HUGH WALPOLE

THE DUCHESS OF WREXE, HER DECLINE AND DEATH

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The Duchess of Wrexe, Her Decline and Death; A Romantic Commentary:

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"And we'll have fires out of the Grand Duke's Wood."
Letter to Maria Gisborne

BOOK I
THE DUCHESS

CHAPTER I
FELIX BRUN, DR. CHRISTOPHER, RACHEL BEAMINSTER—THEY ARE SURVEYED BY THE PORTRAIT

I

Felix Brun, perched like a little bird, on the steps of the Rede Art Gallery, gazed up and down Bond Street, with his sharp eyes for someone to whom he might show Yale Ross's portrait of the Duchess of Wrexe. The afternoon was warm, the date May of the year 1898, and the occasion was the Young Portrait Painters' first show with Ross's "Duchess" as its principal attraction.

Brun was thrilled with excitement, with emotion, and he must have his audience. There must be somebody to whom he might talk, to whom he might explain exactly why this occasion was of so stirring an importance.

His eyes lighted with satisfaction. Coming towards him was

a tall, gaunt man with a bronzed face, loose ill-fitting clothes, a stride that had little of the town about it. This was Arkwright, the explorer, a man who had been lost in African jungles during the last five years, the very creature for Brun's purposes.

Here was someone who, knowing nothing about Art, would listen all the more readily to Brun's pronouncement upon it, a homely simple soul, fitted for the killing of lions and tigers, but pliable as wax in the hands of a master of civilization like Brun. At the same time Arkwright was no fool; a psychologist in his way, he had written two books about the East that had aroused considerable interest.

No fool, Arkwright.... He would be able to appreciate Brun's subtleties and perhaps add some of his own.

He had, however, been away from England for so long a time that anything that Brun had to tell him about the London world would be pleasantly fresh and stimulating.

Brun, round and neat, and a citizen of the world from the crown of his head to the top of his shining toes, tapped Arkwright on his shoulder:

"Hallo! Brun. How are you? It *is* good to see you! Haven't seen a soul I know for the last ever so long."

"Good—good. Excellent. Come along in here."

"In there? Pictures? What's the use of me looking at pictures?"

"We can talk in here. I'll tell you all the news. Besides, there's something that even you will appreciate."

"Well?" Arkwright laughed good-humouredly and moved

towards the door. "What is it?"

"The Duchess," Brun answered him. "Yale Ross's portrait of the Duchess of Wrexe. At last," he triumphantly cried, "at last we've got her!"

II

The Duchess had a small corner wall for her own individual possession. The thin glowing May sunlight fell about her and the dull gold of her frame received it and gave it back with a rich solemnity as though it had said, "You have been gay and unrestrained enough with all those crowds, but here, let me tell you, is something that requires a very different attitude."

The Duchess received the colour and the sunlight, but made no response. She sat, leaning forward a little, bending with one of her dry wrinkled hands over a black ebony cane, a high carved chair supporting and surrounding her. She seemed, herself, to be carved there, stone, marble, anything lifeless save for her eyes, the tense clutch of her fingers about the cane, and the dull but brooding gleam that a large jade pendant, the only colour against the black of her dress, flung at the observer. Her mouth was a thin hard line, her nose small but sharp, her colour so white that it seemed to cut into the paper, and the skin drawn so tightly over her bones that a breath, a sigh, might snap it.

Her little body was, one might suppose, shrivelled with age, with the business and pleasure of the world, with the pursuit

of some great ambition or prize, with the battle, unceasing and unyielding, over some weakness or softness.

Indomitable, remorseless, unhumorous, proud, the pose of the body was absolutely, one felt, the justest possible.

On either side of the chair were two white and green Chinese dragons, grotesque with open mouths and large flat feet; a hanging tapestry of dull gold filled in the background.

Out upon these dull colours the little body, with the white face, the shining eyes, the clenched hand, was flung, poised, sustained by its very force and will.

Nothing in the world could be so fierce as that determined absence of ferocity, nothing so energetic as that negation of all energy, nothing so proud as that contemptuous rejection of all that had to do with pride.

It was as though she had said: "They shall see nothing of me, these people. I will give them nothing" … and then the green jade on her bosom had betrayed her.

Maliciously the dragons grinned behind her back.

III

Arkwright, as he watched, was conscious suddenly of an overwhelming curiosity. He had in earlier days seen her portrait, and always it had been interesting, suggestive, provocative; but now, as he stood there, he was aware that something quite definite, something uncomfortably disconcerting had occurred;

life absurdly seemed to warn him that he must prepare for some new development.

The Duchess had, he was aware, taken notice of him for the first time.

Little Felix Brun watched Arkwright with interest. They were, at that moment, the only persons in the room, and it was as though they had begged for a private interview and had been granted it. The other portraits of the exhibition had vanished into the mild May afternoon.

"She doesn't like us," Brun said, laughing. "She'd turn the dragons on to us if she could."

"It's wonderful." Arkwright moved back a little. "Young Ross has done it this time. No other portrait has ever given one the least idea of her. She *must* be that."

Brun stood regarding her. "There'll never be anything like her again. As far as your England is concerned she's the very, very last, and when she goes a heap of things will go with her. There'll be other Principalities and Powers, but never *that* Power."

"She's asked us to come," said Arkwright, "or, at any rate, asked *me*. I wonder what she wants."

"She's only asked you," said Brun, "to tell you how she hates you. And doesn't she, my word!"

There were voices behind him; Brun turned, and Arkwright heard him exclaim beneath his breath. Then in a moment the little man was received with: "Why, Mr. Brun! How fortunate! We've come to see my mother's portrait."

Arkwright caught these words, and knew that the lady standing there must be Lady Adela Beaminster, the Duchess's only daughter. He had never seen Lady Adela before, but it amused him now that she should resemble so exactly the figure that he had imagined—it showed, after all, that one could take the world's verdict about these things.

The world's verdict about Lady Adela was that she was dull, but important, bearing her tall dried body as a kind of flag for the right people to range themselves behind her—and range themselves they did. Standing now, with Felix Brun in front of her demanding a display of graciousness, she extended her patronage. Thin, with her sharp nose and tight mouth, she was like an exclamation mark that had left off exclaiming, and it was only her ability to be gracious, and the sense that she conveyed of having any number of rights and possessions to stand for, that gave her claim to attention.

Her black hat was harsh, her hair iron-grey, her eyes cold with lack of intelligence. Arkwright thought her unpleasant.

Standing a little behind her was a tall thin girl who was obviously determined to be as ungracious as a protest against her companion's amiability should require. The girl's thinness was accentuated by her rather tightly clinging white dress, and beneath her long black gloves her hands moved a little awkwardly, as though she were not quite sure what she should do with them. A large black hat overshadowed her face, but Arkwright could see that her eyes, large and dark, were more

beautiful than anything else about her. Her nose was too thin, her mouth too large, her face too white and pinched.

Her body as she stood there was graceful, but not yet disciplined, so that she made movements and then checked them, giving the impression that she wished to do a number of things, but was uncertain of the correctness of any of them.

She was of foreign blood Arkwright decided—much too black and white for England. But it was her expression that demanded his attention. As she watched Felix Brun talking to Lady Adela, she seemed to be longing to express the contempt that she felt for both of them, and yet to have behind that desire a pathetic hesitation as to whether she had a right to be contemptuous of anyone.

It was the pathos, Arkwright decided, that one ultimately felt concerning her. She looked lonely, she looked frightened, and she looked "in the devil of a temper." Her black eyes would be beautiful, whether they were filled with tears or with anger, and it seemed that they must very often be filled with both. "I wouldn't like to have the handling of her," thought Arkwright, and then instantly after, "I'd like to take away some of that loneliness."

"She'll have a fine old time," he thought, "if she isn't too sensitive."

Lady Adela had now moved forward with Brun to look at the picture, but the girl did not move with them. She did not look at the portrait nor did she appear to take any interest in the other pictures. She stood there, making, every now and again, little

nervous movements with her black gloves.

Arkwright moved about the gallery by himself a little, and he was conscious that the girl's large black eyes followed him. He fancied, as, for an instant he glanced back, that the Duchess from her high wall leaned forward on her cane just a little further, so that she might force the girl to give her attention. "That girl's got plenty of spirit," thought Arkwright, "I'd like to see a battle between her and the old lady. It would be tooth and nail."

Then once again the door opened—there was again an addition to the company. Arkwright was, at that moment, facing the girl, and as he heard the sharp closing of the door he saw in her eyes the welcome that the new-comer had received.

She was transformed. The pallor of her face was now flooded with colour, and she seemed almost beautiful as the hostility left her, and her mouth curved in a smile of so immense a relief that it emphasized indeed her earlier burden. Her whole body expressed the intensity of her pleasure; her awkwardness had departed; she was suddenly in possession of herself. Arkwright's gaze went past her to the door. The man who stood there was greeting the girl with a smile that had in it both surprise and intimacy, as though they were the two oldest friends in the world, and yet he was astonished to see her there. The man was large, roughly built, with big limbs and a face that, without being good-looking, beamed kindness and good-nature. His eyes and mouth were sensitive and less ragged than the rest of him, his nose the plainest thing about him, was square and too large for his mouth.

His hair was white, although he looked between forty and fifty years of age. His dress was correct, but he obviously did not give his clothes more consideration than the feelings of his friends required of him. Ruddy of face, with his white hair and large limbs and smiling good-humour, he was pleasant to look upon, and Arkwright did not wonder at the girl's welcome; he would be, precisely, the kind of friend that she would need—benevolent, understanding, strong.

They greeted one another, and then they moved forward and spoke to Lady Adela and Brun.

Arkwright watched them. There they all were, gathered together under the sharp eyes of the Duchess, and she seemed, so Arkwright fancied, to hold them with her gaze. Little Brun was neater than ever, and Lady Adela drier than ever by the side of the stranger. They talked; they were discussing the picture—their eyes travelled up to it, and for an instant there was silence as though they were all charging it with their challenge or surrender, as the case might be. The girl's eyes moved up to it with a sudden sharpened, thinning of the face that brought back the gleam of hostility that it had worn before. Then her eyes fell, and, with a smile, they sought her friend.

Arkwright did not know any reason for his interest, but he watched them breathlessly, and the sense that he had had, on first entering the room, of being on the verge of some new experience, deepened with him.

