AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED TALES OF THE SUPERNATURAL BY HENRY JAMES AND A CREATIVE WORK OF SHORT FICTION IN THE JAMESIAN TRADITION

PROJECT REPORT

Submitted to the faculty of
The University of Houston - Clear Lake

By
Thresa Ellen Stallings

In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
In
Literature
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We the undersigned, certify that we have read this project and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for the Master's Degree in Literature.

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ABSTRACT

The Jamesian philosophy encompasses a paradox with which James, through his characters, sought to come to terms. James equated suffering with commitment, even though he recognized it as a critical component of a fulfilled life. However, James’s male characters, much like himself, were less likely than their female counterparts to understand and apply this principle. This may be attributed to James’s complicated familial relationships and his conflicted perception of his own sexuality. James’s fascination with the subconscious led him to write his supernatural tales. James broke with the traditional gothic treatment of ghosts and, instead, utilized them as symbolic metaphors. His ghosts became catalysts for action and propelled his characters into self-awareness. More importantly, he used these supernatural inventions as a means of exploring his own inner demons, the evidence for which may be discerned in the comparison of certain pivotal events in James’s life with his later supernatural tales.
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personal haunting throughout his art.

issue to such an extent that it appears he was in fact working out aspects of his own
interest in the theme of an indifferent life; his later works reveal a preoccupation with this
impossibility." (Queret 1971). Although James's literary works evidence an ongoing
enquiry into the visions of the human condition, for him, were half a terror and half
in life, then all is lost. James's anthropological writings reveal that he was haunted from
philosophy. If we as individuals succumb to our fears and remain from July Particulate
no one who lives life fully emerges unscathed. However, according to Jamesians
and hence many of his characters, evokes from the recognition that life is full of danger.
individuals in their quest to either conquer or remain from life. The paradox for James,
offer intriguing psychological insights into the deserts and fears which motivate
One of the most notable and prolific writers of his time, Henry James continues to

Henry James in a letter to Crane in 1883

universe which is probably good not to possess a
we appear to be, in all, there is something that holds one in one's place, makes it a standpoint in the
yet in the way in which the forces that move us to work to find our power and strength and thought and moments
consciousness is an indwelling power and thought at times it may seem to be all consciousness of myself.
An analysis of selected works of the supramental

The Haunting of Henry James.

Shellings
He faced penury and ridicule; he had a horror of dogs and of moral judgments. His older brothers from one school to another with little or no provocation. As Fred observed: hap hazard, frequently proscribing on the whimsical at Henry, Jr. was apt to move the two James children from attending college. Formal education for James proved was things initially prohibiting both Henry, Jr. and his brother, William. He chided of the paths he opened; considered his philosophy with a dominating name. All another compulsiveness that encouraged children to develop naturally along self-determined brother, William. Although James's father advocated a doctrine of parental father a self-sacrificing mother, and a life-long companionate relationships with his older resembles the substance of classic literature and includes the elements of a controlling his life experiences, particularly with regard to this family. His family's psychological themes survive remarkably within this plot and characters that were directly influenced by when completing James's literary works, it becomes apparent that particular supplemental as symbolic metaphors of consciousness: the traditional Greco-Roman approach of ancient metaphysical cultures in his formulation of the perhaps even abstraction for his personal life choices. James, however, moves away from other projections of his own human psyche which camouflage sophisticated validation of a second area for exploration resides in the combination that James's supernational lies were that his inner conflicts were overlappings of his affiliations with family members. The banned by personal failure. An examination of James's familial psychological reveals infirmation of James's conflicted nature into the composition of characters that were often directly related to James's personal life. The first area for consideration involves the analysis of selected works reveals the convergence of two aesthetic elements.
solution was to throw his sons into many schools and to let them find their own feet” (37).

In addition, the elder Henry moved his family to Europe for three years ostensibly for the sake of his four sons, hoping that their exposure to French and German would benefit their acquisition of the languages. During their stay in Europe, Henry, Sr., moved the family from place to place with the result that the variety of schools and tutors afforded James with an eclectic mixture of educational experiences and associations. The development of James’s literary style, therefore, did not depend upon classical literary traditions but rather drew upon his observations of the contemporary world in which he lived. Influenced by the works of French authors, he sought to create real life characters and situations. In a word, James was thus able to convey through his art that which he deemed “real,” thereby moving American realism out of romance more so than his American contemporaries. James’s particular powers of observation ultimately propelled his art into psychological provinces as he probed the subconscious mind for motive. James’s foray into this area ultimately led him down the paths of the supernatural realm.

In his supernatural tales, James utilizes psychology as a means for exploring moralistic truths as his characters search within themselves for answers to their dilemmas rather than seek divine intervention. In essence, psychology replaces religion for James, at least in a literary sense. His lack of religious affiliation may be traced to his father. Although reared as a Presbyterian, Henry, Sr., moved away from the strict religious doctrine imposed upon him by his own father and replaced it more or less with the teachings of the eighteenth century Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg, whose “books
recast Christianity into a Romantic religion of the innately good heart in which the human and the divine had ready interaction and mutual assimilation” (Kaplan 13). Henry, Sr., considered by James to be a very spiritual being, left the decision of whether or not to attend church services, and for that matter, which church to attend, to the individual inclinations of his family members. As a result, Henry, Jr., opted to abstain from affiliating with any established religion. The implications for James’s art may be found in his choice to inject very few religious figures as characters into his stories as well as the avoidance of characters in moral turmoil resulting from religious constraints. Yet, James’s writings are not of themselves devoid of moral and spiritual influence. Rather, personal moral convictions and in particular, “an instinctive rightness of heart” replace religious dogma (Richardson xxi).

His father’s lack of visible employment presented an additional anomaly for James and his brother, William, who were victims of the taunts of their playmates. Henry, Sr., provided for his family by means of his inheritance. This state of affairs proved unsatisfactory for the brothers when comparing their father’s image to that of their friends’ fathers who were occupied with “business.” The emergence of the American businessman as the modern American hero was to have a lasting effect upon the younger James who would later compare his life and artistic accomplishments against those of his imagined alter ego. James would ultimately confront his nemesis through his character, Spencer Brydon, in “The Jolly Corner.”

The rivalry between the brothers was perhaps most visible when the two were in their twenties. William, as the eldest son, was afforded the first opportunity for an independent trip abroad while Henry, Jr., was left at home to await his turn. Twenty-three
year old James seized the opportunity to assert his position within the family hierarchy. His diminishing health markedly improved and his literary endeavors flourished while his brother was away. During his brother's absence (1866-1869), James wrote four short stories in which a deep-seated conflict with William is in evidence. Two of the tales incorporate a supernatural element. One of these stories, “The Romance of the Old Clothes,” was written shortly after James ordered a suit from the same cloth as one that belonged to William. In the story, two sisters become rivals for the affection of an Englishman, a close friend of their brother, who comes to the colonies to make his fortune. The man marries the younger sister who later dies in childbirth. Jealousy and the fear that her elder sister will come into possession of her elegant trousseau prompt the dying sister to extract a promise from her husband that he will preserve her beautiful dresses for their daughter. Following her death, the husband keeps his promise and locks the clothes away in a trunk. The older sister eventually marries her former brother-in-law and eventually gains possession of the key to the forbidden trunk. Her husband later finds her in the attic lying dead beside the finery she will never wear.

Viola had fallen backward from a kneeling posture, with one hand supporting her on the floor and the other pressed to her heart. On her limbs was the stiffness of death, and on her face, in the fading light of the sun, the terror of something more than death. Her lips were parted in entreaty, in dismay, in agony; and on her bloodless brow and cheeks there glowed the marks of ten hideous wounds from two vengeful ghostly hands.

(“Romance” 362)
James uses the traditional literary technique of employing a supernatural element as a means of exacting vengeance for "sisterly identification and imitation, as well as usurpation" which Leon Edel interprets as James's guilt over his relationship with his brother, William (82). In James's later works, such as The Turn of the Screw, his utilization of ghosts evidences a maturity of style and purpose.

The other early tale involving a supernatural element, "De Grey: A Romance," tells the story of a young woman who must defy an old De Grey family curse in order to marry. She does so but at a great cost to her lover who now falls prey to the curse in her place. "She was to find then, after her long passion, that the curse was absolute, inevitable, eternal. It could be shifted, but not eluded, in spite of the utmost strivings of human agony, it insatiably claimed its victim" ("DeGrey" 34). As De Grey's condition deteriorates, Margaret senses his affection for her has lessened, and she fears the loss of his love entirely. She is consumed by guilt for having asserted herself against the curse, even contemplating suicide in hopes it might reverse the effects of the curse back onto its originally intended victim. In her agony, we detect James's guilt for asserting his position within the family and his fear of losing his brother's love.

