

**THE TRAGIC MUSE;  
IN THREE  
VOLUMES; VOL. II**

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The tragic muse; in three volumes; Vol. II by Henry James

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**HENRY JAMES**

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# THE TRAGIC MUSE

BY  
HENRY JAMES

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

VOL. II.

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## THE TRAGIC MUSE.

### I.

WHILE, after leaving Mrs. Gresham, he was hesitating which way to go and was on the point of hailing a gardener to ask if Mrs. Dallow had been seen, he noticed, as a spot of colour in an expanse of shrubbery, a far-away parasol moving in the direction of the lake. He took his course that way, across the park, and as the bearer of the parasol was strolling slowly it was not five minutes before he had joined her. He went to her soundlessly over the grass (he had been whistling at first, but as he got nearer he stopped), and it was not till he was close to her that she looked round. He had watched her moving as if she were turning things over in her mind, brushing the smooth walks and the clean turf with her dress, slowly making her parasol revolve on her shoulder and carrying in the hand which hung beside her a book which he perceived to be a monthly review.

"I came out to get away," she remarked when he had begun to walk with her.

"Away from me?"

"Ah, that's impossible," said Mrs. Dallow. Then she added: "The day is so nice."

"Lovely weather," Nick dropped. "You want to get away from Mrs. Gresham, I suppose."

Mrs. Dallow was silent a moment. "From everything!"

"Well, I want to get away too."

"It has been such a racket. Listen to the dear birds."

"Yes, our noise isn't so good as theirs," said Nick. "I feel as if I had been married and had shoes and rice thrown after me," he went on. "But not to you, Julia—nothing so good as that."

Mrs. Dallow made no answer to this; she only turned her eyes on the ornamental water which stretched away at their right. In a moment she exclaimed: "How nasty the lake looks!" and Nick recognized in the tone of the words a manifestation of that odd shyness—a perverse stiffness at a moment when she probably only wanted to be soft—which, taken in combination with her other qualities, was so far from being displeasing to him that it represented her nearest approach to extreme charm. *He* was not shy now, for he considered, this morning, that he saw things very straight and in a sense altogether superior and delightful. This enabled him to be generously sorry for his companion, if he were the reason of her being in any degree uncomfortable, and yet left him to enjoy the prettiness of some of the signs by which her discomfort was revealed. He would not insist on anything yet: so he observed that his cousin's standard in lakes was too high, and then talked a little about his mother and the girls, their having gone home, his not having seen



them that morning, Lady Agnes's deep satisfaction in his victory and the fact that she would be obliged to "do something" for the autumn—take a house or something.

"I'll lend her a house," said Mrs. Dallow.

"Oh, Julia, Julia!" Nick exclaimed.

But Mrs. Dallow paid no attention to his exclamation; she only held up her review and said: "See what I have brought with me to read—Mr. Hoppus's article."

"That's right; then *I* sha'n't have to. You'll tell me about it." He uttered this without believing that she had meant or wished to read the article, which was entitled "The Revision of the British Constitution," in spite of her having encumbered herself with the stiff, fresh magazine. He was conscious that she was not in want of such mental occupation as periodical literature could supply. They walked along and then he added: "But *is* that what we are in for—reading Mr. Hoppus? Is that the sort of thing our constituents expect? Or even worse, pretending to have read him when one hasn't? Oh, what a tangled web we weave!"

"People are talking about it. One has to know. It's the article of the month."

Nick looked at his companion askance a moment. "You say things every now and then for which I could kill you. 'The article of the month,' for instance: I could kill you for that."

"Well, kill me!" Mrs. Dallow exclaimed.

"Let me carry your book," Nick rejoined, irrelevantly. The hand in which she held it was on the side of her on which he was walking, and he put out his own hand to take it. But

for a couple of minutes she forbore to give it up, and they held it together, swinging it a little. Before she surrendered it he inquired where she was going.

"To the island," she answered.

"Well, I'll go with you—I'll kill you there."

"The things I say are the right things," said Mrs. Dallow.

"It's just the right things that are wrong. It's because you're so political," Nick went on. "It's your horrible ambition. The woman who has a salon should have read the article of the month. See how one dreadful thing leads to another."

"There are some things that lead to nothing."

"No doubt—no doubt. And how are you going to get over to your island?"

"I don't know."

"Isn't there a boat?"

"I don't know."

Nick had paused a moment, to look round for the boat, but Mrs. Dallow walked on without turning her head. "Can you row?" her companion asked.

"Don't you know I can do everything?"

"Yes, to be sure. That's why I want to kill you. There's the boat."

"Shall you drown me?"

"Oh, let me perish with you!" Nick answered with a sigh. The boat had been hidden from them by the bole of a great tree, which rose from the grass at the water's-edge. It was moored to a small place of embarkation and was large enough to hold as many persons as were likely to wish to visit at once

the little temple in the middle of the lake, which Nick liked because it was absurd and Mrs. Dallow had never had a particular esteem for. The lake, fed by a natural spring, was a liberal sheet of water, measured by the scale of park scenery; and though its principal merit was that, taken at a distance, it gave a gleam of abstraction to the concrete verdure, doing the office of an open eye in a dull face, it could also be approached without derision on a sweet summer morning, when it made a lapping sound and reflected candidly various things that were probably finer than itself—the sky, the great trees, the flight of birds.

A man of taste, a hundred years before, coming back from Rome, had caused a small ornamental structure to be erected, on artificial foundations, on its bosom, and had endeavoured to make this architectural pleasantry as nearly as possible a reminiscence of the small ruined rotunda which stands on the bank of the Tiber and is declared by *ciceroni* to have been dedicated to Vesta. It was circular, it was roofed with old tiles, it was surrounded by white columns and it was considerably dilapidated. George Dallow had taken an interest in it (it reminded him not in the least of Rome, but of other things that he liked), and had amused himself with restoring it.

“Give me your hand; sit there, and I’ll ferry you,” Nick Dormer said.

Mrs. Dallow complied, placing herself opposite to him in the boat; but as he took up the paddles she declared that she preferred to remain on the water—there was too much malice prepossessed in the temple. He asked her what she meant by that, and she said it was ridiculous to withdraw to an island