Brun was apparently suddenly conscious that he had left his

friend alone long enough, for he detached himself from the group, shook hands with Lady Adela and the girl, bowed stiffly to the man and joined Arkwright.

"Seen enough?" he said.

"Yes," said Arkwright.

They went out together.

IV

Felix Brun and Arkwright were not intimate friends. No one was intimate with Brun, and the little man came and disappeared, was there and was not there, was absent for a year, and then back again as though he had been away a week, was, indeed, simply a succession of explanatory footnotes to the social history of Europe.

It was for the social history of Europe that he lived, for the eager penetrating gaze into this capital and that, something suddenly noted, some case examined and dismissed. Life is discovered most accurately by those who learn to watch for its accidents rather than its intentions, and it was always the things that occurred by change that gave Brun his discoveries. He was a cosmopolitan of a multitude of acquaintances, no friends, no occupation, an enthusiasm only for cynical and pessimistic observation, invaluable as a commentator, useless as a human being.

When, as was now the case, some chance meeting had assisted

his theories his neat little body shone like a celluloid ball. If, having made his discovery, he might also have his audience to whom he might declare it, then his very fingers quivered with the excitement of it. His hands, white and thin and tapering, waved now. His eyes were on fire. As they walked up Bond Street one might have imagined air-bladders at his armpits, Mercury's wings at his heels. The quiet evening air was charged with him.

"Well," said Arkwright, smiling and looking down at his companion. "Who are they all?"

"Lady Adela Beaminster, Rachel Beaminster, Christopher–"

"Christopher?"

"Dr. Christopher, the Harley Street man. He's the Duchess' doctor, has been for years. The girl was the Duchess' granddaughter—Lady Adela's niece."

"Well?"

"The girl's coming out in three days' time. They're giving a ball in Portland Place for her. Nobody knows much about her. She's been educated abroad, and always kept very close when she's here. I shouldn't think the old Duchess loves her much. She loved the girl's father, but he married a Russian actress, bolted to Russia with her, and the old lady never forgave him. He and the actress were both killed in a Petersburg fire, and the child was sent home—only tiny then–"

"Ah! that explains the foreign air she had. She didn't look as though she loved her aunt very much either."

"No—don't suppose she does. But that's not it—that's not it."

They had arrived now at the top of Bond Street, and they paused for a moment to allow the Oxford Street traffic to sweep past them.

It was an hour of stir and clatter—hansoms, carts, lumbering omnibuses, bicycles, all were hurled along as though by some impatient hand, and the evening light crept higher and higher along the walls of the street, leaving grey-purple shadows beneath it.

They crossed over, and were instantly in a dim, golden, voiceless square. It was as though a door had been closed.

Brun still held Arkwright's arm. "Now we can talk—no noise. Francis Breton has come back."

To Arkwright this name, unfortunately, conveyed nothing.

"You don't know?" Brun was disappointed.

"Never heard of him."

"Fancy that. World of wonders; what have you been doing with your time? He is the Duchess's grandson, son of the beautiful, the wonderful Iris Beaminster, who eloped with Kit Breton thirty years ago. I believe the old Duchess pursued her relentlessly until the end. They were married only a few years and then Iris Breton committed suicide. Kit Breton beat her and was always drunk; an absolute rascal. There was one boy, and he wandered about Europe with his father until he was twenty or so. Then Kit Breton died, and the boy came home. Revenge on his grandmother was his one idea. He was taken up by her enemies, of whom she always had a goodly store, and they might have

made something out of him, if he hadn't developed his father's habits and finally been mixed up in some gambling scandal, and forced to leave the country.

"You can imagine what all this was to the Beaminsters—the great immaculate Beaminsters—you can picture the Duchess.... He went and saw her once … but that's another story. Well, abroad he went, and abroad he stayed—just now, coming out of the Gallery, I saw him–"

"You are sure?"

"Positive. There could be no mistake. He's just the same, a trifle tireder, a trifle lower down—but the same, oh yes."

It was when Brun was most excited that he was unmistakably the foreigner. Now little exclamations that escaped him revealed him. As a rule in England he was more English than the English.

They had left the square and were passing up Harley Street. The houses wore their accustomed air of profitable secrecy. The doors, the windows, the brass knockers, the white and chastened steps were so discreet that Sunday morning was the only time in the week when they were really comfortable and at home. In every muffled hall there was lying in wait a muffled man-servant, beyond every muffled man-servant there was a muffled waiting-room with muffled illustrated papers: only the tinkling, at long intervals, of some sharp little bell from some inner secrecy would pierce that horrible discretion. Upon both men that shining succession of little brass plates produced its solemnity.

Arkwright was nevertheless interested by Brun's discoveries.

He was accompanied, as they talked, by that picture of the thin, dark girl moving restlessly her long, gloved hands. He could see now that look that she had flung at the picture.... Oh! she was interesting!

"But tell me, Brun," he said, "you go on so fast. As I understand you there are these two, Breton and the girl, both of them the result of tragedies.... Do they know one another, do you suppose?"

"No. The girl was only a small child when Breton was in England, and you can be sure that she was carefully kept out of his way. But now that he's back … now that he's back!"

"It's the girl that interests me!" said Arkwright.

"Oh! the girl!" Brun was almost contemptuous. "There you go—English sentiment—missing all the time the great thing, the splendid thing."

"Explain," Arkwright said, laughing; "I know you won't be happy until you have."

"Why—it's the Duchess, the Duchess, the Duchess all the time. She's the centre of the picture; she *is* the picture. *She's* the subject."

Arkwright said nothing. Brun tossed his hands in the air.

"Oh—you English! No wonder you're centuries behind everything—you miss the very things under your nose. There's the Duchess, sitting there—a great figure as she has been these sixty years, but a figure hidden, veiled. There she has been for the last thirty years, shut up in that great house, wrapped about

and concealed. Nobody knows what the matter was—I don't know. I should think Christopher's the only man who can tell. At any rate, thirty years ago she retired altogether from the world, and sees only the fewest of people. But all the ceremony goes on, dressing up, receiving, and the influence she has! She was powerful enough before she disappeared, but since! Why, there's no pie she hasn't her finger in: politics, society, revolution, life, death; nothing goes on without her knowledge, her approval, her disapproval–"

"Her family, poor dears!"

"Oh; they love it—at any rate, the ones who are left do. The rebels are the younger generation. Society in England, my dear Arkwright, is dissolved into three divisions—the Autocrats, the Aristocrats, and the Democrats. I take my hat off to the Aristocrats—the Chichesters, the Medleys, the Darrants, the Weddons. All those quiet, decorous people, poor as mice many of them, standing aside altogether from any movements or war-cries of the day, living in their quiet little houses, or their empty big ones, clever some of them, charitable all of them, but never asserting their position or estimating it. They never look about them and see where they are. They've no need to. They're just there.

"The Democrats are quite a new development—not much of them at present—the Ruddards, the Denisons, the Oaks—but we shall hear a lot of them in the future, I'm sure. They'll sacrifice anything for cleverness; they must be amused; life must

be entertaining. They embrace everybody: actors, Americans, writers; they're quite clever, mind you, and it's all perfectly genuine. They're not snobs—they say, 'Here are our lands and our titles. You're common and vulgar, but you've got brains—you're amusing and we're well born—let's make an exchange. Life must be fun for us, so we'll have anyone with money or talent."

"Then, last of all, the Autocrats—the Beaminsters, the Gutterils, the Ministers. I'm using Autocrat in its broadest sense, but that's just what they are. You *must* have your quarterings, and you must look down on those who haven't. But, more than that, everything must be preserved, and continual ceremonies, dignities, chastities, restraints, pomps, and circumstances. Above all, no one must be admitted within the company who is not of the noblest, the stupidest, the narrowest.

"The Beaminsters are the bodyguard of this little army, and the Duchess is their general. There, behind her shut doors, she keeps it all going; an American like Mrs. Bronson, a democrat like George Lent, she spoils their games here, there, everywhere. So far all has been well. But at last there are enemies within her gates—that girl, Breton. Now, at last, for the first time in her life, she must look out."

He paused. They had reached Portland Place. To right and left of them the broad road was golden in the sun—dark trees guarded one end of it, bronzed roofs the other.

Two carriages stood like sentinels at the upper end.

Brun raised his hand as though he would invoke the spirit of

it. "There, Arkwright, there's your subject. The Duchess, tiny, indomitable, brooding over this place. This square of London round the Circus, your prostituted street, this splendour, Harley Street, Morris Square with its respectability, Ferris Street with its boarding-houses, over them all the Duchess is ruling. There's not one of them, I dare fancy, that is not conscious of her existence, not one of them that will not see life differently when she is gone. Meanwhile, she'll fight for her Autocrats to the last breath, and she's got a battle in front of her that will take her all her time. And when she goes the Autocrats will go with her, the Beaminsters as Beaminsters will be done for; life here round the Circus will never be the same again. There's a new city rising, Arkwright, and the new citizens may forget, the Aristocrats may compromise with the Democrats, but they'll turn out the Autocrats. A lot of good things will go with them—good old things—but a lot of fine new things will come in."

As they passed out of Portland Place the wooden-legged crossing-sweeper touched his hat to them.

"Will *he* come in?" said Arkwright, laughing.

"Perhaps," said Brun gravely.

Arkwright shook his head. "You can talk, Brun, you can say a lot. But it's artificial the whole of it. Your subject, as you call it, is in the air. We're realists nowadays, you know."

Brun's flat stared at them with its hideous red brick and ugly shapelessness. No romance for Dent Street; the glittering expanse of Portland Place was gone.

"You can't be a realist only, if you're to do the Duchess properly," said Brun. "There's more than that wanted."

CHAPTER II
RACHEL

"My dear thing, it all comes back, as everything always does, simply to personal pluck. It's only a question, no matter when or where, of having enough.
—Henry James.

I

No. 104 Portland Place was the house where the Duchess of Wrexe had lived now for sixty years. On the left as you go towards the park it had an air that no other house in the Place had ever been able to catch. There were certain buildings, Nos. 31, 26, 42, for instance, that were obviously doing their little best to present a successful imitation, but they were left a long, a very long way behind. The interesting thing would be to know whether No. 104 had had that wonderful "note" sixty years ago, when the Duchess came to it. Probably not; it was, beyond question, her presence that had thus given it its distinction. Its grim facade, without her, would not so strangely have hinted at beauties and wonders and glories within, nor would the windows have gleamed so finely, nor the great hall-door have symbolized such rich dark depths.