Equally at the center of the rivalry between Henry, Jr., and William was James's sexuality. Kaplan sees William as playing "the active, masculine role to Henry's passive, feminine role--the devil of the house in comparison to the angel of the house" (90). Critics have debated the issue of James's sexual predilections. However, even Edel, author of a comprehensive biographical study in which he sought to explain James's sexual ambiguity in psychological terms, conceded, in his subsequent revised, abridged edition, to the likelihood of James having demonstrated, at least in a literary sense,
homoerotic feelings for his brother, William. According to Edel, the fourth tale written during William’s absence, “The Light Man,” offers powerful insights into James’s homoerotic feeling for his brother that William, himself, “sensed and feared” (82).

James would eventually gain both the critical acclaim and the admiration he craved from his family with the successful publication of his novel, The Portrait of a Lady (1881). In the character of Isabel Archer, James reveals a self-portrait of a paradoxical nature. Both James and Isabel have been herded back and forth between Europe and America by their fathers. Following her father’s death, Isabel travels to her aunt’s estate, Gardencourt. Isabel arrives in England ready to “face the thrilling dangers that await inexperienced young girls. She knows they are true because she has read about them” (Banta 169). Not surprisingly then, Isabel, intrigued by the ghost at Gardencourt, expresses a desire to see it. Her cousin, Ralph, warns her that in order for that to happen, Isabel must experience suffering. In crafting Isabel’s vulnerability, James seemingly accepts his father’s philosophy that knowledge comes through experience. Knowledge, furthermore, is an indication that one has learned the difference between good and evil which is revealed through suffering. Isabel’s journey into the dark side of life comes about through an ironic twist of fate when, unlike James, she becomes heir to a fortune that was intended to ensure her freedom to use her imagination to make of her life what she will. However, Isabel lacks the ability to bring this ideal to fruition and as a result, makes a tragic mistake. Kaplan likens Isabel’s marriage to Osmond to “a form of death,” wryly observing that “James probably felt that he had made a better choice than his fictional double—that is, no marriage at all” (Kaplan 238-9).
James’s physical description of Osmond is similar enough to that of his brother, William, to call into question the possibility that Osmond symbolically represents the elder brother on some psychological level. As Kaplan observes:

Osmond, like William, has close-cropped hair, a short-clipped sharp beard, a thin, angular body, and bright, intelligent eyes. Osmond dominates others by means of an articulate and aggressive sensibility. Like William, Osmond is a talented painter who can never rise to the level of brilliance because he lacks genius. Like William, in his brother’s complaint, Osmond “takes himself so seriously,” as if his own nervous system was the necessary measure and judge of everything. (241)

Osmond serves as the novel’s villain, representing the evil that Isabel must experience if she is to suffer. James employs elements of the Gothic villain in his creation of Osmond. Typically, the villain “is by far the most impressive single element in the Gothic novel. The magnetism of his personality serves his evil purposes well in the story, and his actions hold the reader in a delightful attitude of dread” (Lewis 55). Isabel observes of Osmond’s “faculty for making everything wither that he touched, spoiling everything for her that he looked at” that “It was as if he had had the evil eye; as if his presence were a blight and his favour a misfortune” (Portrait 355-6). James skillfully mutates the traditional Gothic approach into the province of the psychological when he couples the image of Osmond’s Palazzo (the Gothic dwelling) with Osmond’s mind. James designs Isabel’s horrifying journey into awareness through his description of Osmond’s “dungeon-like house as if it were a man’s mind and his mind as if it were a gothic house of horror and then, in turn, imagining that mind as if it were also the menacing presence
that haunts the actual Palazzo” (Banta 176). The image deeply affects Isabel and lingers with her as she relives “over again, the incredulous terror with which she had taken the measure of her dwelling . . . Osmond’s beautiful mind indeed seemed to peep down from a small high window and mock at her” (Portrait 360).

A pivotal scene in the novel occurs when Isabel chances upon Osmond and Madam Merle talking together. The scene sounds a note of alarm within Isabel because of the familiarity of their posture. Madam Merle is standing while Osmond remains seated; they appear to be communicating without words “with the freedom of old friends . . . But the thing made an image, lasting only a moment, like a sudden flicker of light. Their relative positions, their absorbed mutual gaze, struck her as something detected” (Portrait 343). In a later scene, Madam Merle confesses to having had an affair with Osmond many years previously while both had been married to other people and reveals that Pansy, Isabel’s step-daughter, is actually their child. Isabel learns that her marriage was a the result of a plot between them. Isabel has been the victim of treachery. This is a pivotal moment for Isabel, who confronts the reality of her marriage and the true character of the man she has married. Isabel suffers from her acknowledgement of the evil surrounding her.

James thereby uses Isabel Archer to demonstrate his theory that a worthwhile life must include suffering. He describes her suffering as follows: “Suffering, with Isabel, was an active condition; it was not a chill, a stupor, a despair; it was a passion of thought, of speculation, of response to every pressure” (Portrait 356). Isabel has discerned the presence of evil; her suffering is the result. James employs the symbolic appearance of a ghost as the means of signifying Isabel’s rite of passage. Ralph Touchett, her cousin, had
told her on her arrival in England that she might be able to see the ghost in the family mansion if she were to suffer. Isabel’s visitation follows the death of her cousin, who had burdened her with freedom in the form of an inheritance, and the denouement in which she confesses both her love for the dying Ralph and her mistake in marrying Osmond. James writes that Isabel “apparently had fulfilled the necessary condition, for the next morning, in the cold, faint dawn, she knew that a spirit was standing by her bed” (Portrait 479). James constructs the ghost as a means of signifying Isabel’s recognition of the hopelessness of her predicament. She has both misjudged the character of her husband and, as a result, mistakenly trusted his intentions. Having allowed herself to experience, albeit briefly, the tumultuous depths of love, she must now confront the prospect of continuing an existence tethered to a loveless marriage and therefore, devoid of passion.

However, James offers Isabel one last chance at love in the guise of a former rejected lover, Caspar Goodwood, who makes an impassioned plea for Isabel to remain with him rather than return to her husband. “Were we born to rot in our misery—were we born to be afraid? I never knew you afraid!” he protests. “If you’ll only trust me, how little you will be disappointed! The world’s all before us—and the world’s very big” (Portrait 489). The reader, along with Caspar Goodwood, learns from Henrietta Stackpole of Isabel’s decision to return to Rome and presumably, her husband. Isabel seems fated to return to the dungeon of her husband’s mind, and in so doing, leaves the reader with a rather darkened image of marriage.

James’s often arbitrary treatment of marriage may be attributed in a large part to the ambiguous views of his father, Henry, Sr., who often presented his family with something of an enigma. Although seemingly a strong proponent of personal freedom,
Henry, Sr., nevertheless expressed conventional views of marriage. Henry, Sr., viewed marriage as a highly spiritual relationship conceived to protect individuals against their innate lustful character (Kaplan 15). James’s mother was placed upon the proverbial pedestal, and the family was held captive by her all-consuming self-sacrifice on their behalf. James observed his father’s utter dependency upon her while experiencing firsthand the confining nature of her care and attention. When, later in life, James wrote his autobiographies, he only briefly mentioned his mother, reasoning that her memory was too “sacred.”

While James’s more mature works, such as The Portrait of a Lady, evidence a move toward the portrayal of women as realistic individuals rather than as stereotypes, James’s earlier works exhibit a lack of experience with the female sex. James’s style, as seen in his early tales, indicates a naïve handling of male-female relationships (Edel 85). James’s psychological treatment of Isabel Archer offers a more in-depth study of the feminine subconscious. Her conflicted nature, however, may be attributed in part to the infusion of Henry, Sr.’s, puritan convictions into the composition of Isabel’s character:

Sexually frozen and fearful, she is repelled by Caspar Goodwood’s priapic manliness, unaroused by Lord Warburton’s gentlemanly, domestic sexual good manners, and drained by Osmond’s passive sexual fastidiousness. She makes the worst of the choices available to her.

