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The American

Henry James · *1877* · *original English text*

Christopher Newman, a wealthy American, is reclining in the Salon Carré of the Louvre on a brilliant day in May, 1868, when his European education, and his courtship of Claire de Cintré, begin. The Bellegarde family will take his money more easily than they will take him. James's original English, Project Gutenberg #177, complete.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What happens when an honest American, sure that fortune and good will should be enough, meets a proud old European house that will use him and then close its door?

"On a brilliant day in May, in the year 1868, a gentleman was reclining at his ease on the great circular divan which at that period occupied the centre of the Salon Carré, in the Museum of the Louvre."

Chapter I, opening

Newman is not a fool, and he is not yet experienced. He wants a wife as he has wanted a picture: the best that can be had. Claire de Cintré is more than that, and her family's pride is more dangerous than he first thinks. The close tests whether he will take revenge when he could. Teach the innocence, the insult, and the choice.

KEY CHARACTERS

Christopher Newman
The wealthy American whose European education begins in the Louvre, and whose courtship is refused by an old house

Claire de Cintré
The Bellegarde daughter, a widow, whom Newman loves

Valentin de Bellegarde
Claire's younger brother, Newman's friend

Madame de Bellegarde and the elder son
The proud heads of the house who will not, in the end, take the American

Mrs. Bread
The old servant who holds a family secret

Tristram, and Noémie Nioche
The American friend in Paris, and the young copyist of the opening

A DIVAN IN THE LOUVRE

> *"On a brilliant day in May, in the year 1868, a gentleman was reclining at his ease on the great circular divan which at that period occupied the centre of the Salon Carré, in the Museum of the Louvre."*
>
> Chapter I

Grades 10–12

Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

A Brilliant Day in May

CHAPTER I

The novel opens in the Louvre, on the circular divan of the Salon Carré, in 1868. The gentleman is Christopher Newman, at his ease, and already being painted by a young copyist.

- The first sentence is exact, including "Salon Carré" and "Museum of the Louvre"
- The ottoman, James notes, has since been removed, to the regret of weak-kneed lovers of the fine arts
- Newman is a wealthy American, at leisure after business, ready to take Europe as a field of experience
- This is the 1877 novel in James's original English, PG #177, complete

> *"On a brilliant day in May, in the year 1868, a gentleman was reclining at his ease on the great circular divan which at that period occupied the centre of the Salon Carré, in the Museum of the Louvre."*
>
> Chapter I

02

Friends, and an Introduction

THE EARLY CHAPTERS

Newman gathers companions—Tristram, the young painter Noémie, Valentin de Bellegarde—and is introduced to Claire de Cintré.

- Claire de Cintré is a widow, of the Bellegarde family; keep James's accented form, Cintré, as printed
- Valentin, her brother, is the most human of the house, and Newman's friend
- Newman's courtship is direct, generous, and a little commercial in its first habits; the book will test those habits
- Paris is the field; the old house is the obstacle

03

The Bellegardes

THE MIDDLE CHAPTERS

The family consents, or seems to consent, and then withdraws. Pride of blood will not, in the end, take the American.

- The mother and the elder brother stand for the house's pride
- Claire is dutiful, and she is also a person with a conscience; do not reduce her to a prize
- The broken engagement is the novel's insult, and Newman feels it as such
- Valentin's fate darkens the middle of the book; teach it with gravity

04

A Secret, and a Choice

THE LATER CHAPTERS

Newman comes into knowledge that could serve as revenge against the Bellegardes. The close is the test of what he will do with it.

- Mrs. Bread, the old English servant, is the witness who can give him the family's secret
- The question is not only whether the Bellegardes have done wrong; it is whether Newman will pay them back in their own coin
- Teach the close as a moral choice, not only as a plot twist
- Do not invent a last-chapter marriage James did not write

05

The 1877 American, Complete

THE HOSTED FILE

Project Gutenberg #177, James's original English, the complete novel.

- This is the early international novel, before The Portrait of a Lady; the two may be read together
- Keep period details (Salon Carré, 1868) as printed
- For grades 10–12
- The comedy of the American abroad is real; the injury is real too

Innocence and Experience · Pride of Birth · Money and Marriage · Friendship · Revenge or Restraint · The American Abroad

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 10–12

1. The opening is exact: "On a brilliant day in May, in the year 1868, a gentleman was reclining at his ease on the great circular divan which at that period occupied the centre of the Salon Carré, in the Museum of the Louvre."
2. Keep James's spelling Claire de Cintré, as printed throughout this text.
3. The close is a moral choice about revenge, not a last-minute wedding. Do not invent an ending James did not write.
4. The hosted text is the complete 1877 novel, PG #177, original English. It may be read beside The Portrait of a Lady, now also complete on the site.
5. For grades 10–12. The comedy of manners is real; the insult to Newman, and Valentin's fate, should be taught with their proper weight.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #177, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/james-the-american/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.