Here the temple of the Beaminsters, here, therefore, the shrine

of all that is best and finest in English aristocracy. It was indeed the largest house in Portland Place, and most of the houses there were large, but, across that blank austere front more was written than mere size. It was Age at its most scornful, but observant Age, an Age that could compare one period with another, an Age that had not forgotten the things that belonged to its Youth.

There was very little, up and down Portland Place, at morning, at midday, at night, that the house did not perceive. Those high, broad, shining windows were not as other windows—there was assertion in their very bland stupidity.

Within the house was dark and cold, with high square rooms, wide stone staircase, and a curious capacity for clutching any boisterous or seedy humanity on the very threshold and strangling it.

From the hall the great stone staircase was the feature. It struck a chill, at once, into the heart of the visitor so vast was it, so cold and white, so uncompromising, so scornful of other less solid staircases. Very ancient, too—went back a long, long way and would last, just like that, for ever!

What people it must have known, what scenes, what catastrophes encountered! About it, on either side, the hall vanished into blackness; here a gleaming portrait, there some antlers, here again an eighteenth-century gentleman with a full wig and the Beaminster nose and comfortable contempt in his eyes … and, around and about it all, silence; no sound from any part of the house penetrated here.

Up the stone staircase, passages, doors, more family portraits, more staircase, more passages, more doors and, somewhere, in some hidden solemnity, the ticking of a clock, so lonely in all that silence that every now and again it would catch its breath with a little whir, as though it wondered whether it really could go on in the teeth of so contemptuous an indifference.

Rachel Beaminster's sitting-room overlooked Portland Place, and caught the sun on lucky days for quite a time. It was small, square of shape, like a box with a high window, a tiny fireplace, an arm-chair, and a squat table with a bright blue cloth.

Always during the two years that had been devoted to "finishing" in Munich she had had that little room, cosy, compact, before her. Now did it seem a little shabby, the carpet and tablecloth and curtains a little faded; it yet had its cosiness, there in the heart of the great waste and desert that the house presented to her.

The little silver clock on the mantelpiece had struck five: she had come back with Aunt Adela from the picture gallery, and, hearing voices in the Long Drawing-room (the voices said, "My dear Adela, we just came...." "Adela dear, how well...."), she slipped up the stairs and secured her own refuge, and rang for tea to be brought to her there.

She wanted to think: she wanted to lie in the arm-chair there with the window a little open and the evening air coming from the park across Portland Place curiously scented like the sea.

As she lay back in her chair her body seemed fragile, and,

almost, in its abandonment, exhausted. Under the black eyes her cheeks and neck were very white, and her black hair gave it all the intensest setting.

She *was* tired, horribly tired, and she wondered, vaguely, as she lay there how she was ever to manage this life that, in three days' time, she must take up and carry, a life that offered, perhaps, a little freedom, a little release, but so many, so many terrors.

As her gaze took in the little room—its grey paper, a photograph of Uncle John, a book-case with poets, some miscellaneous and untidy-looking novels, and a number of little red Carlyles, a china cockatoo with an impertinent stare, a copy of Furze's "Ride," and a water-colour of red Munich roofs signed "Mary," a tiny writing-table with one old yellow photograph of a sad dark woman in a silver frame—these things were, it seemed the only friendly things she knew. Outside this room there was her grandmother, the house, London, the world—more and more horrible as the circles grew wider and wider.

At the mere thought of the things that she must, in three days' time, face, her heart began to beat so that she could scarcely breathe, and, with that beating, came the iron determination that no one should ever know.

She could not remember a time when these two emotions had not come together. She saw, as though it had happened only an hour ago, a tiny child in a black frock stumbling across endless deserts of carpet towards someone who looked older and

more curious than anything one could have conceived possible. Someone sitting in a high carved chair, someone leaning on a stick, with two terrifying great dragons behind her.

The child was seized with such a panic that her breath came in little pumping gasps, her legs quivered and trembled, her mouth was open, her eyes like saucers. And then, suddenly, after what had seemed a century of time, there came the thin trembling voice: "Why, the child's an idiot!"

Since that awful day Rachel had determined that "no one should ever know." There had come to her, at that moment, the knowledge that round every corner there might lurk dragons and a witch. Sometimes they were there, sometimes they were not, but always there was the terror before the corner was turned.

Life for Rachel during those early years was one long determination to meet bravely that half-hour, from six to half-past. Every evening at five minutes before six down the long passages she would be led, then would come the short pause before the dark door, a pause when the beating of the child's heart seemed the only sound in the vast house; then the knock, someone's voice "Come in," then the slow opening of the door, the revelation of the strange dim room with the old mirrors, the purple carpet, the china dragons, and grandmother in the high carved chair. There was always, in the hottest weather, a fire burning, always Dorchester, a large ugly woman, behind the chair, always the cockatoo see-sawing on a golden perch and crying out every now and again with shrill, hostile cries. And

then, in the centre of this, grandmother, with her terrible hands, her terrible nose, her terrible eyes, and, most terrible of all, her voice.

Rachel would sit upright on her chair, and very often nothing would be said throughout the half-hour. Sometimes Dorchester would ask questions, such as: "And what has Miss Rachel been doing to-day?" "Did Miss Rachel enjoy her walk in the park this afternoon?" "Has Miss Rachel enjoyed her lessons to-day?" Sometimes, and these were the terrible occasions, her grandmother would speak: "Well, have you been a good little girl?" or "Tell me what you have been doing, child."

At the sound of that voice the room would flood with terror: the child would still, by an effort of will, her body. She could feel now, from all that distance of years, the discipline that it had needed to steady her little black legs that dangled from her chair. She learnt, in time, to control herself so that she could give long answers in a grave, reserved tone.

The old lady never moved as she spoke, only bent forward and stared at her, as though she would see whether it were the truth that she were speaking.

As the days passed and Rachel grew older it was around this half-hour that the house ranged itself. The things in it—the rooms, the passages, the stairs, the high, cold schoolroom with its shining maps and large frigid table, the tapestry room, long and dark and mysterious with strange beasts and horsemen waving in the dusk, the white drawing-room so delicate and fragile that

the furniture seemed to be all holding its breath as though a little motion in the air would dissipate it, the vast dining-room with the great hanging candelabra, and the family portraits and the stone fireplace—all these things existed only that that terrible half-hour might fling its shadow about the day.

The child was much alone; she had governesses, a music master, a drawing master, but from these persons, however friendly they might be, she held aloof. She told them nothing of her thoughts. She had behind her her very early years that were now to her like a dream; she did not know that it had ever really existed, that picture of snow and some dark kind figure that was always beside her protecting her, and in the air always a noise of bells. As she grew older that picture was not dimmed in the vision of it, but only she doubted its authenticity. Nevertheless, the memory provided a standard and before that standard these governesses were compelled to yield.

There were, of course, her uncles and her aunt. Aunt Adela was more immediately concerned in the duty of her niece's progress than any other, but as a duty she always, from the first, represented it. From that first morning, when she had given her cold dry cheek to the little girl to kiss until now, three days before Rachel's freedom, she had made no suggestion nor provocation of affection. "It is a business, my dear niece," she seemed to say, "that, for the sake of our family, we must go through. Let us be honest and deny all foolish sentiment."

To this Rachel was only too ready to agree. She did not like

her Aunt Adela. Aunt Adela resembled a dry, wintry tree, a tree whose branches cracked and snapped, a tree that gave no hope of any spring. Rachel always saw Aunt Adela as an ugly necessity; she was not a thing of terror, but merely something unpleasant, something frigid and of a lukewarm hostility.

Then there were the uncles—Uncle Vincent, Uncle John, and Uncle Richard.

Uncle Vincent, the Duke, was over sixty now and very like his mother, withered and sharp and shrivelled, but he was without her terror, being merely dapper and insignificant, and his sleek hair (there was only a little of it very carefully spread out) and his white spats were the most prominent things about him. He was fond, Rachel gathered, of his racing and his club and his meals, and he was unmarried.

Uncle Richard had been twice Prime Minister and was a widower. He lived in a beautiful house in Grosvenor Street, and collected wine and fans and first editions. He was always very kind to Rachel, and she liked his tall thin figure, bent a little, with his high white forehead, gold-rimmed pince-nez on the Beaminster nose, and beautiful long white hands. She went to have tea with him sometimes, and this was an hour of freedom and delight, because he talked to her about the Elizabethans and Homer, and, when she was older, Nietzsche and Kant. She liked the warm rooms, with their thick curtains and soft carpets and rows and rows of gleaming glittering books, and he always had tea in such beautiful china and the silver teapot shone like a

mirror. But she never felt that she was of the same value to him as a first edition would be, and he talked to her of the Elizabethans for their sake, and not for hers.

Lastly, there was Uncle John, and her heart was divided between Uncle John and Dr. Christopher. Uncle John was a dear. He was round and fat, with snow-white hair that had waves in it, and his face resembled that of a very, very good-natured pig. His nose was not in the least a Beaminster nose, being round and snub and his eyes beamed kindliness. Rachel, although she had always loved him, had long learnt to place no reliance upon him. His aim in life was to make it as comfortable, as free from all vulgar squabble and dispute, as pleasant for everyone everywhere as it could possibly be. He was a Beaminster in so far as he thought the Beaminsters were a splendid and ancient family, and that there was no other family to which a man might count himself so fortunate to belong. But he was kind and pleasant about the rest of the world. He would like everyone to have a good time, and it was vaguely a puzzle to him that it should be so arranged that life should have any difficulties—it would be so much easier if everything were pleasant. When, however, difficulties did arise they must at all costs be dismissed. There had been no time in his life when he had not been in love with some woman or other, but the hazards and difficulties of marriage had always frightened him too much.

He was not entirely selfish, for he thought a great deal about the wishes and comforts of other people, but unpleasantness

frightened him, like a rabbit, into his hole. He lived the life of the "Compleat Bachelor" at 93 Portland Place, having a multitude of friends of both sexes, spending hours in his clubs with some of them, week-ends in country houses with others of them, and months in delightful places abroad with one or two of them.