(Kaplan 239)

While James’s treatment of women characters in subsequent works continued to develop a sophistication of style, he nevertheless maintained “his primitive fear of womankind, a symptom of his own troubled sexuality” (Edel 87).
In the mid-1890s and into the next decade, James developed intimate friendships with several young men that, for him, approximated the experienced of being in love. James was careful to maintain appearances, however. According to Kaplan, “Each time he fell in love, he placed the emphasis on friendship, not on physical consummation, which remained as dangerous, as threatening, as morally and culturally difficult for him as it had always been” (402). If James ever consummated any of these relationships, he remained discreet. James was keenly aware both of the social stigma attached to homosexuality and the danger of legal ramifications for those who flagrantly exhibited such behaviors. For example, James was aware of the conviction of Oscar Wilde, poet and playwright, for sodomy. In a letter to his brother, William, “James’s distaste for what he believed to be the Irishman’s vulgarity gave way to horror at what seemed Wilde’s unwarrantedly severe punishment for the wrong weaknesses” (Kaplan 403).

During this period, James made his own attempt as a playwright with the dramatic adaptations of several of his novels. The experience was unsuccessful, however, and James returned to his fiction. For commercial reasons, he concentrated on short pieces, deciding that longer novels were not cost effective with regard to the time spent writing them. However, James made an exception for his novel, The Spoils of Poynton (1897), “his most sardonic comment on English culture” (Kaplan 414). In the novel, Mrs. Gereth devotes her life to the acquisition of valuable material possessions only to lose them to her son as part of his inheritance following his father’s death. Mrs. Gereth describes her possessions as follows: “There isn’t one of them I don’t know and love . . . They’re living things to me; they know me, they return the touch of my hand” (Poynton 31). While Mrs. Gereth markedly reacts to the impending loss of her possessions, she fails to recognize
the profound cost engendered by a life obsessed with material possessions. The reader, on the other hand, realizes the folly of such a life when the “spoils” are reduced to ashes along with Poynton, the result of a catastrophic fire. James prepares the reader for this realization with a subtle contrast in the guise of an aura attached to the possessions that Mrs. Gereth inherits from a maiden aunt. When Fleda Vetch accompanies Mrs. Gereth to the deceased aunt’s home, she forms a distinct impression of the aunt’s character. “The more she looked about the surer she felt of the character of the maiden-aunt, the sense of whose dim presence urged her to pacification: the maiden-aunt had been a dear; she would have adored the maiden-aunt” (Poynton 54). James uses the lingering impression of the aunt to state once more his presumption of a worthwhile life as being one that experiences suffering. Fleda senses the aura of the maiden aunt lingering about her earthly possessions: “The poor lady had passed shyly, yet with some bruises, through life; had been sensitive and ignorant and exquisite” (Poynton 54). Fleda takes in the abstract qualities of her surroundings and observes a life; therefore, she declares to Mrs. Gereth, “she was so sure she had deeply suffered” (Poynton 55). But Mrs. Gereth, trapped within the blinding limitations of obsession, sees only the stark reality of the furnishings and replies without comprehending, “I’m sure I thoroughly hope she did!” (Poynton 55).

While Poynton is not considered one of James’s ghost stories, it does serve to demonstrate both his interest in obsession as a theme and his utilization of supernatural phenomena as a literary tool.

James recognized that the supernatural elicits an emotional response from the reader in a manner unduplicated by any other literary contrivance. He understood that belief in the unknown was not a necessity for arresting the attention of the reader. The
merest nuance of a ghostly presence excites the imagination, compelling the reader to identify with the affected characters so that, “Whether they stand for actual presences or as manipulated metaphors for consciousness, James uses them as ‘agents of action’ . . . to drive, lure, coerce, or win the living from innocence to self-comprehension, and to a comprehension shared, suffered, and perhaps capable of saving” (Banta 132). The Gothic ghosts in the tradition of Horace Walpole and his successors, the literary predecessors of James’s supernatural phantoms, fall into three categories:

The first type is really a natural occurrence which somehow inspires in the human breast an unnatural, or supernatural dread or terror. The second is the existence of dreams, certainly a natural enough human occurrence, but dreams of a supernatural nature. And the final type is the purely supernatural: those phenomena whose existence can have no natural explanation. (Lewis 21)

While James departed from Gothic tradition with regard to the utility of ghosts, he nevertheless employed vestiges of these categories to varying degrees not only within his ghost stories but within his realistic writing as well. His ghosts became literary tools that he applied with increasing skill as evidenced in his later tales.

The theme of obsession was to figure prominently in several of James’s ghost stories following Poynton’s publication. James’s absorption with matters of the subconscious “just kept deepening until eventually he began to probe the caverns and weirs of abnormal psychology, especially the condition of obsession” (Hock 5). A sense of loss is also prominent within the core of each plot. A close examination of his works, The Turn of the Screw (1898), “The Beast in the Jungle” (1903), and “The Jolly Corner”
Stallings 15

(1908) reveals three distinct uses for the supernatural. The theme of obsession, a sense of loss, and the question of "what might have been," permeate the storylines with haunting effect for the central characters. Although Freud's work was largely unknown until the end of the nineteenth century, James was exposed to modern psychology by way of his brother, William, whose essay, "What Psychical Research Has Accomplished" (1896) referenced F. W. G. Meyers' writings on "the subliminal consciousness." In all three tales, "the ghostly realm deepens and in fact parallels the deepening psychological obsession of the protagonist" (Hock 80).

The Turn of the Screw represents a return to Gothicism through what James describes in his New York edition Preface as "an anecdote amplified and highly emphasized and returning upon itself... an amusette to catch those not easily caught" (xviii). Alice Hall Petry's analysis notes striking similarities between James's tale and Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre. She theorizes that "James borrowed heavily from Bronte's novel: the similarities in plot, characterization, narrative technique, and even phraseology are so striking that it is impossible to believe that they are purely fortuitous" (61).

However, James injects characteristics of his own style into the gothic mix as he plumbs the subconsciousness of the governess, the narrator of the tale. It is through her that we are introduced to the presence of the ghosts. She describes her first citing of Quint as follows:

What arrested me on the spot--and with a shock made greater than any vision had allowed for--was the sense that my imagination had in a flash, turned real. He did stand there!--but high up, beyond the lawn and at the
very top of the tower to which, on that first morning, little Flora had conducted me. (Turn 175)

Much critical speculation has gone into the issue of whether or not the ghosts should be considered "real" or the invention of the governess's deluded mind.Literalists cite chapter and verse of the story to support opposing sides of the issue. They were later joined by proponents of the Freudian camp who burrowed into the governess's subconscious to search for sexual repression and unnatural feelings for the children, especially Miles. Feminists challenge the Freudian interpretation, advocating that if the narrator had been a man, the issue of the narrator's sanity would not have surfaced.

James explains his supernatural injection of the spectres as suggestions of evil that he anticipated would be sufficient to activate the reader's imagination. Only make the reader's general vision of evil intense enough... and his own experience, his own imagination his own sympathy (with the children) and horror of their false friends will supply him quite sufficiently with all the particulars. (xxi) James was delighted that his technique, which he devised as a means of having the reader "think evil," proved so successful.
The story begins with an explanation of the manuscript’s origin and a validation of the authenticity of its author, thus setting the stage for storytelling with a gathering “in an old house” on Christmas Eve. The participants in the festivities are gathered around the fireplace exchanging ghost stories. The reader, along with the fictitious guests, is readied for an evening’s entertainment of chills and thrills. A tale has just been recounted concerning the appearance of a ghost to a little boy and his mother. James baits his literary hook with a brooding young man named Douglas who responds to the tale with a tantalizing suggestion:

I quite agree--in regard to Griffin’s ghost, or whatever it was--that its appearing first to the little boy, at so tender an age, adds a particular touch.

But it’s not the first occurrence of its charming kind that I know to have been concerned with a child. If the child gives the effect another turn of the screw, what do you say to two children--? (Turn 147-8)

James cleverly allows for those individuals who staunchly refute the reality of ghosts. He seems to assure the reader that no matter what one’s personal views may be regarding the existence of supernatural spectres, an interesting tale is to follow so why not join the fun? He affirms this approach with the willingness of Douglas’s audience to do just that.

