

**THE PRINCESS
CASAMASSIMA. A
NOVEL. IN THREE
VOLUMES. VOL. II**

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The Princess Casamassima. A novel. In Three volumes. Vol. II by Henry James

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HENRY JAMES

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A *Novel*

BY
HENRY JAMES

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

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By HENRY JAMES

THE
PRINCESS CASAMASSIMA

XVI

THE aspect of South Street, Mayfair, on a Sunday afternoon in August, is not enlivening, yet the Prince had stood for ten minutes gazing out of the window at the genteel vacancy of the scene; at the closed blinds of the opposite houses, the lonely policeman on the corner, covering a yawn with a white cotton hand, the low-pitched light itself, which seemed conscious of an obligation to observe the decency of the British Sabbath. The Prince, however, had a talent for that kind of attitude; it was one of the things by which he had exasperated his wife; he could remain motionless, with the aid of some casual support for his high, lean person, considering serenely and inexpressively any object that might lie before him and presenting his aristocratic head at a favourable angle, for periods of extraordinary length. On first coming into the room he had given some attention to its furniture and decorations, perceiving at a glance that they were rich and varied; some of the things he recognised as old friends, odds and ends the Princess was fond of, which had accompanied her in her remarkable wanderings, while others were unfamiliar, and

suggested vividly that she had not ceased to 'collect.' The Prince made two reflections: one was that she was living as expensively as ever; the other that, however this might be, no one had such a feeling as she for the *mise-en-scène* of life, such a talent for arranging a room. She had still the most charming salon in Europe.

It was his impression that she had taken the house in South Street but for three months; yet, gracious heaven, what had she not put into it? The Prince asked himself this question without violence, for that was not to be his line to-day. He could be angry to a point at which he himself was often frightened, but he honestly believed that this was only when he had been baited beyond endurance and that as a usual thing he was really as mild and accommodating as the extreme urbanity of his manner appeared to announce. There was indeed nothing to suggest to the world in general that he was an impracticable or vindictive nobleman: his features were not regular, and his complexion had a bilious tone; but his dark brown eye, which was at once salient and dull, expressed benevolence and melancholy; his head drooped from his long neck in a considerate, attentive style; and his close-cropped black hair, combined with a short, fine, pointed beard, completed his resemblance to some old portrait of a personage of distinction under the Spanish dominion at Naples. To-day, at any rate, he had come in conciliation, almost in humility, and that is why he did not permit himself even to murmur at the long delay to which he was subjected. He knew very well that if his wife should consent to take him back it would be only after a probation to which this little wait in her drawing-room was a trifle. It was a quarter of an hour

before the door opened, and even then it was not the Princess who appeared, but only Madame Grandoni.

Their greeting was a very silent one. She came to him with both hands outstretched, and took his own and held them awhile, looking up at him in a kindly, motherly manner. She had elongated her florid, humorous face to a degree that was almost comical, and the pair might have passed, in their speechless solemnity, for acquaintances meeting in a house in which a funeral was about to take place. It was indeed a house on which death had descended, as he very soon learned from Madame Grandoni's expression; something had perished there for ever, and he might proceed to bury it as soon as he liked. His wife's ancient German friend, however, was not a person to keep up a manner of that sort very long, and when, after she had made him sit down on the sofa beside her, she shook her head, slowly and definitely, several times, it was with a face in which a more genial appreciation of the circumstances had already begun to appear.

'Never—never—never?' said the Prince, in a deep, hoarse voice, which was at variance with his aristocratic slimness. He had much of the aspect which, in late-coming members of long-descended races, we qualify to-day as effete; but his speech might have been the speech of some deep-chested fighting ancestor.

'Surely you know your wife as well as I,' she replied, in Italian, which she evidently spoke with facility, though with a strong guttural accent. 'I have been talking with her: that is what has made me keep you. I have urged her to see you. I have told her that this could do no harm and would pledge her to nothing. But you know your wife,'

Madame Grandoni repeated, with a smile which was now distinctly facetious.

Prince Casamassima looked down at his boots. 'How can one ever know a person like that? I hoped she would see me for five minutes.'

'For what purpose? Have you anything to propose?'

'For what purpose? To rest my eyes on her beautiful face.'

'Did you come to England for that?'

'For what else should I have come?' the Prince inquired, turning his blighted gaze to the opposite side of South Street.

'In London, such a day as this, *già*,' said the old lady, sympathetically. 'I am very sorry for you; but if I had known you were coming I would have written to you that you might spare yourself the pain.'

The Prince gave a low, interminable sigh. 'You ask me what I wish to propose. What I wish to propose is that my wife does not kill me inch by inch.'

'She would be much more likely to do that if you lived with her!' Madame Grandoni cried.

'*Cara signora*, she doesn't appear to have killed you, the melancholy nobleman rejoined.

'Oh, me? I am past killing. I am as hard as a stone. I went through my miseries long ago; I suffered what you have not had to suffer; I wished for death many times, and I survived it all. Our troubles don't kill us, Prince; it is we who must try to kill them. I have buried not a few. Besides Christina is fond of me, God knows why!' Madame Grandoni added.