He was very popular, always smiling and good-natured, and cared more for Rachel than for anyone else in the world … but even for Rachel he would not risk discomfort.

There they all were, then.

Gradually they had emerged, for her, out of the mists and shadows, arranging themselves about her as possible protections against that horrible half-hour of hers. She soon found that, in that, at any rate, they would, none of them, be of use to her except Uncle John. Uncle Vincent did not count at all. Uncle Richard only counted as china or pictures counted.

Uncle John could not count as a very strong defence, it was true, but he was fond of her; he showed it in a thousand ways, and although he might never actually stand up for her, yet he would always be there to comfort her.

Not that she wanted comfort. From a very early age indeed she resolutely flung from her all props and sympathies and sentiments. She hated the house, she hated the loneliness, most of all she hated grandmother … but she would go through with it, and no one should know that she suffered.

II

Then, when she was seventeen, came Munich.

On the day that she first heard that she was to go to Germany to be "finished" the flashing thought that came to her was that, for a time at any rate, the "half-hour" would be suspended. Standing there thinking of the days passing without the shadow of that interview about them was like emerging from some black and screaming, banging, shouting tunnel into the clear serenity of a shining landscape. Two years might count for her escape, and perhaps, on her return, she would be old enough for her grandmother to have lost her terrors—perhaps....

Meanwhile, that Germany, with its music and forests and toys and fairies, danced before her. Her two years in it gave her all that she had expected; it gave her Wagner and Mozart and Beethoven, it gave her Goethe and Heine, Jean Paul and Heyse, Hauptmann and Mörike, it gave her a perception of life that admitted physical and spiritual emotions on precisely the same level, so that a sausage and the *Unfinished Symphony* gave you the same ecstatic crawl down your spine and did not, for an instant, object to sharing that honour.

Munich also gave her the experience and revelations of May Eversley.

There were some twenty or thirty girls who were, with Rachel, under the finishing care of Frau Bebel, but Rachel held herself

apart from them all. She could not herself have explained why she did so. It was partly because she felt that she had nothing, whether experience or discovery, to give to them, partly because they seemed already so happy and comfortable amongst themselves that they had surely no need of her, and partly because she feared that from some person or some place, suddenly round the corner there would spring the terror again. She could even fancy that her grandmother, watching her, had placed horrors behind curtains, closed doors, grimed and shuttered windows.—"If you think, my dear," she might perhaps be saying, "that you've escaped by this year or two in Germany, you're mightily mistaken.—Back to me you're coming."

But May Eversley was different from the other girls. She was different because she saw things without a muddle, knew what she wanted, knew what she disliked, knew what was delightful, knew what was intolerable.

To Rachel this clear-cut decision was more enviable than any other quality that one could have. At this stage of her experience it was the assent, so it seemed to her, that could give life its intensest value. "Sit down and see, without any exaggeration or false colouring, what you've got. Take away, ruthlessly, anything that you imagine that you've got but haven't. See what you want. Take away ruthlessly everything that you imagine that you would like to have but are not confident of securing. See what's happened to you in the past. Take away ruthlessly any sentimental repentances or sloppy regrets, but learn quite resolutely from

your ugly mistakes."

Rachel's world had hitherto been limited very largely to the schoolroom in Portland Place, the park and Beaminster House, the country place-in-chief (three others, one in Leicestershire, one in Northumberland, one in Norfolk), but even within this limited country the terrific importance of those rules was driven in upon her.

She felt that her grandmother was clear-headed, but, no, none of the others—not Aunt Adela, nor the uncles, nor any of the governesses. She was allowed to meet one or two little boys and girls of her own age. She walked with them in the park, played with them at Beaminster House, had tea with them occasionally, but they were, none of them, clear-headed.

She was not priggish about this discovery of hers. She did not despise other people because their definite rules did not seem to them of importance. She did not talk about these things.

To see facts very steadily without blinking was impelled upon her by the necessity for courage. It was the only weapon wherewith to fight her grandmother. "Now," she might say to herself, "this half-hour of yours. Is it so bad? What definitely do you fear about it? Is it the knock at the door? Is it the crossing the room? Is it answering questions?"

So challenged her terror did fall, a little, away from her, ashamed at its inadequate cause. So she went to face every peril —"Is the danger really so bad? What exactly is it?…"

May Eversley was thin and spare, small with sharp features,

pince-nez, hair brushed sternly back, and every inch of her body trained to the purpose that it was meant to fulfil. She rang her sentences on the air like coin on a plate. Meanwhile, as she explained to Rachel, she had been fighting since she was five. Her mother, Lady Eversley, was the widow of Tom Eversley, now happily deceased, once the most dissolute scamp in Europe. He had died leaving nothing but debts behind him. Since then his widow and his daughter had lived in three little rooms above a public house off Shepherd's Market, and the widow had battled to keep up the gayest of appearances. May had been, at a very early age, introduced to the struggle. "My silver mug and rattle were pawned to get a dress for mother to go to a drawing-room in. I shouldn't be here now if it weren't for an uncle, and it's the last thing he'll do for us. So back I go in two year's time—to do my damnedest."

Of course she was clear-headed—she had to be.

"There are only two sorts of people," she said to Rachel. "Like soup—thick and clear—the Clear ones get on and the Thick don't."

May obviously liked Rachel, but was amused by her. Nobody, it seemed to May, showed so nakedly her emotions as Rachel, and yet, also, nobody could produce, more suddenly, the closest of reserves. May, to whom the world had been, since she was six, a measured plain of contest, marvelled at the poignancy of Rachel's contact with it. "If she's going to be hurt as easily as this by everything, how on earth is she going to get through?"

Then, as the Munich days passed, May found, to her own delight, Rachel's keen sense of humour. Munich afforded enough food for it, and finally one discovered that Rachel smiled more readily than she trembled, but she hid her smile because, as yet, she was not sure of it.

"All she wants," May Eversley concluded, "is to be told things."

Nobody in the world could be better adapted to give out these revelations. London, to May Eversley, was an open book; moreover, the most stormy of battle-fields on which the combatants fought, were wounded, were slain, were gloriously victorious.

She told Rachel a great deal—a great deal about people, a great deal about sets and parties, a great deal about likes and dislikes. She had on her side one burning curiosity to know about Rachel's Duchess. "Is she as terrible, so tremendous as people say? Has she such a brain even now? Old Lady Grandon, who was a great friend when they were both girls, says that she wasn't clever then a bit—rather stupid and shy—but you never know. Jealousy on old Grandon's part, I expect. They say she's wonderful still."

Questions of taste never worried May Eversley, and it did not worry her now that Rachel might dislike so penetrating an inquisition. But at least May got nothing for her trouble. Rachel told her nothing.

May's final word was, "You care too much about it all—care

whether it's going to hurt, whether it's going to be frightening or not. My advice to you is, just dash in, snatch what you can, and dash out again. It doesn't matter a hair-pin what anyone says. Everyone says everything in London, and nobody minds. They've all got the shortest memories."

Rachel, sitting now in her little room and thinking of Munich wondered how completely her own discovery of London would coincide with May's. May's idea of it was certainly not Aunt Adela's. Aunt Adela, Rachel thought, was far too dried and brittle to risk any sharp contact with anything. None of her uncles, she further reflected, liked sharp contacts, and yet, how continually grandmother provided them!

How comfortable all of them—Aunt Adela and the uncles—would be without their mother, and yet how proud they were of having her! For herself, Rachel faced her approaching deliverance with a tightening of all the muscles of her body. "I won't care. It shall be as May says—and there are sure to be some comfortable people about, some people who want to make it pleasant for one."

Then there was a tap at the door and Uncle John came in. Uncle John often came in about half-past five. It was a convenient time for him to come, but also, perhaps, he recognized that that approaching half-hour that Rachel was to have with his mother demanded, beforehand, some kind of easy, amiable prologue.

To-day, however, there was more in his comfortable smiling

countenance than merely paying a visit warranted. He stood for a moment at the door looking over at her, rather fat but not very, his white hair, his pearl pin, his white spats all gleaming, a rosiness and a cleanliness always about him so that he seemed, at any moment of the day, to have come straight from his tub, having jumped, in his eagerness to see you, into his beautiful clothes, and hurried, all in a glow, to get to you.

"They're all chattering downstairs—chattering like anything. There's Roddy Seddon, old Lady Carloes and Crewner and some young ass Crewner's brought with him and your Uncle Dick looking bored and your Aunt Adela looking nothing at all—and so out of it I came."

He came over and sat on the broad, fat arm of her chair and looked out, in his contented, amiable way, over the light, salmon-coloured and pale, that now had persuaded Portland Place into silence. His eyes seemed to say: "Now this is how I like things—all pink and quiet and comfortable."

Rachel leant a little against his shoulder, and put her hand on his knee—

"You've had tea down there?"

"Yes, thank you—all I wanted. What have you been doing all the afternoon?"

He put his own hand down upon hers.

"Oh! Aunt Adela and I went to look at grandmother's portrait."

"Well?"

"It's as clever as it can be. To anyone who doesn't know her, it's the most wonderful likeness. It's what grandmother would like herself."

He caught the note in her voice that threatened the pink security of Portland Place. He held her hand a little tighter.

"In what way?"

"Oh, it's got the dragons and the tapestry and the purple carpet. All the coloured things that grandmother like so much and that help her so. Why, imagine her for a second in an ordinary room, in an old arm-chair with a worn-out carpet and everlastings on the mantelpiece; what *would* she do? The young man, whoever he is, has helped her all he can."

Rachel felt his grasp of her hand slacken a little.

"Yes, I know it's wrong of me to talk like that. But it's all so sham. It's like someone in one of those absurd fantastic novels that people write nowadays when half the characters are out of Dickens only put into a real background. I'm frightened of grandmother—you know I always have been—but sometimes I wonder whether–"

She paused.

"Whether there's anything really to be frightened of. And yet the relief when I can get off this half-hour every evening—the relief even now when I'm even grown up—oh! it's absurd!"

"Well, my dear, you're coming out, you're going to break away from all of us—you'll have your own life now to make what you like of."

"Yes, that's all very well. But I've been brought up all wrong. Most girls begin to come out when they're about ten and go on, more and more, until, when the time actually comes, well, there's simply nothing in it. I've never known anyone intimately except May, and now at the thought of crowds and crowds of people, at one moment I'd like to fly into a convent somewhere, and at the next I want to go and be rude to the lot of them—to get in quickly you know, lest they should be rude to me first."