The guests must wait, however, for Douglas to send word to “his man” to retrieve the written document from a locked drawer and send it by the next post. The suspense is thus prolonged, and the guests, along with the reader, eventually learn that the author of the document had been the governess to Douglas’s sister and that he had become infatuated with her upon becoming her confidant. In this way, James draws the reader into a shared confidence with the storyteller and plants the assumption that the document
must, of course, be genuine. Douglas reveals that the governess “has been dead these twenty years. She sent me the pages in question before she died” (Turn 149). Now the manuscript assumes the aura of a legal document for it came by way of an inheritance. When pressed to answer certain questions about the governess, the teller of the tale refuses to betray her secret insisting that “The story won’t tell . . . not in any literal vulgar way” (Turn 151). Douglas implies that the reader’s interpretation must extend beyond the text. (Goetz 157). And so, the Jamesian trap is set, for the governess’s tale is incomplete and without an epilogue at the end, the reader is left hanging. Readers are left to “Either . . . run beyond the given text (as the Freudian reading does), trying to complete the governess’s narrative by saying for her what she did not quite say, or they remain within her text, or short of it (the literalist reading), overlooking many signals that the text is clearly giving off” (Goetz 157). The master storyteller, it seems, has baited his story well. The reader becomes caught up in the need to satisfactorily explain this bizarre tale.

Since James explains the ghosts as representations of evil in his Preface, it follows, therefore, that the children are intended as representations of innocence. When Miles, for example, is expelled from school, both the housekeeper and the governess protest his innocence against any wrong-doing. As their protector, the governess seeks to shield the children from corruption by preventing their knowledge of the ghosts. It is at this point that James breaks with the gothic template and employs the theme of obsession. The heroine will not be rescued by the hero, for the Master made clear that she was never to bother him with anything that happens at Bly. Therefore, when Miles is expelled from
The tales may be interpreted as a lightweight variation on James's own sense of his
overwhelming presence of James's Aunt Kale, who lived with the Jameses for many years.
Influence of the adults in James's childhood. The government in many ways recalls the
childhood's unremarkably to the Influence of the adults recalls the oppression
childhood and with the death of the boy. While
ended momentarily with the government being ultimately responsible for the corruption of the
waltzings: as James destined, the effect of the waltzings on the government's oppression that
in their version of the dead resolved to them. He is not reading to her... they're talking of
there to their Hill; but even while they pretended to be lost in their fairy-tale they're looked
housekeeper. "Oh yes, we may sit here and look at them, and they may show off us
that the children are in collusion with the ghosts. The government continues to the
upon, she stands faster and faster into a possession zeal that evanescence confuses her
dizzling trip. We'll / was strangled in the behind. (167-68). Which only tended to confirm
which I had the fancy of our Being almost as loss a handful of passengers in a train
enronering a few lessons of a building still older, partly destroyed and half-ruined in
impression and observes that Bly was simply a girl who achieved her conventional house.
163). But with the intervening years for reflection, she amends her original romantic
division of the young idea, take all caution out of story-books and fairy-tales. (167)
castle of romance impressed by a rose spot, such a place as would somehow, for
The government describes the manner as if it first impressed him. I had the view of a
in her charge as well as Bly is well, and she alone is to deal with whatever arises.
school for saying "bad words," she left on her own to deal with it. The children are left
helplessness as a child; on the sibling drama in the James household; on the role of Aunt Kate, a kind of governess; and on the powerful effect of Mary and Henry, Sr., on the sensibilities of the children” (Kaplan 414). The governess becomes obsessed with the moral salvation of the children who have been, in her opinion, corrupted by the evil of the ghosts, echoing the fears of Henry, Sr., who feared the corruption of his children. This perception of evil has been enhanced for both the governess and the reader by the housekeeper’s intimation that Quint and Miss Jessel had participated in an illicit sexual relationship.

James was to apply the theme of obsession in a much different arena in his short story, “The Beast in the Jungle.” In this tale, James scrutinizes the uneventful life. Not only does the central character, John Marcher, fail to live life fully; he mistakenly waits in anticipation of a remarkable event. May Bartram, his confidant, recalls.

You said you had had from your earliest time, as the deepest thing within you, the sense of being kept for something rare and strange, possibly prodigious and terrible, that was sooner or later to happen to you, that you had in your bones the foreboding and the conviction of, and that would perhaps overwhelm you. (“Beast” 71)

The two had met ten years earlier, and it was then that Marcher had confided his premonition to her. Upon renewing their acquaintance, Bartram questions him about his premonition: “Isn’t what you describe perhaps but the expectation—or at any rate the sense of danger, familiar to so many people--of falling in love?” (“Beast” 72). In this way, James presents the possible solution to Marcher who rejects it. May joins in
Marcher’s vigilance for the remainder of her life but is disappointed by Marcher’s failure to experience a “moral awakening” (Banta 209).

James constructs a story of inaction by employing images “that mark the stages of his protagonist’s psychological evasions” (Gargano 160). The reader is caught up in the limbo of waiting for the big event. Marcher and Bartram develop a life-long companionable relationship around the anticipated event as they watch and wait together. Eventually, Bartram falls ill. She intimates to Marcher that she knows his fate but refuses to divulge it, declaring instead that she hopes he never knows because the horror would be too great. Following her death, Marcher visits her grave and chances to observe a man who is deeply in mourning for his deceased wife. Horrified, Marcher realizes that the event he anticipated has at last come to pass. He was “the man of his time, the man to whom nothing on earth was to have happened” (“Beast” 125). Marcher realizes that his way out would have been to love May Bartram, and with this recognition comes the overwhelming sense of loss in having failed to experience the fulfillment of life’s opportunities. James injected a supernatural effect through his vivid imagery into this climactic moment. Marcher recoils from the psychological monster created within his mind:

He saw the Jungle of his life and saw the lurking Beast; then, while he looked, perceived it, as by a stir of the air, rise, huge and hideous, for the leap that was to settle him. His eyes darkened—it was close; and, instinctively turning, in his hallucination, to avoid it, he flung himself, face down on the tomb. (“Beast” 126-7)
Stallings 22

James employed a similar metaphor in The Turn of the Screw when the governess describes her idyllic time with the children: "I had been in charge of a pair of little grandees, of princes of the blood, for whom everything, to be right, would have to be fenced about and ordered and arranged, the only form that in my fancy the after-years could take for them was that of a romantic, a really royal extension of the garden and the park" (173-4). She then describes her impending confrontation with the ghost of Quint: "It may be of course above all that what suddenly broke into this gives the previous time a charm of stillness—that hush in which something gathers or crouches. The change was actually like the spring of a beast" (Turn 174). As noted previously, the governess first alluded to the ghost as coming from her "imagination," the product of her romantic musings as she strolled about the grounds of Bly. James thus visualizes the stark contrast between the romantic dream-state of life during which a person simply exists with that of self-realization when the romantic haze falls away leaving stark reality and comprehension in its wake. The "beast" springs cutting off the escape into the oblivion of unawareness.

The profound sense of loss and the tragic elements of "The Beast in the Jungle" call into question the issue of James's choice to remain unmarried. At least one of his female friends may have harbored a hope for a more intimate relationship than James was willing or able to undertake. Constance Fenimore Woolson, an American author and the grand-niece of James Fenimore Cooper, had been keen to meet James upon her arrival in England. Eventually, the two did meet in Florence, Italy in 1880. Edel describes the uniqueness of their relationship as having served "a kind of mutual flattery" (256). Fennimore, however, was evidently more enamored of James than he was of her. James
intimated his awareness of Fenimore's feelings for him in a letter to his Aunt Kate following their initial meeting in which he described her as "intense." It was during this trip to Florence that James embarked upon his novel, *The Portrait*. Isabel Archer, like Fenimore, is eager to experience the sensual flavor of her surroundings an experience that Fenimore described in a letter to a friend: "Florence is all I have dreamed about and more: here I have attained the old-world feeling I used to dream about" (Edel 256). Her words are reminiscent of the image of Isabel sitting in her father's library reading about the world she longed to experience and of the girl whose eyes eagerly surveyed every detail of Gardencourt upon her arrival. As for Fenimore, a Henry James character appeared in several of her subsequent works. In the same letter to her friend, she described him as "charming" with a "beautiful regular profile" and a manner that was "very quiet, almost cold" (Edel 256). Their friendship continued until her death in Venice in January of 1894.

James was deeply affected by Fenimore's sudden demise. Speculation that her fall from her bedroom window was an act of suicide caused James to despair. Overcome, he was unable to attend her funeral. James's imagination conjured up vivid images of her death, and he became obsessed with the details of her death. He tormented himself with self-recremoniations:

He could not keep completely at a distance the possibility that he might have been a contributor to her problems. Could he have done something more? If her depression had external coordinates, might he have been one of them? He touched the edges of these questions, and searched
immediately for a description of Fenimore and her life that would relieve him of such fearful possibilities. (Kaplan 383)

In the following spring, James traveled to Italy. He had agreed to meet Fenimore’s sister and her daughter in Venice where they planned to dispose of her possessions. Before joining them, James made a pilgrimage to Rome to visit Fenimore’s grave after which he continued to Venice where he spent a month with Fenimore’s relatives in her apartment. He retrieved his letters from among her things and presumably destroyed them.

