

The Awkward Age



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The Awkward Age(1899), written at a time when female emancipation and the double standard were subjects of fierce debate, is the most remarkable example of James's dramatic method. The novel traces the experiences of 18-year-old Nanda Brookenham, exposed to corruption in the salon of her youthful, 'modern' mother, who, in maintaining a circle where talk is shockingly sophisticated, 'must sacrifice either her daughter or...her intellectual habits'. Does Nanda reach maturity and self-knowledge in the lively company of handsome, genial Vanderbank, whom she loves, and of ugly, intelligent, parvenu Mitchy, who loves her? Or is she a symbol of sterile idealism, as she clings to old Mr Longdon, with his memories of Nanda's grandmother, and of an aristocracy once untouched by money-troubles and dubious French novels? A sense of suppressed violence lurks behind this powerful story of virginal innocence and its importance in the marriage market.

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