Now that she had begun, it came out in a flood. "Oh! I shall make such a mess of it all. What on earth am I to talk about to these people? What do they want with me or I with them? What have I ever to say to anybody except you and Dr. Chris, and even with you I'm as cross as possible most of the time. Grandmother always thought me a complete fool, and so I suppose I am. If people aren't kind I can't say a word, and if they are I say far too much and blush afterwards for all the nonsense I've poured out. It doesn't matter with you and Dr. Chris because you know me, but the others! And always behind me there'd be grandmother! She knows I'm going to be a failure, and she wants me to be—but just to prove to her, just to prove!"

She jumped up, and standing in front of the window, met, furiously, a hostile world. Her hands were clenched, her face white, her eyes desperate.

"—Just to prove I'll be a success—I'll marry the most magnificent husband, I'll be the most magnificent person—I'll bring it off–"

Suddenly her agitation was gone—she was laughing, looking down on her uncle half humorously, half tenderly.

"Just because I love you and Dr. Chris, I'll do my best not to shame you. I'll be the most decorous and amiable of Beaminsters. —No one shall have a word to say–"

She bent down, put her arms round his neck, and kissed him. Then she sat down on the edge of the arm-chair with her hands clasped over his knee. Uncle John would not have loved her so dearly had he not been, on so many occasions, frightened of her. She was often hostile in the most curious way—so militant that he could only console himself by thinking that her mother had been Russian, and from Russia one might expect anything. And then, in a moment, the hostility would break into a tenderness, an affection that touched him to the heart and made the tears come into his eyes. But for one who loved comfort above everything Rachel was an agitating person.

Now as he felt the pressure of her hands on his knees, he knew that he would do anything, anything for her.

"That's all right, Rachel dear," was all that he could say. "You hold on to me and Christopher. We'll see you through."

The little silver clock struck six. She got up from the chair and smiled down at him. "If I hadn't got you and Dr. Chris—well—I just don't know what would happen to me."

Meanwhile Uncle John had remembered what it was that he had come to say. His expression was now one of puzzled distress as though he wondered how people could be so provoking and

inconsiderate.

He looked up at her. "By the way," he said, "it's doubtful whether mother will see you this evening. You'd better go and ask, but I expect–"

"What's happened?"

"I may as well tell you. You're bound to hear sooner or later. Your cousin Francis is back in London. He's written a most insulting letter to your grandmother. It's upset her very much."

"Cousin Frank?"

"Yes. He's living apparently quite near here—in some cheap rooms."

May Eversley had, long before, supplied Rachel with all details as to that family scandal.

Rachel now only said: "Well, I'll go and see whether she would like me to come."

For a moment she hesitated, then turned back and flung her arms again about her uncle's neck.

"Whatever happens, Uncle John, whatever happens, we'll stick together."

"Whatever happens," he repeated, "we'll stick together."

His eyes, as they followed her, were full of tenderness—but behind the tenderness there lurked a shadow of alarm.

CHAPTER III
LADY ADELA

"At first it seemed a little speck,
And then it seemed a mist;
It moved and moved, and took at last
A certain shape, I wist."

The Ancient Mariner.

I

Lady Adela had returned from that visit to her mother's portrait with a confused mind. She was not used to confused minds and resented them; whenever so great an infliction came upon her she solved the confusion by dismissing it, by leaving her mind a blank until it should take upon itself to be clear again. To obtain that blank an interval of reflection was necessary, and now, to-day, that had been impossible. On returning, she had been instantly confronted by a number of people who required to be given tea and conversation, and no time had been allowed her in which she might resolve that her mind should be cleared.

Her confusion was that the portrait of her mother was precisely like, a most brilliant affair, and yet wasn't like in the

least. Further than that, in some completely muddled way, it was in the back of her mind that her mother, suddenly, this afternoon, presented herself to her as not entirely living up to the portrait, as being less sharp, less terrible, less magnificent. Horror lest she should in any way be doubting her mother's terror and magnificence—both proved every day of the week—lay, like a dark cloud, at the back of her confusion.

She could not, however, extract anything definite from the little cluster of discomforts; old Lady Carloes and Lord Crewner, a young thing that Lord Crewner had brought with him, and her brother Richard were all waiting for tea, and floods of conversation instantly covered Lady Adela's poor mind and drowned it.

The Long Drawing-room, where they now were, was long and narrow, with two large open fireplaces, a great deal of old furniture rather faded and very handsome, silver that gleamed against the dark wall-paper, one big portrait of the Duchess, painted by Sargent twenty years ago, and high windows shut off now by heavy dark green curtains.

The Duchess, it was understood, did not approve of electric light and the house therefore disdained it. Parts of the room were lighted by candles placed in heavy old silver candlesticks. Round the fireplace at the farther end of the light shone and glittered; there the tea-tables stood, and round about them the company was gathered.

The rest of the room, hung in dark shadow, stretched into

black depths, lit only now and again by the gleam of silver or glass as the light of the more distant fire flashed and fell.

The voices, the clatter of the tea-things, these sounds seemed to be echoed by the darker depths of the farther stretches of the room.

Lady Carlos was eighty, extremely vigorous, and believed in bright colours. She was dressed now in purple, and wore a hat with a large white feather. Her figure was bunched into a kind of bundle, so that her waist was too near her bosom and her bosom too near her chin and her chin too near her forehead.

It was as though some spiteful person had pressed all of her too closely together. But this very shapelessness added to her undoubted amiability; her face was fat and smiling, her hair white and untidy, and she maintained her dignity in spite of her figure. Nobody knew anything with certainty as to her income, but she was charitable, and ran a little house in Charles Street with a great deal of ceremony and hospitality. Her husband had long been dead and her two daughters had long been married, so that she was happy and independent. Many people considered her tiresome because her curiosity was insatiable and her discretion open to question, yet she was a staunch Beaminster adherent, an old friend of the Duchess, and saw both this world and the next in the proper Beaminster light.

Lady Adela depended on her a good deal, at certain times: she had forseen that the old lady would come to-day; she had heard of course of Frank Breton's arrival in town, she would demand

every detail; Lady Adela knew that the account that she gave to Lady Carloes would be the account that the town would receive.

By the fire Lord Richard, Lord Crewner and the nondescript young man were talking together. Lady Adela caught fragments. "But of course Dilchester is incautious—when was he anything else? What these fellows need–"

That was her brother.

And then Lord Crewner, who believed that the windows of White's and Brook's were the only courts of Ultimate Judgment. "That's all very well, Beaminster, but I assure you, they were saying last night at the club–"

As far as all that was concerned Lady Adela flung it aside. She must attend to Lady Carloes, she must give to her the version of Frank Breton's arrival that her mother would wish her to give. But what *was* that version? And *was* her mother really to be depended upon?

At so terrible a flash of disloyalty Lady Adela coloured.—Why were things so difficult this afternoon? And why had she ever gone to that picture-gallery?

Lady Carloes had, however, not yet arrived at Frank Breton. She never paid a visit anywhere without tabulating carefully in her mind the things that she must know before leaving the house. Her theory was that she was really very old indeed, and couldn't possibly live much longer, and that no moment therefore must be wasted. The more news that she could give and receive before her ultimate departure, the more value would her life have in

retrospect.

She never went definitely into the exact worth that all the gossip that she collected might have for anybody or anything; as with any other collection it was pursuit rather than acquisition that fired the blood. At the back of her old mind was a perfect lumber-room of muddle and confusion—dusty gossip, cobwebs of scandal, windows thick with grime and tightly closed. There was no time left now to do anything to that. Meanwhile every day something was purchased or exchanged; muddle there might be, but, thank God, nobody knew it.

"You must be very busy about the ball, my dear."

"Yes—it means a great deal of work. It's so long since we've had anything here, but Norris is invaluable. You don't find servants like that nowadays."

"No, my dear, you don't. But, of course, it will go off splendidly. We're all so anxious that Rachel shall have a good time. It's the least we can do for your mother."

At the mention of Rachel Lady Adela's thoughts straightened for a second; *that* was where the confusion lay. It had been Rachel's attitude to the portrait that had caused Lady Adela's own momentary disloyalty. Of course Rachel hated her grandmother. Lady Adela made a little sound with her fingers, a sound like the clicking of needles.

"As far as Rachel is concerned nobody can tell possibly how she's going to take it all. I don't pretend to understand her."

Lady Carloes found this interesting—she bent forward a little.

"We're all greatly excited about her. You've kept her away from all of us and one hears such different accounts of her. And of course her success is most important—as things are just now."

Lady Adela answered, "I can tell you nothing. She isn't in the least like any of us, and I don't suppose for a moment that she'll listen to anybody. She made a friend of May Eversley in Munich, and I don't think that was the best thing for her. But you know—I've talked about this to you before."

Not only had Lady Adela talked; all of them had done so. In the Beaminster camp this appearance that Rachel was about to make was of the last importance. There were enemies, redoubtable enemies, in the field. Rachel Beaminster's bow to the world was for the very reason that all the world was watching, a responsibility for them all.

But there were many rumours. Rachel was not to be relied upon—she hated her grandmother, she was strange and foreign and morose. Lady Carloes was not happy about it, and Lady Adela's attitude now was anything but reassuring.

John Beaminster came in. Lady Carloes liked him because he was good-tempered and injudicious. He told her a number of things that nobody else ever told her, and he had so simple a mind that extracting news from it was as easy as taking plums from a pudding. He did not come over to them at once, but stood laughing with Lord Crewner and his brother. He would come, however, in a moment, so Lady Carloes made a last hurried plunge at her friend.

"What's this I hear, my dear, about Frank Breton?"

"Yes, it's perfectly true. He's come back, and has taken rooms quite near here. He wrote to mother–"

Lady Carloes took this in with a gulp of delight. "My dear Adela! What did he say?"

"Oh! a very rude letter. He told mother that he knew that she would like him to be near at hand and that they ought to let bygones be bygones, and that he was sure that she would be glad to hear that he was a reformed character. Of course he hates all of us."

"What will you all do?"

"Oh! Nothing, of course. We gave him up long ago. By a tiresome coincidence he's taken rooms in the same house as my secretary, Miss Rand. I would send her away if she weren't simply invaluable. But it gives him a kind of a link with us."