Given the extent of James’s obsession with the details of Fenimore’s death and his subsequent brooding over his possible role in her decision to end her life, the inference may be drawn that James, through his art, may have worked out his lingering subconscious feelings of guilt and remorse for his inability to live up to Fenimore’s expectations for the evolution of their relationship. Kaplan notes a similarity between James’s relationship with Fenimore and that of May Bartram and John Marcher.

For Marcher, there is no second chance, no renewal—an embodiment of James’s nightmare vision of never having lived, of having missed the depths and the passions of life, of having denied love and sexuality. His experience with Constance Fenimore Woolson tremulously informs the surface pattern of the story and the depiction of May Bartram. James did indeed ponder what he had missed. (457)

James relegated himself to the role of an observer when it came to heterosexual unions. As a result, in his tales love becomes a panacea of hope and a healing balm for the discouraged and the broken-hearted who are unmarried.
This is particularly evident in “The Jolly Corner.” Several years before writing what was to be his final ghost story, James returned to America following a twenty-two year absence. James recounted the experience in *The American Scene*. He discovered that his boyhood home was gone and in its place stood an apartment building. James likened the discovery to “an amputation.” Likewise, he was disheartened by the country’s immersion in commercial enterprise. James steeped his tale in symbolism. His protagonist, Spencer Brydon, also returns to America following a thirty-three year absence. But unlike James, he is heir to two properties that he is having renovated. One house, located on the Jolly Corner, is his boyhood home. Brydon is drawn to the house at night where he roams about searching for his alter ego, “the hideously maimed yet successful American robber-baron capitalist” (Hock 82). He becomes obsessed with encountering the visage of the self he might have been had he not chosen to live in Europe. He speculates that he has a “strange alter ego deep down somewhere within me, as the full-blown flower is in the small tight bud, and that I just took the course, I just transferred him to the climate, that blighted him for once and for ever” (“Jolly” 449). This image holds an irresistible fascination for him.

James draws the reader into the “ghost hunt” as he describes the house’s unique feature: “This effect was the dim reverberating tinkle as of some far-off bell hung who should say where?—in the depths of the house, of the past, of that mystical other world that might have flourished for him had he not, for weal or woe, abandoned it” (“Jolly” 455). Brydon spent his life abroad devoted to his own selfish pursuits of the senses. James reveals the contrast between the inaction of John Marcher and the pursuits of
appeal positively for pity; you convince me that for reasons clear and sublime ... we both should make a gesture of compassion: I spare you and I give up. You affect me as by the
468
He gracefully answered the question. A period of danger loomed. (Jolly. 468)
469
Tel his eyes almost leave their sockets. A period of danger loomed. (Jolly. 469)
470
the height of the Chinese fires was to the terror of contemporaries: while, softly padding, he
471
When Bryan humbly courtes the ghost of himself in a room behind a closed door,
472
successive nights to pursue his older goal: unopened possibilities a source of misery and power. (Ibida. 473)
474
Bryan continues on his way and is beginning to feel that he comes with feeling one's
475
experiences as never before, the thrill and thrill of real life that comes with feeling one's
476
the ghost of his boyhood home. Imagination the specifier. Feeling before him, he
477
then, on impulse, intrude the house. At first he is elated that it is he who is haunting
478
he senses from the beginning that the ghost are shy and not all sinister or he burns
479
As Bryan proceeds about the house at night, he becomes both the haunter and the haunted
480
of the forest. (Jolly. 476-7)
481
creates more subtle, yet at bay percepts more formidable, than any beast
482
spot that demand all the patience and the nerve of this slaughter of a
483
of no pleasure so fine as his actual tension. Had been introduced to no
484
that he was wrestling that life in a struggle to sensibilities. But he had resisted
485
he had been the check of many superstitiously-frightened persons. He knew,
486
Lying in wait for the mutilated, wasted life.
487
Bryan, in delight so James once more brings into view the image of the peddlerly beast
488
unhumbled 26
of us should have suffered. So rest for ever--and let me!" ("Jolly" 468). Brydon lingers upstairs for several hours before attempting to flee the house. He hesitates to look upon the door again: "he hung back from really seeing . . . The risk was too great and his fear too definite . . . He knew . . . that should he see the door open, it would all too abjectly be the end of him" ("Jolly" 471). He hastens down the staircase, but before he can exit the house, he confronts the spectre. The figure stands before him dressed in evening clothes with his hands covering his face. Brydon notes that two fingers are missing on one hand "as if accidentally shot away" ("Jolly" 476). When the figure removes his hands from his face and confronts him, Brydon recoils at the sight. "Horror, with the sight, had leaped into Brydon's throat, gasping there in a sound he couldn't utter: for the bared identity was too hideous as his" ("Jolly" 469). The figure advances toward him "as one of those expanding fantastic images projected by the magic lantern of childhood," and Brydon beholds his "evil, odious, blatant, vulgar" aggressor ("Jolly" 477). Having collapsed, he awakens to find Alice Staverton cushioning his head in her lap. She reveals that the figure that confronted him had also come to her in another dream during the night. She confesses to pitying him "But he's grim, he's worn--and things have happened to him" ("Jolly" 485).

Interpretations of James's tale vary regarding whether or not there were, in fact, two ghosts. Banta, for example, interprets the upstairs ghost as the person Brydon never became while the downstairs ghost represents what he is. Hocks allows for the presence of a single ghost that symbolically represents the "American robber-baron capitalist" (82) Brydon could have become had he remained in America. This popular interpretation is supported by Brydon's assertion that "He has a million a year" ("Jolly" 485) and the fact
that the apparition has been seen by another character. Alice Staverton, the young woman Brydon had left behind in America, claims to have seen his alter ego in a dream on three occasions, including the night of Brydon's encounter. For many, her corroboration of the apparition's identity affirms the single alter ego theory. However, while such an interpretation is in keeping with the surface storyline of the text, a deeper interpretation is equally possible when viewed in terms of James's subconscious, assuming that Brydon symbolizes James, himself. When viewed in this context, James is working out deeply entrenched complex issues within his story. He lays the foundation for the ultimate confrontation of both his past and the person he has become in a progression of the supernatural tales.

In The Turn of the Screw, James relives a childhood suffused with the moral constraints of his father. The conflicted nature of his relationship with his brother evidences itself in the character of Miles who must necessarily die in order to symbolically lay to rest the confused sexual anxieties associated with his youth. "The Beast in the Jungle" symbolizes James frustrations over his inability to experience love in the context dictated by his father's Puritan beliefs. Evidence for this may be detected within another of James's supernatural tales. Shortly after Constance Fenimore Woolson's death, James wrote a short story entitled "The Altar of the Dead" (1895). In it, George Stransom erects an altar in a church dedicated to the memory of friends who precede him in death with one exception, a close friend who had betrayed him. The private alcove is visited over the years by a woman whom the man eventually meets. To his horror, he discovers that she has used the altar to represent the memory of only one
individual, the very person he had sought to exclude. In a romantic alliance, she, too, had been wronged by this man, but unlike him had been able to forgive.

Ultimately, the protagonist is himself able to forgive as death closes upon him. Was James seeking Woolson’s forgiveness as most critics assume, or was he in fact feeling the need to forgive his father whose strong moral influence prevented him from experiencing the consummation of his homoerotic relationships? If the latter possibility, the next step in his subconscious journey would be the direct confrontation of his father and his latent homosexual inclinations. Evidence that the second ghostly encounter symbolically represented the psychological image of Henry, Sr., may be discerned in both James’s invention and description of the ghostly character.

The premise for the alter ego image may have been based upon an experience described by James’s father. In 1843, when James was only six months old, Henry, Sr., took his family to Europe. The elder Henry was tormented by spiritual concerns. Having abandoned his theological studies, he sought to understand his conception of God. During his visit to London, Henry, Sr., had an experience that he later referred to as a “vastation.” He later described the sensation of an invisible form “raying out from his fetid personality influences fatal to life . . . to all appearance it was a perfect insane and abject terror, without ostensible cause” (Edel 7). As for the amputated fingers, in his boyhood, Henry, Sr., had undergone an amputation of a leg, the result of injuries suffered in a fire. The millionaire reference can also be attributed to James’s father who had inherited three million dollars. James subconsciously interposes the beast image between the reconstruction of the maimed terror-stricken visage of his father and that of his own homoerotic identity. Upon confronting his alter ego, he recoils from the horrifying truth.
his own homoerotic identity. Upon confronting his alter ego, he recoils from the horrifying truth.

