

Penguin



Readers

HENRY JAMES



WASHINGTON
SQUARE

Contents

People in the story	4
New words	5
Note about the story	6
Before-reading questions	6
Chapter One – The Slopers	7
Chapter Two – Catherine meets Morris	11
Chapter Three – Dr. Sloper meets Morris	17
Chapter Four – The engagement	21
Chapter Five – Morris Townsend's sister	28
Chapter Six – A serious talk	35
Chapter Seven – Aunt Lavinia interferes again	40
Chapter Eight – A vacation in Europe	46
Chapter Nine – Back in New York	52
Chapter Ten – Leaving New York	56
Chapter Eleven – Many years later	62
Chapter Twelve – They meet again	66
During-reading questions	70
After-reading questions	72
Exercises	72
Project work	77
Glossary	78

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Note about the story

Henry James was born in New York, in the United States of America, in 1843. His family were rich. They spent a lot of time in Europe and, in 1876, James moved to the United Kingdom. In 1915, a year before his death, he became British.

The story *Washington Square* happens in New York in the 1840s. The story asks, “Who can you **trust*** and who should you **respect**?” Daughters at the time felt a **duty** to respect their fathers but their fathers did not always treat them well. And **mercenary** young men sometimes wanted to marry rich young women only for their money.

Washington Square is also about love. It was not always easy at the time for a woman to marry for love, and it was more difficult if the man who she loved was not rich. In the United States, to be an important, well-**respected** person, you had to have lots of money.

Before-reading questions

- 1 The title of the book is *Washington Square*. Look online. What is Washington Square and where is it? What kind of people live there?
- 2 Look at the front and back covers and guess three things that will happen in the story.
- 3 In the 1840s in the United States, how could a man become rich if he was not born rich?
- 4 How were women’s lives in the 1840s different from women’s lives now?

*Definitions of words in **bold** can be found in the glossary on pages 78–80.

CHAPTER ONE The Slopers

In the 1840s, in New York, there lived a man called Austin Sloper. He was clever, funny, and **honest**, and everyone thought well of him. At the age of 27, Austin Sloper fell in love with Miss Catherine Harrington. She was beautiful and clever, and she was **also** rich. Many men wanted to marry her, but she chose Austin Sloper. They soon married and were very happy.

Dr. Sloper was rich now, too, thanks to his wife’s \$10,000 a year, but that did not stop him from working very hard in his job. He became a **respected** doctor.

Their first child, a little boy, sadly died at the age of three. His mother’s love and his father’s medicines could not save him. Two years later, they had a baby girl. She was a **disappointment** to her father because she was not a boy. A week after her daughter’s birth, the young mother suddenly became ill and, another week later, Dr. Sloper became a **widower**. Dr. Sloper’s job was to make people better but he could not make his wife or son better. Nobody **blamed** him but he blamed himself all his life.

He still had his little girl. She had her mother’s name, Catherine, and she was never ill. “I don’t have to worry about losing her. She’s so strong,” Dr. Sloper thought.

Dr. Sloper had two sisters and both of them married early in life. His younger sister, Elizabeth, was his favorite. Her husband was a rich **merchant** and they had a big family.

Aunt Elizabeth was an intelligent, **sensible** woman.

Dr. Sloper did not **respect** his other sister, Lavinia, who was not intelligent or sensible. Her husband was poor. When he died, she became a **widow** with no money and no children. Dr. Sloper invited Aunt Lavinia to live with him and his ten-year-old daughter while she looked for a new home. But after she arrived, she never looked for another place to live. Dr. Sloper did not **mind** this. He thought that it was good for Catherine to have another woman in the house.

One day, when Catherine was about 12, he said to his sister, "You must make Catherine a clever woman, Lavinia. I want her to be clever."

Aunt Lavinia thought for a moment, then she said, "My dear Austin, do you think that it is better to be clever than good?"

Dr. Sloper replied, "If you want people to respect you, you must be clever." He continued, "Of course I want Catherine to be good, but I already know that she will never be bad. She has always been a good and honest person."

Aunt Lavinia was tall and thin, and she had a pleasant **personality**. But she was **silly** and **sentimental**. She also loved secrets. Sadly for her, she never had any secrets because her life was not interesting. She did not have a **lover** but she wanted one. She wanted to write him secret love letters.

Her brother, Dr. Sloper, understood her mind very well.

He said to himself, "When Catherine is about 17, Lavinia will **persuade** her that a young man is in love with her. It will not be true. No young man will ever be in love with Catherine. But Lavinia will talk to her about it and maybe she will talk to me about it. Catherine won't believe it. Luckily for her, she isn't sentimental."

Catherine was not intelligent or beautiful like her mother. Her father was rich but no men were interested in her. She was a good person with a **gentle** personality, who always did what her father told her and always told the **truth**. She did not like to be the center of attention. She was not tall. She had good skin and straight brown hair.

She loved and respected her father very much but she was also very frightened of him. She thought that he was the cleverest, handsomest, and most respected man in the world. She always wanted to make him happy but she never **succeeded**. He was very kind to her but she was a disappointment to him. He never told her that, but it was true.

"Lavinia is not succeeding," Dr. Sloper said to himself. "She is not making Catherine clever. She is normal but she is nothing special."

Catherine was **shy** and did not speak very much but she showed her personality through her clothes. She spent a lot of money on them. Her father did not mind about the money because, by this time, he was making \$20,000 a year. But he thought that some of Catherine's clothes were too bright and that she sometimes looked silly in them.



When Catherine was 17, Dr. Sloper and his family moved to Washington Square, to a beautiful modern white house. It was close to Fifth Avenue and it was a wonderful, quiet area. Aunt Elizabeth also lived in New York but quite far from Washington Square. There were chickens and pigs in the street outside of her house. She had nine children, Catherine's cousins, who were all adults now. Two of her cousins were girls. One was already married and the other was now **engaged**.

At the age of 20, Catherine was invited to a party at her Aunt Elizabeth's house and she bought a big bright-red dress for the event. She looked like an old woman in it, but she did not know this.

CHAPTER TWO Catherine meets Morris

Before Catherine and Aunt Lavinia went to the party, Dr. Sloper said to them, "Have a good time. I'll join you later when I've finished my work."

Very soon after they arrived at Aunt Elizabeth's house, Marian, Catherine's cousin, came to talk to her. She brought with her a tall young man. "Catherine, let me introduce you to Morris Townsend. He really wants to meet you. He's my **fiancé's** cousin!" Marian continued to talk about Morris Townsend but Catherine found it difficult to listen because she was thinking, "Marian is so **relaxed** and good with words. And Mr. Townsend is so handsome!"

Then Marian left Catherine and Mr. Townsend alone suddenly and Catherine did not know what to say to him. Luckily, he began to talk **immediately**, with an easy smile. "What a wonderful party! What a beautiful house! What an interesting family! And your cousin Marian is very pretty!"

He looked straight into Catherine's eyes as he talked. She did not answer him. She only listened and looked at him. He continued talking in the same relaxed way. Then, when the music started again, he asked her to dance. She stayed silent but he just put his arm round her and took her to dance. After a few minutes, she could feel that her face was red. He noticed and said, "Let's stop dancing. Let's just sit and talk for a while."