

I. Madame Merle slowly seated herself, with her arms folded and her white hands arranged as a support to one of them and an ornament, as it were, to the other. She looked exquisitely calm, but impressively sad.<sup>1</sup>

II.

“Pride, Thaddeus. However misguided the concept of pride may be...a sign of vanity, a flash of ego, a cure of insecurities...it is a wonderful motivation- at least for those for whom earning food and rent doesn't provide the necessary motivation.” Father stopped to take a sip of his sparkling water, motioning with his index finger pointed toward the molded beaux-arts ceiling twenty feet above, indicating I was not to use his sip as a wedge to interrupt what I've heard before. “Pride for yourself...and for me.”<sup>2</sup>

### III. Problems with Action

Jeri had paused in curling her eyelashes in front of the mirror to glance at the other two. She resumed curling her eyelashes.

“That is just what Faith always does,” said Pat furiously, stamping her foot and flouncing away from Faith over to the other mirror and pulling out her make up case and opening it.

Faith continued to stand sadly, squinting a little in the bright dressing room lights.

“I guess you're still mad,” said Jeri philosophically.

Are you confused about how many people are in the scene? Where they are? Who is Jeri addressing? Below is a possible revision:

The three of them were staring at one another in the dressing room mirrors. Jeri had stopped curling her eyelashes to listen.

Furious, Pat stamped her foot and snapped open her make-up case. “That is just what Faith always does!” she snapped.

Faith was still standing in the doorway, squinting a little in the bright dressing room lights.

Jeri met her eyes. “I guess Pat is still mad,” she said philosophically.

Below is a version that might be better: tighter, fewer tags.

The three of them were staring at one another in the dressing room mirrors. Jeri had stopped curling her eyelashes to listen.

Pat stamped her foot and flounced over to the table. “That is just what Faith always does!”

Faith was still standing in the doorway, squinting a little in the bright dressing room lights.

Jeri met her eyes. “I guess Pat's still mad.”

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<sup>1</sup>Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* in *Henry James: Novels 1881-1886* (New York: Library of America, 1985), p. 726.

<sup>2</sup>Geoffrey Clay, novel-in-process *Brahmins & Untouchables*. Get in touch with Geoffrey Clay at [geoffclay@yahoo.com](mailto:geoffclay@yahoo.com).