Horror, with the sight, had leaped into Brydon's throat, gasping there in a sound he could n't utter; for the bared identity was too hideous as his, and his glare was the passion of his protest. The face, that face . . . he searched it still, but looking away from it in dismay and denial . . . Such an identity fitted his at no point, made its alternative monstrous." ("Jolly" 477)

Having collapsed as the result of his confrontation with the ghost, now symbolically tied to his father's overbearing influence upon his life and his own natural inclinations, James rests in the arms of a mother figure, Alice Staverton. Alice must be for Brydon, a romantic figure, but James recalls from memory the image of his caring mother who nursed him through the illnesses of childhood and adolescence. In her care, he finds acceptance and redemption. He cannot be a man in his father's image, yet he shrinks from the image of the monster he believes his father would think him to be if he had known the homoerotic yearnings James harbored throughout a lifetime. The amputated fingers on the right hand may indicate his subconscious image of himself as an emasculated male without the protective persona of his identity as a writer. Thus, in this the last of his supernatural tales, James confronted the ghosts of his past and the beastly image of his nature that he subconsciously harbored.

In the remaining years of his life until his death in 1916, James sorted through his papers and destroyed some 4,000 letters and documents. He completed the collection of his works known as the New York edition. James's brother, William, died in 1910, and was preceded in death by both parents and his sister, Alice. In 1913 James wrote his
autobiographies, _A Small Boy and Others_ and _Notes of a Son and Brother_. He became a British citizen the year before his death. Speculation over his reasons for this vary among critics, some citing his support of England's war effort while more modern interpretations credit taxation issues. Regardless of his intent, his ashes were returned to the homeland of his youth and buried in a Cambridge, Massachusetts cemetery following his death on the 28th of February in 1916.

It would be a mistake to interpret everything James wrote through the lens of symbolic expression. But it is, perhaps, not unreasonable to surmise that James, upon occasion, worked through the confrontation of his personal demons in the guise of his literary characters. It is not uncommon for the human consciousness, particularly in the later years of life, to explore the past and confront recurrent issues. James's later works appear to bear out the assumption that James revisited his life via his most critically acclaimed tales of the supernatural. Recollections of relationships and pivotal decisions pressed hard upon him as he sought to validate his life in light of the life choices he made. Through his characters, James poses the crucial question: "What if?" In the last of his supernatural tales, "The Jolly Corner," he returns home to confront the haunting of his past. Within the symbolic mothering of Alice Staverton, James reveals the acceptance, and perhaps, the absolution he craves when Alice assures the object of her passion: "I could have liked him. And to me . . . he was no horror. I had accepted him" ("Jolly" 484). Thus, James, in a literary sense confronts his inner demons and explores the self-taunting accusation that his life may not have been all that it could have been. With this, his final tale, James lays the issue to rest.
Preface

“Daddy’s Favorite” represents an effort to evoke the psychological essence of James’s literary style. As we saw in the analysis of James’s supernatural tales, the central characters often confront apparitions that represent particular elements of their respective lives. Each character suffers a profound loss, more often than not representing “the road not taken,” with the result that each character is haunted by a perceived failure. In contrast to Spencer Brydon in “The Jolly Corner,” Margaret, the central character of “Daddy’s Favorite,” chooses a life devoted to a business career. Margaret benefits from the inheritance of her father’s business, but her decision to run the business personally is a bold move for a female of her day. Women of her era were expected to become wives and mothers and were often schooled in methods designed to promote their husbands’ careers. Margaret, who at first aspires to such a role, is disappointed by her fiancé, who unheroically ends their relationship when he returns home from war with a bride. Margaret never marries, and until the death of her mother, is satisfied with her life. Her mother’s death triggers a psychological crisis state for Margaret as she becomes aware of the sacrifices she has made for her career.

In keeping with James’s predilection for symbolism, symbolic elements are included within the text of this creative work. The father’s presence lingers through symbolic rituals and sibling rivalries, continuing the dysfunctional state of her familial relationship with her sister. Within the confines of her mother’s rose garden, a symbol of motherhood, Margaret clings to the image of her mother by tending the garden as lovingly as her mother tended her daughters. Ironically, although Margaret is determined to keep the garden alive, she must hire a gardener when her busy work schedule interferes
with her ability to personally tend it. Ghostly images, symbols of her unborn children, appear to her in the garden. Margaret senses a profound loss when Ralph, the lover of her youth, walks out of the garden never to return. With all hope for their existence lost, the children disappear from the garden, and Margaret is left to contemplate the emptiness of her life.

Both Isabel Archer, heroine of *The Portrait of a Lady*, and Margaret suffer from a profound loss. But unlike Isabel who marries unwisely, Margaret unwisely chooses not to marry. The results are similar, however, for both earn the privilege of seeing their ghosts. James believed that the greater mistake was to make no choice, to take no risks in life. The lesson resides in the moral that life is messy and its road is full of potholes. No matter what choices are made, the possibility exists that individuals nearing the end of their earthly lives will be haunted by the vexing, “What if?”
Daddy’s Favorite

Most of the afternoon had slipped away, but enough daylight remained for Margaret to enjoy her daily walk through her mother’s garden. She placed her briefcase on the lowest porch step before stepping onto the path that wound its way among the rows of heavy-laden rose bushes. Autumn hovered just out of reach as the sultry summer heat lingered in the east Texas tradition of a seemingly endless summer. Margaret scowled at the barren sky and shook her head. She felt quite certain that if God were a woman, something as unreasonable as this drought would not exist.

Since her mother’s death a few months earlier, she had taken it upon herself to preserve her mother’s prize roses. Her job left little time for gardening, however, so she had procured the services of a local gardener who came twice a week to weed and water the plants. Margaret studied the pink Queen Elizabeth rosebush before her and tapped a waning blossom, shattering the remnants of its fragile beauty. She stooped to retrieve the petals scattered about her feet and placed them in the pocket of her blazer. Later, she would float the petals in a bowl of water beside her bed in hopes that their delicate fragrance would lull her into sleep. Her mother had smelled of roses. Margaret became aware of the tune she was humming absentmindedly and broke into song on the last verse, “London Bridge is falling down, my fair lady!” Suddenly, she sensed a familiar presence in the garden with her. “Momma?” She quickly turned to look behind her, but her eyes failed to discern what she sensed was there. To anyone who happened to see her, she appeared to be alone in the garden with the exception of a troublesome bee that
hovered nearby. Margaret waved her hand impatiently to shoo it away. The faint sound of giggling startled her. Margaret looked about to see who was laughing at her. She glanced toward the house and discovered her sister hailing her from the porch of their grandparents’ Victorian home.

“Peggy!” Sue Ellen tapped the glass in her hand. “Daddy’s lemonade! Want some?”

The frosted glass was too much temptation for Margaret’s parched throat. “All right. I’m coming!” Margaret walked toward the sprawling porch, pausing to retrieve her briefcase before ascending the steps. Lowering herself onto a wicker rocker, she dropped the case beside her chair. Margaret watched Sue Ellen pour a glass of old-fashioned lemonade and add to it a healthy dash of their daddy’s special ingredient. Her sister then returned the decanter to its customary place on the silver tray at the center of the table. Beside it resided the frosted pitcher filled with lemonade. When he was alive, Eugene Grangerfield had spent most evenings installed on his porch, glass in hand, surveying the comings and goings in the neighborhood. Now his daughters faithfully continued the ritual in his honor. Margaret leaned back, glass in hand, and breathed in the sweet fragrance of the roses stirred by the evening breeze. She rocked in silence, unaware of her sister’s furtive glances in her direction.

Margaret sipped her lemonade and gestured to the thriving roses. “I would have shriveled up long ago in this heat.”

Sue Ellen drained her glass and attempted to thwart an unlady-like burp. “What makes you think you haven’t?”

Puzzled, Margaret scrunched up her brow.
“Shriveled up! What makes you think you aren’t a shriveled up old hag?” Sue Ellen had already sampled a glass or two of lemonade in the kitchen.

“What are you talking about?”

“Peggy, you know full well what I mean! All you do any more is either bury yourself in work or traipse around Momma’s roses. You’ve hardly spoken a word to me since we found that old photograph album in Momma’s cedar chest when we were sorting through her things.”

Margaret waved her off.

Sue Ellen pressed on, wagging an accusing finger at her sister. “Belinda says that when you come into work these days you go straight into your office and rarely surface until the end of the day. Why, it’s gotten so that you hardly even speak to anyone at church on Sunday mornings!”