"Monty Carfax saw him yesterday. He's lost his left arm, Monty says, and looks more of an adventurer than ever. So tiresome for your mother, my dear."

Then, as Lord John began to break away from the group at the fireplace and move towards them–

"Roddy Seddon told me he might look in this afternoon.... Your mother's so devoted to him. He seems to understand her so well."

The two ladies faced one another. Their eyes crossed. Lady Carloes murmured, "Such a splendid fellow!" then, as Lord John's cheerful laugh broke upon them–

"Isn't Rachel coming down?" she asked.

II

Lady Adela left her brother and Lady Carloes together and crossed over to the group at the fireplace. Of all her brothers, she liked Richard best. He seemed to her to be precisely all that a Beaminster should be: she liked his appearance—his fine domed forehead, his grey hair, his long rather melancholy face, his austere and orderly figure.

He had to perfection that reserve, that kind benignancy that a Beaminster ought to have; whenever Lady Adela questioned the foundations upon which the stability of her life depended he reassured her. Without saying anything at all, he gravely comforted her. That is what a Beaminster ought to do.

She knew, as she saw him standing there by the fire, that *he* would never doubt his mother. To him she would always be splendid and magnificent, and with what determination would he expel from him any base attacks on that loyalty! Lady Adela thought that power to expel resolutely and firmly everything that attacked the settled assurance of one's mind the finest thing in the world.

Lord Crewner was a thin, handsome man of any age at all over forty and under sixty. He was polished and brushed and scrubbed to such an extent that he looked like an advertisement of some fine old English firm that produced, at great cost

and with wonderful completeness, Fine old English gentlemen. He believed in not thinking about things very much, because thinking let in Radicals and diseases and the poor, and made one uncomfortable. He loved the London that he knew, a London bounded by Sloane Square, the Marble Arch, Trafalgar Square and Westminster.

He was a bachelor, but might have married Lady Adela had the Duchess not refused to hear of Lady Adela leaving her; he adored the Duchess, although he was scarcely ever allowed to see her because he bored her. He always lowered his voice a little when talking to women, and heightened it a little when talking to men; to his valet he spoke in the voice that Nature had given him.

Lady Adela was reassured as she came towards them. Although she did not especially desire to marry Lord Crewner, the thought that he might, had affairs been differently arranged, have asked her, placed him, in her eyes, apart from other men. At any rate these two were comfortable to her, and, for a moment, she was able to dismiss Rachel and Frank Breton from her mind.

They talked easily beside the fireplace. The voices of Lady Carloes and Lord John, the pleasant murmur of the fire, the ticking clocks, all helped that lazy swaying of time and space about one, that happy reassurance that as the world had been so would it continue ever to be, and that the old emotions and the old experiences and the old opinions would always hold their own against all invasion and decay.

Lord Richard talked of Chippendale and some wonderful

Lowestoft, Lord Crewner talked of Madeira and Lady Masters' new house; Lady Adela listened and was soothed.

Upon them all broke a voice:

"Sir Roderick Seddon, my lady."

There stood in the doorway the freshest, the most beaming of young men. He was tall and broad; his face was of a red-brick colour, and his dark London clothes, although they were well cut and handsome enough, were obviously only worn to please a necessary convention. His hair was light brown and cut close to his head, and his body had the healthy sturdiness of someone whose every muscle was in proper training.

He came forward to the group at the fireplace with the walk of a man accustomed to space and air and freedom; his smiling face was so genial and good-humoured that the whole room seemed to break away a little from its decorous and shining propriety. They were all pleased to see him. Lady Carloes and Lord John came over and joined the group, and they stood all about him talking and laughing.

Roddy Seddon was the only young man whom the Duchess permitted, and people said that that was because he was the only young man who had never shown any fear of her. The knowledge of this fact gave him in Lady Adela's eyes a curious interest. She beheld him always rather as she would have beheld anyone who had learnt an abstruse language that no one else had ever mastered or some traveller who was reputed to have said or done the most extraordinary things in some savage country. How *could*

he? What talisman had he discovered that protected him? And then, swiftly on that, came the curious thought that she herself was glad that she had her terror, that she was proud, in some strange, inverted way, that any Beaminster could have the effect upon anyone that her mother had upon her.

But Roddy Seddon had another especial interest for her, for it was Roddy, all the Beaminsters had decided, who was to marry Rachel. Roddy was, in every way, the right person; not very wealthy, perhaps, but he had one nice place in Sussex, and Rachel would not, herself, be a pauper.

Roddy would never let the Beaminsters down; he hated all these new invaders as strongly as any Beaminster could. He hated this mixing of the classes, this perpetual urging of the working man to think.

"Lots of our fellows," Lady Adela had heard him say, "get along without thinkin'—why not the other fellers?"

She felt now that a conversation with Roddy would complete the soothing process that Lord Crewner and her brother had begun. He would finally reassure her.

She had no difficulty in securing him. Lady Carloes sat by the fire and talked to Lord Crewner, and the nondescript, and the two brothers departed.

When Roddy had drunk his tea, she led him away to the farther part of the long dim room, and there by that more distant fireplace the two of them sat, shadowy against the leaping light, their faces and their hands white and sharp and definite.

"Who else is dinin' on Thursday?"

She gave him names. "The Prince and Princess are coming, you know, but they aren't alarming. They've been often to see mother when they've been over here before. They're getting old enough now to be comfortable. He dances like anything still."

"I always like dinin' in the place you're dancin' at. You don't get that shivery feeling comin' up the stairs and puttin' your gloves on. You're one up on the others if you've been dinin'."

Lady Adela looked at him, and sighed a little impatiently. He was incredibly young and might, after all, let them down.

He was thirty now, but he looked not a day more than nineteen, and he always talked and behaved as though he were still in his last year at Eton. She opposed him, in her mind's eye, to that figure of Frank Breton that had been before her all day. How could a mere boy stand up against a scoundrel like that?

Moreover, she had heard stories about Roddy. Women had terrible power over him, she had been told, and then, with a glance at him, sighed again at the thought that her own time had gone by for having power over anybody, even Lord Crewner.

Well, after all, her mother knew the boy better than anyone did and her mother loved him—better than everyone else put together her mother loved him.

"How's Rachel takin' it?"

"How does Rachel take anything? She never says anything, and one never knows. She seems to have no curiosity, or eagerness."

"I was talkin' to May Eversley about her the other night. May says she'll be splendid."

"I don't like May Eversley"—Lady Adela nervously moved her hands on her lap. "I wish Rachel hadn't made such friends with her in Munich."

"Oh, May's all right." Roddy's blue eyes were smiling. "Took her down to Hurlingham yesterday and we had no end of a time."

It was a pity, Lady Adela reflected, that Roddy was so absolutely on his own.

His mother had died at his birth, and his father had been dead for five years now, and here it seemed to Lady Adela a curious coincidence that both Rachel and Roddy were orphans —and both so young.

She leant forward towards him—

"You can do a lot for Rachel, Roddy. You can help her to understand her grandmother, you can reconcile her to all of us."

"Oh! I say," Roddy laughed. "Perhaps she won't have anythin' to say to me, you know. My seein' your mother so often is quite enough–"

"No. She likes cheerful people—Dr. Christopher and John. You're in the same line of country, Roddy. She doesn't like me, and I haven't got the things in me to draw affection out of her. I'm not that kind of woman."

As a rule Lady Adela betrayed no emotion of any kind, but now, this afternoon, both to Lady Carloes and Roddy she had made some vague, indefinite appeal. Perhaps the news of

Breton's arrival had alarmed her, perhaps her visit to the gallery with Rachel had really disturbed her. She seemed to beg for assistance.

Roddy analysed neither his own emotions nor those of his friends, but, this afternoon, Lady Adela did appear to him a little more human than before. He was suddenly sorry for her.

"Rachel'll be all right," he assured her. "Wait a bit. By the way, I met that little feller Brun yesterday—said he was comin' on Thursday. He's wild about your mother's picture–"

"Yes—we saw him at the gallery this afternoon. Rachel and I were there."

"Rachel! What did she think of it?"

"Seemed to take no interest in it at all. We were there only a few minutes–"

Silence fell between them, a silence filled with meaning. Lady Adela had intended to speak about Breton—now, suddenly, she could say nothing. The mention of the picture-gallery had brought back all her earlier discomfort—she saw the picture, the eyes, the nose, the mouth, the white pinched cheeks. Then she saw the great bedroom upstairs, the high white bed, the little shrivelled figure.

Had Rachel pointed this contrast? Had Breton? Was it something that Roddy had discovered already, something that had made his courage so easy for him? What, what was going to be done with her if she were no longer afraid? Why, on that terror, on that trembling service, were built the foundations of

all her life. How could she face that picture that the world had of a splendid, historic, dominating figure if she herself saw only a sick, miserable old woman tumbling to pieces, passing to decay?

The minutes had passed, and she had said nothing. Roddy must be wondering at her silence. To her relief Lady Carloes came towards her to say good-bye.

Roddy's eyes were puzzled. For what had she carried him off if she had nothing to say to him?

III

When they were all gone she went up to her mother. Before the door she paused. The house was very still, and her heart was furiously beating.

She opened the door, and at the sight of the room was instantly reassured.

Dorchester met her. "Her Grace went to bed early to-night. But she will see you, my lady."

Lady Adela stepped softly to the farther door. All was well. About her, around her, within her, was that same splendid terror, that same knowledge that she was approaching some great presence that had been with her all her life–

As she opened the bedroom door and saw the high white bed she knew that her mother was more magnificent, more wonderful than any painted picture could possibly make her.

CHAPTER IV
THE POOL

I

On that same afternoon in another part of the house Miss Rand, Lady Adela's secretary, finished her work for the day, and prepared to go home.

It was about a quarter-past six, and the May evening was sending through the windows its pale glow suggesting soft blue skies and fading lights. Miss Rand's room told you at once everything about Miss Rand. For efficiency and neatness, for discipline and restraint, it could not be beaten. Miss Rand herself was all these things, efficient and neat, disciplined and restrained.

Her room had against one white and shining wall a black and shining typewriter. Against another wall was a table, and on this table were so many contrivances for keeping letters and papers decent and docketed that it made every other table the observer could remember seem untidy and littered. There was nothing in the room superfluous or unnecessary, and even some carnations in a green bowl near the window looked as though they were numbered and ticketed.

