

**THE TRAGIC MUSE,
IN THREE
VOLUMES, VOL. III**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649287727

The tragic muse, in three volumes, Vol. III by Henry James

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HENRY JAMES

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BY
HENRY JAMES

IN THREE VOLUMES

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London
MACMILLAN AND CO.
AND NEW YORK

1890

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LONDON & BUNGAY.

THE TRAGIC MUSE.

I.

MR. CARTERET was propped up on pillows, and in this attitude, beneath the high, spare canopy of his bed, presented himself to Nick's picture-seeking vision as a figure in a clever composition or a novel. He had gathered strength, though this strength was not much in his voice; it was mainly in his brighter eye and his air of being pleased with himself. He put out his hand and said: "I dare say you know why I sent for you;" upon which Nick sank into the seat he had occupied the day before, replying that he had been delighted to come, whatever the reason. Mr. Carteret said nothing more about the division or the second reading; he only murmured that they were keeping the newspapers for him. "I'm rather behind—I'm rather behind," he went on; "but two or three quiet mornings will make it all right. You can go back to-night, you know—you can easily go back." This was the only thing not quite straight that Nick saw in him—his making light of his young friend's flying to and fro. Nick sat looking at him with a sense that was half compunction and

half the idea of the rare beauty of his face, to which, strangely, the waste of illness now seemed to have restored some of its youth. Mr. Carteret was evidently conscious that this morning he should not be able to go on long, so that he must be practical and concise. "I dare say you know—you have only to remember," he continued.

"You know what a pleasure it is to me to see you—there can be no better reason than that."

"Hasn't the year come round—the year of that foolish arrangement?"

Nick thought a little, asking himself if it were really necessary to disturb his companion's earnest faith. Then the consciousness of the falsity of his own position surged over him again, and he replied: "Do you mean the period for which Mrs. Dallow insisted on keeping me dangling? Oh, that's over."

"And are you married—has it come off?" the old man asked, eagerly. "How long have I been ill?"

"We are uncomfortable, unreasonable people, not deserving of your interest. We are not married," Nick said.

"Then I haven't been ill so long," Mr. Carteret sighed, with vague relief.

"Not very long—but things *are* different," Nick continued.

The old man's eyes rested on his, and Nick noted how much larger they appeared. "You mean the arrangements are made—the day is at hand?"

"There are no arrangements," Nick smiled: "but why should it trouble you?"

"What then will you do—without arrangements?" Mr. Carteret's inquiry was plaintive and childlike.

"We shall do nothing—there is nothing to be done. We are not to be married—it's all off," said Nick. Then he added: "Mrs. Dallow has gone abroad."

The old man, motionless among his pillows, gave a long groan. "Ah, I don't like that."

"No more do I, sir."

"What's the matter? It was so good—so good."

"It wasn't good enough for her," Nick Dormer declared.

"For her? Is she so great as that? She told me she had the greatest regard for you. You're good enough for the best, my dear boy," Mr. Carteret went on.

"You don't know me; I *am* disappointing. Mrs. Dallow had, I believe, a great regard for me; but I have forfeited her regard."

The old man stared at this cynical announcement: he searched his companion's face for some attenuation of the words. But Nick apparently struck him as unashamed; and a faint colour coming into his withered cheek indicated his mystification and alarm. "Have you been unfaithful to her?" he demanded, considerably.

"She thinks so—it comes to the same thing. As I told you a year ago, she doesn't believe in me."

"You ought to have made her—you ought to have made her," said Mr. Carteret. Nick was about to utter some rejoinder when he continued: "Do you remember what I told you I would give you if you did? Do you remember what I told you I would give you on your wedding-day?"