“I speak to people when they have the good sense to say something worth while! And Belinda needs to remember which one of the Grangerfield sisters is her boss!”

Sue Ellen threw up her hands. “I could never have a serious conversation with you. Why Daddy liked you best is a mystery to me!” Her words hung in the air, a timeworn barrier between them. Sue Ellen gripped the arms of her rocker and leaned forward. “Momma’s album stirred up an old ghost, and his name is Ralph Jamison. Honestly, Peggy! You should have realized years ago that Ralph was never worth all this heartache!” She leaned back, satisfied her barb had hit its mark.

Margaret glared at her sister and silently finished off her lemonade before responding, “I was Daddy’s favorite? You know good and well that that honor was reserved for the baby of the family, *Little* Sister!”
“Me? What a laugh!”

“You could do no wrong in Daddy’s eyes, Sue Ellen, even when you eloped with that Mr. No Good who up and left you when married life didn’t agree with him!”

Sue Ellen sloshed more lemonade into her glass and reached for the crystal decanter. “It is just like you to bring up that old news!”

“You started this! It’s my right to finish it!”

Sue Ellen stared into her drink. “Well, maybe I was Daddy’s favorite. At least I showed some spunk! You don’t see me pining away over a lost cause.” She lifted her glass in a toast to herself.

Margaret held her glass, empty now except for a few remaining ice cubes, against her forehead. “This heat has given me a headache.”

Sue Ellen peered over her beverage. Her tone, tinged with guilt, softened.

“Anything I can do, Peggy?”

“It’ll pass.” Margaret relaxed and closed her eyes against the throbbing pain as Sue Ellen absent-mindedly began humming a lullaby their mother had sung to them long ago. After awhile, Sue Ellen stopped humming and eyed her sister. “Peggy, dear.”

Margaret opened one eye and waited for trouble.

“Earlier, when you mentioned Ralph Jamison . . .”

“You mentioned him, not me!”

Sue Ellen ignored the interruption. “It’s such a coincidence that we should be talking about him.”

“Sue Ellen, just spit it out! What are you up to?”

“Me? Why nothing! It’s just that he called the other day and . . .”
Margaret stiffened. "Ralph Jamison called here? Why?"

"To ask about you, of course!"

"So, the prodigal lives." She pushed her empty glass toward Sue Ellen. "I need a refill."

Sue Ellen prepared another round of lemonade. "He's coming home next week to look after his mother's estate, and he wants to see you."

Margaret stopped rocking. "And naturally you told him that he is the last person in this world I would ever want to see!"

"I told him we would be delighted to have him over for Sunday dinner!"

Margaret thought about calling Dr. Fowler in the morning. Obviously, Sue Ellen had lost her mind. "Sue Ellen, why in the name of all that's holy would you think for one moment that I would ever allow that man to set foot in my house!"

"Our house!" Sue Ellen corrected. "Peggy, it's time you laid this thing to rest!"

"Leave it alone, Sue Ellen!"

Sue Ellen tried a different tactic. "Now Margaret, Momma always said. 'Let bygones be bygones!'"

"Momma is no longer with us, and calling me Margaret won't get you back into my good graces! You had better ring up Mr. Jamison and tell him he is not welcome here!"

"I'll do no such thing!" Sue Ellen drained her glass and blinked at Margaret's blurring image. "Besides, I don't know his number."

Margaret noted the glazing over of Sue Ellen's eyes and realized further discussion was useless. She closed her own eyes once more and calmed her nerves with
the gentle rocking of her chair. The sun was fading and the mosquitoes would be out in force soon, a fitting tribute, she mused, for the human pestilence Ralph Jamison had turned out to be. The rocking prompted youthful memories of romantic summer evenings spent on the porch swing with Ralph. On these occasions, her mother always retired early to her bedroom for the evening, but her father continued to sit in the living room keeping a watchful eye on his eldest daughter. Ralph never talked much. He mostly listened as Margaret shared her plans for the two of them. She remembered that he smelled of Old Spice and that he had a nervous habit of rubbing his hands on the knees of his jeans because his palms were always damp. Whenever Margaret sat close to him, he would swallow hard and glance at the living room window. His reaction gave her a sense of power that she used to her advantage.

She had leaned against him and whispered, "Ralph, I know Daddy would love to give you a job. He as much as said so this morning. I'm sure if you just talked to him..."

Ralph shifted nervously. "Well, I don't know. I got a letter from Caltech today, and I can enter this fall."

"But Ralph, we would hardly ever see each other."

"It wouldn't be all that long. Just four years."

"Four years! It might as well be forever!"

Margaret opened her eyes and realized that she was holding her breath. When she tried to breathe, her whole body shook with the effort. An irresistible impulse compelled her to enter the house. She picked up her briefcase and walked to the far end of the living room where she pushed open the paneled French doors that opened into a small office. Setting the briefcase on the desktop, she opened a drawer in the desk and removed an old
photograph album. The yellowed pages were filled with childhood memories, but she paused only to study a photograph of herself sitting on the swing with Ralph. She continued looking until she found the folded newspaper article hidden between two unused pages. She read the headline, "Local Hero Returns from Viet Nam." Margaret winced at the photograph of the handsome young Marine and the beautiful Vietnamese woman standing beside him. The caption below the photograph read, "Cpl. Jamison with his War Bride." She had only glimpsed the newlyweds together once before they left for California.

Margaret closed the album and replaced it inside the drawer. She returned to the porch and settled back into her rocker, her thoughts still on Ralph. It made no sense that he should return after all this time. At least thirty years had passed since she had last seen him. Aloud she mused, "What could he possibly want?" Her only reply came from the buzzing of the mosquitoes along with the snores of her sister slumped in the rocker beside her. Margaret wrestled with an onslaught of emotions and memories as she nursed her lemonade. When her father died unexpectedly, she had talked her mother out of selling his company. For years, Margaret had worked patiently at her father's side learning the business. Now at last, the company was hers. She thrived on the challenge of running her own business and had evolved into a savvy businesswoman. She proved equally skillful over the years at avoiding marriage, a fate that would have stripped her of her coveted independence. It had only recently occurred to her that her desire to remain unmarried had also denied her the possibility of motherhood. What surprised her most was the realization that she, in any way, cared about such a prospect.
A sudden breeze stirred the wind chimes hanging at the far end of the porch. The melodious notes invaded the quiet like the laughter of children. In the deepening twilight, Margaret noted the playful pattern of the shadows in the garden. For a moment, she thought she could make out the outline of a girl and a smaller child standing motionless among the roses. They seemed to be studying her. She felt an impulse to lift her arm to wave at them when she realized the fading light must be playing tricks on her eyes. A joyless smile caressed her lips as she hummed the haunting childhood refrain, "my fair lady."

Sunday arrived with the two Grangerfield sisters having both survived the ordeal of preparing their home for Ralph’s visit. Savory smells wafted from the kitchen into the dining room where the table had been set with Momma’s best china and silverware. The lace and linens were also pressed into duty as was their grandmother’s crystal vase filled with some of Momma’s finest roses. Margaret surveyed the room while pressing her hands together with only the fingertips touching spread apart in spider-like fashion.

A knock sounded at the front door. Margaret heard Sue Ellen open the door and gush her finest Southern greeting to their visitor. She waited for her summons which was not long in coming. Margaret smoothed the skirt of her dress and glanced into the mirror hanging on the wall over the sideboard. The years showed on her face, but she attempted to mask the damage with a forced smile. She swept victoriously into the hallway, but stopped short when their visitor turned to greet her.

"Margaret?"

For a moment she thought Ralph’s grandfather had come in his place, but then she remembered the man had died three or four decades ago. A sickening realization flushed
her face as she beheld Ralph Jamison, himself. She had not set eyes upon him for all these years, and so he had remained in her memory the handsome young man of her youth. He stood before her now a shadow of that memory with a worn countenance and a balding pate. Surely this could not be him, she thought. Margaret coughed slightly to cover the gasp that escaped from somewhere within her.

"Just look at the two of you. Together again after all this time!" Sue Ellen took Ralph’s Stetson from his hand. "Ralph, you are just as handsome as ever. Don’t you think so, Peggy?" She laid Ralph’s hat on the hallway table.

Margaret opened her mouth to speak, but Sue Ellen was already herding the two of them into the living room. Ralph eased into the over-stuffed sofa and commented on how little the room had changed while Margaret sat erect on a mahogany side chair and beheld the man of her nightmares. Sue Ellen suggested they might have a glass of Daddy’s lemonade before dinner while they chatted about old times. Margaret resisted Sue Ellen’s attempts to draw her into the conversation and inhaled the contents of her glass before asking for another.