Miss Rand was a little woman who appeared thirty-five when she was busy, and twenty-five when someone was pleasant to

her. When she was at work the broad dark belt that she wore at her waist was her most characteristic feature. Then, in keeping with this, was her dark hair, beautiful hair perhaps if it had been allowed some freedom, but now ordered and sternly disciplined; she wore no ornaments, and about her there was nothing out of place nor extravagant.

Her face was full of light and colour and her eyes were beautiful, but no one considered them: it was impossible to look beyond that stern shining belt—one felt that Miss Rand herself would resent appreciation.

From ten o'clock in the morning until five o'clock in the evening the huge Portland Place house absorbed her energies. She saw it sometimes in her dreams, as a great unwieldy machine kept in place by her hand, but leaping, did she leave it for an instant, trembling, soaring, carrying destruction with it into the heart of the city.

Meanwhile her hand was upon it. From Norris the butler, from Dorchester the guardian of the Duchess's apartments, down to the smallest, most insignificant kitchen-maid, Miss Rand knew them all. There was, of course, Mrs. Newton, the most splendid and elevating of housekeepers, but when matters below stairs went beyond her control Miss Rand could always arrange them. There was nothing, absolutely nothing, that, in the way of managing her fellow-creatures, Miss Rand could not do.

But it was because Miss Rand never occurred to any single creature in the Portland Place house as a sentient breathing

human being that she succeeded as she did. She had no prejudices, no angers, no rebellions, no rejoicings. She was the little engine at the heart of the house that sent everything into motion. "One can't imagine her eating her meals, Mrs. Newton," Mr. Norris once said. "And as to her sleeping like you or me–"

To see her now as she put the final touches to her room before leaving it, arranging a paper here and a paper there, going to the bookshelf and pushing back a book that jutted in front of the others, setting a chair against the wall, placing the blotting-pad exactly in the middle of the table, finally taking her hat and coat and putting them on with the same careful and almost automatic distinction—this sufficiently revealed her. She seemed, as she looked for the last time about the room with her bright eyes, like some sharp little bird, perched on a window-sill, looking beyond closed windows for new adventure.

It was one of the striking points in her that her eyes always seemed to be searching for some disorder in some place outside her immediate vision.

She closed the door behind her. As she stepped into the passage someone was coming down the staircase to her right, and looking up she saw that it was Rachel Beaminster. Rachel was on her way from her grandmother's room, and before she saw Miss Rand standing there, waiting to let her pass, her face was grave and, in that half-light, strangely white. Then, as she saw Miss Rand, she smiled—

"Good evening, Miss Rand."

"Good evening, Miss Beaminster."

"I'm afraid that this ball is giving you a lot of trouble."

"I think that everything is arranged now, Miss Beaminster. I hope that it will be a great success."

Rachel sighed and then laughed.

"Don't I wish the whole stupid thing was over. And I expect you do too!"

Miss Rand smiled a very little. "It's good for the servants," she said. "They're always happy when they're really busy."

For a moment they stood there smiling. It occurred to Rachel that Miss Rand must be rather nice. She had never thought of her before as anything but Aunt Adela's secretary.

"Good night, Miss Rand."

"Good night, Miss Beaminster."

II

In Portland Place Miss Rand drew a little breath and paused. So many times during the last five years had she walked from Portland Place to Saxton Square, and from Saxton Square to Portland Place, that the streets and houses encountered by her had become individual, alive, always offering to her some fresh adventure or romance. Portland Place itself was no bad beginning, with its high white colour, its air, and its dark mysterious park hovering at the edge of it.

If one had not known, Miss Rand thought, one might have

supposed that just beyond it lay the sea, so fresh and full of breezes was the air. The light was yellow now and the houses black and sharp against the faint sky. In another half-hour the lamps would be lit.

It was pleasant and fitting that the end of Portland Place should be guarded by the Round Church and the Queen's Hall. "Leave that calm and chaste society behind you," those places said, "but before you plunge into the wicked careless world (that is Oxford Circus) choose from us. Here you have religion or music, both if you will, but here at any rate we are, the very best of our kind."

The Queen's Hall looked shabby in the evening light, but Miss Rand liked that; it heightened her sense of the splendour within —Beethoven and Wagner and Brahms needed no illumination— it was your musical comedy demanded that.

Miss Rand liked good music.

Then there was the Polytechnic with wonderful offers in the windows enticing you to see Rome for eleven guineas, and Paris for three, and there was a hat shop with three glorious hats wickedly dangling on poles, and there was a pastry-cook's, a tobacconist's, and a theatre agency: all this variety paving the way between music and religion and the whirling, tossing, heaving melodrama of Oxford Circus.

Miss Rand loved Oxford Circus. It was like the sea in that it was never from one moment to another the same. Miss Rand knew the way that it had of piling the melodrama up and up,

faster and faster, wilder and wilder, bursting into a frantio climax and then sinking back, for hours perhaps, into comparative silence. She knew all its moods, from its broom and milkman mood in the early morning, to its soiled and slinking mood somewhere between midnight and one o'clock.

Just now it was getting ready for the evening. Up Regent Street the cabs and buses were straining, the flower women with their baskets were bunched in splashes of colour against the distant outline of the Round Church. Out of every door people were pouring, and in the middle of the Circus three of the four lines of traffic were turned suddenly into something sleepy and indifferent by the hand of a policeman. For an instant the restless movement seemed to be crystallized—the hansoms, the bicycles, the omnibuses, the carts were all held, then at a sign the flow and interflow had begun once more; life was hurled in and hurled out again, stirred and tossed and turned, as though some giant cook were up in the heavens busy over a giant pudding.

And the light faded and the lamps came out, and Miss Rand, walking through two streets that were as dark and secret as though they were spying on the Circus and were going to give all its secrets away very shortly, passed into Saxton Square.

To-night Miss Rand had more to think about than Oxford Circus. She was tired after all the work that there had been during the last few days, and she always noticed that it was when she was tired that she was ready to imagine things. She had been imagining things all day and had found it really difficult to keep

steadily to her proper work, but out and beyond her imaginations there was, before her, this definite, tremendous fact—namely, that she would find, this evening, on entering her little drawing-room, that Mr. Francis Breton was being entertained at tea by her sister and mother.

It was a quarter to seven now, so perhaps he had gone, but at any rate there would be a great deal that her mother and sister would wish to tell her about him. A week ago Mr. Francis Breton had come to live on the second floor in 24 Saxton Square, had put there his own furniture, had brought with him his own man-servant (a most sinister-looking man). These matters might have remained (although, of course, Miss Lizzie Rand's connection with the Beaminster family made his arrival of the most dramatic interest) had not Miss Daisy Rand (Miss Lizzie Rand's prettier and younger sister) happened, one evening, to run into Mr. Breton in the dark hall; she screamed aloud because she thought him a burglar, became very shaky about the knees, and needed Mr. Breton's assistance as far as the Rand drawing-room. Here, of course, there followed conversation; finally Mr. Breton was asked to tea and accepted the invitation.

On this very afternoon must this tea-party have taken place. Lizzie Rand knew her mother and sister very well, and she had, long ago, learnt that their motto was, "Let everything go for the sake of adventure." That was well enough, but when your income was very small indeed, and you wished to do no work at all and yet to have your home pleasant and your life adventurous,

certainly someone must suffer. Everything had always fallen upon Lizzie.

Mrs. Rand's husband had been a colonel and they had lived at Eastbourne; on his death it was discovered that he had debts and obligations to a lady in the chorus of a light opera then popular in London. The debts and the lady Mrs. Rand had covered with romance, because she considered that they were due to the Colonel's insatiable appetite for Adventure—but, romance or no, there was now very little to live upon.

They moved to London. Daisy was obviously so pretty that it would be absurd to expect her to work, and "she would be married in a minute," so Lizzie had, during the last five years, kept the family. It would be impossible to give any clear idea of the effect on Mrs. Rand that Lizzie's connection with the Beaminster family had. Mrs. Rand loved anything that was great and solemn and ceremonious; she loved Royalties, bands and soldiers gave her a choke in her throat, the "Society News" in the *Daily Mail* was like a fine picture or a splendid play. She was no snob; it was simply that she saw life as a background to slow stately figures gorgeously attired.

In all England there was no one like the Duchess of Wrexe; in all England there was no family like the Beaminster family.

Even Royalty had not quite their glow and glitter; Royalty you might see any day, driving, bowing, smiling. The Queen had a smile for everyone and was at home in the merest cottage; but the Duchess, the Duchess—no one, not even Lizzie, on whose

shoulders the whole fortunes of the Beaministers rested, ever saw.

There was nothing about the Beaminsters that Mrs. Rand did not know, and so of course she knew all about the unhappy past history of Francis Breton. That any Beaminster should have behaved rather as her own dead colonel had once behaved gave one a link at once.

Mrs. Rand's mind was, at the best of times, a confused one, and, in the dead of night, she could imagine a scene in which the wonderful Duchess would send for her, give her tea, press her hands and say, "Ah! Dear Mrs. Rand, our men-folk—your husband and my grandson—what trouble they give us, but we love them nevertheless."

So romantic was Mrs. Rand's mind that she saw nothing extraordinary in the coincidence of Mr. Breton's arrival at their very doors. Of course he would arrive there! Where else could he arrive? And of course he would fall in love with Daisy, would reform for her sake; there would be a splendid marriage; the Duchess would thank Mrs. Rand for having saved her grandson.

Yes, Mrs. Rand had an incurably romantic mind.

Lizzie knew all about her mother's mind, and Daisy's mind. She dealt with them very much as she dealt with Lady Adela's mind or Lord John's mind. They were all muddled people together, and the clear-headed people had the advantage over them.

So with regard to her mother and sister Lizzie had developed

a protective feeling; she wished to save them from the inroads of the clear-headed people who might so rob and devour them.

She saw also that her connection with the Beaminster family was a very bad thing for her mother and sister because it encouraged them to be romantic and muddled and idle. But, at present, at any rate, there was nothing to be done.

As she turned into the grey silence of little Saxton Square she did hope that her mother and sister would not behave too outrageously about Mr. Breton. She was interested, she would like to see him; his whole possible relation to the Duchess, to Lady Adela, to Miss Beaminster set her own imagination working. She did hope that her mother and sister would not behave so disgracefully that they would frighten Mr. Breton away so that he would never come near them again.

