leaves for England in spite of her husband's disapproval.

In England, she confesses the mistake she made in marrying Osmond and Caspar Goodwood pleads with her to leave her husband. Isabel, however, feels that she cannot forsake the sacred bonds of marriage and feels that Pansy needs her help. She therefore decides to return to Osmond in spite of her dislike for him.

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Henry James was born in New York in 1843. The second child of a wealthy, somewhat aristocratic parents. His father, Henry James, Sr., was a philosopher and psychologist. Henry James, Sr. disapproved of most schools and consequently sent his sons to a variety of tutors and European schools in search of the best education for them. The children received the major part of their education at home, however, in lively conversations with their father and the other children. The James family's travels in Europe were another source of education for Henry.

When he was growing up in New York, Henry was given a great deal of independence, so much in fact, that he felt isolated from other people. A quiet child among exuberant brothers and cousins, Henry was more often an observer than a participant in their activities. While the adult Henry James developed many close friendships, he retained his attitude of observer and devoted much of his life to solitary work on his writing.

Henry's family lived for a time in Boston, where he became acquainted with New England authors and friends of his father, began his friendship with William Dean Howells and attended Harvard Law School. After 1866, James

lived in Europe much of the time and in 1875 decided to make it his permanent home. He lived in Paris for a year.

The next year he settled in London and lived there and in the English countryside for the rest of his life. In 1915, a year before his death, to show his support of England in World War I, James became a British citizen.

Henry James first achieved recognition as a writer of the “international novel” – a story which brings together persons of various nationalities who represent certain characteristics of their country. The Europeans in James’ novels are more cultured, more concerned with art and more aware of the subtleties of social situations than are James’ Americans. The Americans, however, usually have a morality and innocence which the Europeans lack. James seemed to value both the sophistication of Europe and the idealism of America.

In spite of his decision to live abroad, James remained essentially American in his sympathies. His greatest characters (or central characters) are almost always Americans. But at the same time, some of his most unpleasant characters are also Americans. But the important thing is that the characters who change, mature, and achieve an element of greatness are almost always Americans.