Ignoring her request, Sue Ellen maneuvered the party into the dining room.

"Ralph, you must tell us all about yourself. And how is that lovely family of yours?"

Ralph was all too happy to recount the passage of the years that had separated them with detailed accounts of his family that stretched throughout dinner. Over the years, Margaret had grown to despise the dashing young lover of her past, but this old man was not worth the effort of such exhausting emotion. Margaret thought of all the sleepless nights and empty years she had endured. He sat there completely unaware of the
battle raging within her as he ratted on and on about his wonderful life with *that woman* and their prolific brood. God! Would he ever shut up? Mercifully, he finished a detailed accounting of his grandchildren with his last bite of roast beef. Margaret was grateful that he had run out of both food and grandchildren. When Sue Ellen offered dessert, Margaret tried to kick her under the table. Unscathed, Sue Ellen retreated into the kitchen to retrieve the strawberry truffle. Silence filled the room. Margaret tried not to look directly at him, but she could feel Ralph’s eyes probing her. Finally, he spoke.

“Uh. Mother wrote to me when you took over your father’s business--after he passed on. Quite an undertaking!”

“Someone had to step in. Daddy always said I had a head for business. I managed to keep the wolves away from the door.”

Ralph laughed. “From what I hear, you did a good deal better than that!”

Margaret allowed a hint of pride in her voice. “I held my own in this man’s world. And what about your business, Ralph?”

“Oh, I did all right. After I finished up at Caltech, I went to work for a firm based in San Diego for a while. We eventually settled in Dallas where I started my business as an oil drilling consultant. I retired a few years back. Sold the business for a tidy profit. We’re doing nicely.”

The same piercing hazel eyes that haunted Margaret’s dreams now awakened within her a renewed desire. But her stomach lurched at the realization that Ralph Jamison had no intention of whisking her away to a new life. Her disappointment sickened her. Margaret could stand it no longer. The words inside her now spilled out
into the open. "Why did you come here, Ralph? Whatever possessed you to come back after all these years?"

Ralph hesitated. "I never felt quite right about how things ended between us."

"Things ended with the last letter you wrote to me before you came home from Viet Nam. Things ended when you decided you wanted something else. Or should I say someone else?"

"Margaret, I... I tried to see you when I got back home. Your father said he would blow me to kingdom come if I ever set foot on his property again." Ralph grinned sheepishly. "You know your father. I figured he meant it."

Margaret refused to be side-tracked. "You were a coward, Ralph!"

Ralph waited a moment before he lifted his vanquished head and looked into her eyes. "I'm sorry, Margaret."

"That's all you can say to me? 'Oops, sorry! I made a mistake.'" Margaret slapped the table with one hand and clutched at her heart with the other. "You asked me to marry you. You said you wanted to learn Daddy's business. You should have been the one to take over after Daddy died, not me. We had plans, Ralph. Big plans for a wonderful future!"

Ralph was spared the agony of a reply when Sue Ellen returned with dessert. During the remainder of the meal, Ralph nodded politely when spoken to, but otherwise had little to say. Margaret didn't know whom she hated more--him or herself for having wasted so much energy on so much misery. She sat passively staring beyond him and felt
a lump growing in her throat. She wanted to cry for the helpless young woman she had
kidnapped and held hostage to the pain of abandonment.

Margaret became aware of someone calling her name. Ralph and Sue Ellen stood
in the doorway of the dining room staring at her. “Peggy, dear, don’t you want to say
goodbye to Ralph?”

Margaret rose and moved toward them. So this was it. After all the years of
imagining and wanting and dreading, it would come down to an afternoon of boring
conversation, roast beef, and strawberry trifle. They moved into the hallway where Sue
Ellen handed Ralph his Stetson before saying her goodbyes and tactfully withdrawing.
Margaret opened the front door and stood back for Ralph Jamison to exit her home and
her life--this time, she prayed, forever. He walked out onto the porch before turning to
look at her. She waited stoically for the necessary pleasantries that must signal the end to
her torture.

“Margaret, could we talk for a moment?” He gestured to the swing at the end of
the porch. “We could sit there like old times.”

“I don’t believe that would be a good idea, Ralph.”

He hung his head and shifted his weight from one foot to the other. “I guess not. I
just thought...”

Margaret relented. “Perhaps we could take a walk in the garden. I find it very
relaxing at this time of the day.”

Ralph held the door for her and then followed her down the steps. They stood
together in the garden surrounded by the mingling scents of the roses. For Margaret, the
roses’ fragrances always seemed their most exotic at the end of day. Margaret sensed Ralph’s presence near her just like their courting days, standing as near to her as he could without their actually touching lest her father see them and make his appearance on the porch. That would have spoiled the moment for them, so Ralph had always been careful. He stood beside Margaret now as he had then, an old habit resurrected. She breathed in the sweetened air now made more pungent by the scent of Ralph’s Old Spice. Margaret reluctantly pulled away from her immersion in the past to ask the question that had haunted her through sleepless nights and restless days. The answer to which she had never been brave enough to search for within herself.

"Why did you do it, Ralph? Why did you desert me after we had planned such a lovely life together?"

"Margaret," said Ralph quietly, "those weren’t our plans."

"What are you saying?"

Ralph looked down at his feet. "Those were your plans, Margaret."

"How can you stand there and say that to me? How can you have the gall to say such a thing?"

"Margaret, please." His eyes pleaded with hers. "I was too young to really know what I wanted. I needed time to grow up and figure out who I was."

"If that was the case, why didn’t you say something?"

"I tried." His voice was barely audible. "I just wasn’t much good at talking about such things, I guess. And after reading your last letter, I knew it wasn’t me you really wanted. You wanted to run your daddy’s company. There wouldn’t have been any
question about your taking over the business one day if you had been his son. But you and I both know that your daddy wasn’t about to trust his life’s work to a woman, even though you were his favorite daughter. That’s the only reason you needed me or any other man in your life for that matter. Let’s face it, Margaret. I was just the means to an end.”

Margaret gasped.

“Margaret . . .”

“I don’t know you.” She searched his eyes and discovered an uncomfortable truth. “I don’t think I ever really knew you.”

“Maybe that was the problem, Margaret. I don’t think you understood me very well.”

“Oh, and does your wife--what’s her name--understand you? Does she understand that you married her because you were too much of a coward to face me with the truth?” She felt a twinge of embarrassment at having given voice to her jealousy.

“Ai’ Hung understands me enough to know why I needed to come here and see you.” For the first time, Ralph sounded more like the self-assured man he had become and less like the uncertain boy Margaret had known.

Margaret’s voice faltered. “I wish I did. I wish I understood why you felt it necessary to come back into my life and dredge up old hurts.” She looked past him to her roses.

Ralph sighed. “I didn’t come here to upset you, Margaret. I just wanted to lay it to rest.” He placed the Stetson on his head.
Without understanding why, she wanted to prolong his leaving. "Lay what to rest?"

"The guilt I guess. I'm at an age when I feel the need to right old wrongs." Ralph touched the brim of his hat and nodded. "I'll be on my way." Almost as an afterthought he added softly, "Take care, Margaret."

She watched him walk down the garden path and through the gate beneath the arbor laden with crimson roses. The sun was sinking behind the tree line in the distance. Sue Ellen, who had been hovering inside the house, appeared behind her. "Are you all right, Peggy?"

Margaret walked out of the garden and onto the front porch. "Bring Daddy's lemonade, Sue Ellen."

Sue Ellen sighed. "Good idea. I think we could both use a drink!"

Margaret remained motionless while staring after the dim outline of Ralph's car as it disappeared down the road. A slight shudder alerted her to a familiar haunting presence, but this time her eyes did not fail her. She could vaguely make out the shapes and features of a young girl standing on the sidewalk. She was grasping the hand of the little boy that stood beside her. They both looked at Margaret and then turned away. Margaret sensed that she might never see them again. Anger consumed her. She couldn't allow him to take them from her.

"Don't go!" She hastened down the steps toward them. "Please, you can't go! You belong to me--not him! You were meant for me!"
The girl turned. For the briefest of moments, Margaret and the children stood transfixed in the inexplicable convergence of two worlds.

“Please stay,” Margaret reached her arms toward them. “Please!” In an instant, both the girl and the boy vanished. The cold finality of their parting gripped her heart, and Margaret, discovering a white rosebud in the palm of her outstretched hand, clutched it to her breast.
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