



The Wheel of Time, Collaboration, Owen Wingrave

by Henry James

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"And your daughter?" said Lady Greyswood; "tell me about her. She must be nice."

"Oh yes, she's nice enough. She's a great comfort." Mrs. Knocker hesitated a moment, then she went on: "Unfortunately, she's not good-looking—not a bit."

"That doesn't matter, when they're not ill-natured," rejoined, insincerely, Lady Greyswood, who had the remains of great beauty.

"Oh, but poor Fanny is quite extraordinarily plain. I assure you it does matter. She knows it herself; she suffers from it. It's the sort of thing that makes a great difference in a girl's life."

"But if she's charming, if she's clever!" said Lady Greyswood, with more benevolence than logic. "I've known plain women who were liked."

"Do you mean me, my dear?" her old friend straightforwardly inquired. "But I'm not so awfully liked."

"You?" Lady Greyswood exclaimed. "Why, you're grand!"

"I'm not so repulsive as I was when I was young, perhaps; but that's not saying much."

"As when you were young!" laughed Lady Greyswood. "You sweet thing, you are young. I thought India dried people up."

"Oh, when you're a mummy to begin with!" Mrs. Knocker returned, with her trick of self-abasement. "Of course I've not been such a fool as to keep my children there. My girl is clever," she continued, "but she's afraid to show it. Therefore you may judge whether, with her unfortunate appearance, she's charming."

"She shall show it to me! You must let me do everything for her."

"Does that include finding her a husband? I should like her to show it to some one who'll marry her."

"I'll marry her," said Lady Greyswood, who was handsomer than ever when she laughed and looked capable.

"What a blessing to meet you this way on the threshold of home! I give you notice that I shall cling to you. But that's what I meant; that's the thing the want of beauty makes so difficult—as if it were not difficult enough at the best."

"My dear child, one meets plenty of ugly women with husbands," Lady Greyswood argued, "and often with very nice ones."

"Yes, mine is very nice. There are men who don't mind one's face, for whom beauty isn't indispensable, but they are rare. I don't understand them. If I'd been a man about to marry I should have gone in for looks. However, the poor child will have something," Mrs. Knocker continued.

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