And then, as she reached the door of No. 24, she thought for a moment of Rachel Beaminster.

"I like her," she thought, "I'd like to know her. She's never spoken to me like that before."

III

No. 24 had three floors: the ground floor was occupied by the Rands, the first floor by Breton and the second floor by an old decrepit invalid called Cæsar and his son, who was a bank clerk.

Down in the basement lived Mr. and Mrs. Tweed, owners of the whole house; he had been a butler and she a housekeeper,

and exceedingly respectable they were. Every floor had its own kitchen and every lodger found his own servants, but the hall was common for all the three floors, and if young Mr. Cæsar came in at two in the morning and banged the front door everybody knew about it.

It must have been a fine old house in its day, No. 24, and there were still fine carvings, good fireplaces and ceilings, high broad windows and thick solid walls. Mrs. Rand liked to think that her drawing-room had once seen fine eighteenth-century ladies reflected in its mirrors, heard the tapping of high-heeled shoes on its polished floors. The thought of those glorious days gave her own rather faded furniture a colour and a touch of poetry. Sometimes, Lizzie thought with a sigh, if her mother had inhabited a plain nineteenth-century house living within a small income would have been easier for her.

Lizzie, entering the drawing-room, knew at once that Mr. Breton was still there. She saw that he was tall and spare, that he had no left arm, that he had a rather small pointed brown beard and eyes that struck her as fierce and protesting. She did not know whether it were the beard or the eyes or the absence of the arm, but at her first vision of him she said to herself: "He's too dramatic; it's not quite real," and her second thought was: "He's just what mother will like him to be!"

He was standing against the window, and he wore a black suit, a little faded. The blinds had not been drawn, and the square beyond the window was elephant grey, with the lamps at each

corner a dim yellow; there was a thin rather ragged garden in the middle of the square, and in the garden was a statue of a nymph, old and deserted, and some trees now faintly green. Over it all was a sky so pale that it was more nearly white than blue.

Although the curtains had not been drawn a lamp in the middle of the room was lit and the fire burnt merrily. The furniture had once been good and was now respectable. There were several photographs, a copy of "The Fighting Téméraire," and a water-colour sketch of "Lodore Falls." There was a book-case with the works of Tennyson, Longfellow, and Miss Braddon, and on one of the tables two French novels, one by Gyp and one by Zola.

Mrs. Rand would have been handsome had her grey hair been less untidy and her clothes more uniform in design and colour. Her blouse was cut too low and she wore too many rings; her eyes always wore a lying-in-wait expression, as though she might be called on to be excited at any moment and didn't wish to miss the opportunity.

Daisy Rand was pretty and pink with light fluffy hair. All her clothes looked as though their chief purpose were to reveal other clothes. The impression that she left on a casual observer was that she must be cold in such thin things.

Lizzie, looking at Frank Breton, could not tell what impression her sister and mother had made upon him. "At any rate," she thought, "he's stayed a long time. That looks as though he had been entertained." She was introduced to him and liked the cool,

firm grasp of his hand. She saw that her mother and Daisy were quiet and subdued—that was a good thing. She caught, before she sat down, his instinctive look of surprise. She knew that he had not expected her to be like that.

"We've been telling Mr. Breton, Lizzie," said Mrs. Rand, "all about the theatres. He's been away so long that he's quite out of touch with things."

Lizzie always knew when her mother was finding conversation difficult by the amount of enthusiasm and surprise that she put into her sentences.

"So terrible it must be to have missed so many splendid things."

"I assure you, Mrs. Rand," said Breton, "that I've been seeing other splendid things in other countries. Now I'm ready for this one again."

Mrs. Rand was silent and at a loss. Lizzie knew the explanation of this. Her mother had been trying to venture on to the subject of Breton's family and had found unexpected difficulty. Perhaps there had been something in Breton's attitude that had warned her.

They talked for a little while, but disjointedly. Then suddenly there was a knock at the door, and young Mr. Cæsar, a bony youth with a high collar and an unsuccessful moustache, came in. He had not very much to say, but the result of his coming was that Lizzie found herself standing at the window with Breton; they looked at the square now sinking into dusk.

He spoke; his voice was lowered: "I understand that you are secretary to my aunt, Miss Rand?"

"Yes," she said.

"They haven't heard of my return with any great delight, I'm afraid?"

She noticed that he was trying to steady his voice, but that it shook a little in spite of his efforts.

"I don't know," she said, looking up and smiling. "I'm far too busy to think of things that are not my concern."

"They are giving a ball to-morrow night for my cousin?"

"Yes."

"Do you see much of her?"

"No—nothing at all. She's been abroad, you know."

"Yes, so I heard. But I saw her driving yesterday. She looks different from the rest of them."

All this time, as he spoke to her, she was conscious of his eyes; if only she could have been sure that the protest in them was genuine she would have been moved by them.

She did not help him in any way, and perhaps her silence made him feel that he had done wrong to speak to her about his affairs. They looked at the square for a little time in silence. At last, speaking without any implied fierceness, he said:

"You know, Miss Rand, I'm a wanderer by nature, and sometimes I find cities very hard to bear. Do you know what I do?"

"No," she said.

"Turn them into other things. Now here in London, do you never think of streets as waterways? Portland Place, for instance, is like ever so many rivers I've seen, broad and shining. And some of those high thin streets beside it are like canals; Oxford Circus is a whirlpool, and so on–"

He laughed. "I get no end of relief from thinking of things like that."

"You hate cities?" she asked him.

"No—not really. But it depends how they receive you. If they're hostile–" He shrugged his shoulders.

"And this square?" she said. "What's this square?"

"A pool. All the houses hang over it as though they were hiding it. It's restful like a pool. There's no noise–"

The statue of the nymph had disappeared. The trees were a black splash against the lamp-lit walls. Lights were in the windows.

He seemed suddenly conscious that it was late. When he had gone Lizzie stood, for some time, looking into the square and thinking how right he had been.

All that evening Daisy was out of temper.

CHAPTER V
SHE COMES OUT

I

Downstairs the dinner-party was at its height. Mrs. Newton, the housekeeper, went softly down the passages to give one last glimpse at the ballroom. There it lay, like a great golden shell, empty, expectant. The walls were white, the ceilings gold; on the white walls hung the Lelys, the Van Dycks, and at the farther end of the room Sargent's portrait of Her Grace, brought up, for this especial occasion, from the Long Drawing-room. There was the gleaming, shining floor, there the golden chairs with their backs against the wall, and there before each picture a little globe of golden flame ministering to its beauties, throwing the proud pale faces of the old Beaminsters into scornful relief, and none of them so scornful as that Duchess in the far distance, frowning from her golden frame.

Mrs. Newton was plump and important. She worshipped the Beaminster family, and it yielded her now intense satisfaction to see these rooms, that were used so seldom, given to their proper glory and ceremony. For a moment as she stood there and felt the fine reflection of all that light upon the shining floor, absorbed the silence and the space and the colour, she was

uplifted with pride, and thanked her God that she was not as other women were, but had been permitted by Him to assist in no small measure in the glories and splendours of this great family.

Then, with a little sigh of satisfied approval, she softly walked away again.

II

Two hours later Rachel Beaminster, standing a little behind her aunt, saw the people pressing up the stairs. To those who watched her, she seemed perfectly composed, her flushed cheeks, her white dress, her dark hair and eyes gave her distinction against the colour and movement of the room.

Her eyes were a little stern, and her body was held proudly, but her hands moved with sharp spasmodic movements against her dress.

As she stood there men were brought up to her in constant succession and introduced. They wrote their names on her programme, bowed and went away. She smiled at each one of them. Before dinner she had been introduced to the Prince—German, fat and cheerful—and the second dance of the evening was to be with him. Some of the men who had been dining in the house she already knew—Lord Crewner, Roddy Seddon, Lord Massiter, and others—and once or twice now the faces that were led up to her were familiar to her.

The great ballroom seemed to be already filled with people,

and still they came pressing up the stairs.

Rachel was miserably unhappy. For one moment before she had left her room, where her maid had stood admiringly beside her, when she herself had seen the reflection of the white dress and the dark hair and the flushed cheeks in the long mirror, for one great moment she had been filled with exaltation. This ball, this agitation, this excitement was all for her. The world was at her feet. The locked doors were at last rolling open before her and all life was to be revealed.

Pearls that Uncle John had given her were her only ornament. They laughed at her from the mirror, laughed and promised her success, conquest, glory. Life at that instant was very precious.

But, alas! the dinner had been a terrible failure. She had sat between Lord Crewner and Lord Massiter, and had no word to say to either of them. Lord Massiter was middle-aged and hearty and kind, and he had done his best for her, but she had been paralysed. They had talked to her about the opera, the theatres, hunting, books, Munich; she had had a great deal to say about all these things, and she had said nothing. Always within her there seemed to be rivalry between the Beaminster way of saying things and the other way. When Lord Crewner said to her, "What I like in music is a real cheerful little piece that one can go to after dinner, you know," there were a whole number of Beaminster observations to make. But as soon as they rose to her mouth something within her whispered, "You know that you don't mean that. That's at second hand. Give him your opinion." And then

that seemed presumption, so she said nothing.

It was all wretched and quite endless. Uncle John sent her encouraging smiles every now and again, but she felt that he must be disappointed at her failure. The food choked her. The tears filled her eyes and it was her pride only that saved her. Through it all she felt that her grandmother upstairs in her bedroom was planning this.

Afterwards the Princess, seeing perhaps that she was unhappy, was kind and motherly to her, and told her funny stories about her childhood in Berlin. But all the time Rachel was saying to herself, "You're a fool. You're a fool. You've got no self-control at all."

She had been dreading the introductions to so many young men, but she found that that was easy enough. They were not young men; they were simply numbers on her programme and they vanished as soon as they came.

Then the band in the distance began to play an extra, whilst the young men wandered about and discovered their friends, and the sound of the music cheered her. It amused her now to watch the people as they mounted the stairs. She noticed that all the faces were grave and preoccupied until a moment before the arrival at Aunt Adela, and then a smile was tightly fastened on, held for a moment, and then dropped to give way to the preoccupation again.

The room was so full now that it seemed that it would be quite impossible for any dancing to take place. Uncle John was

working very hard at introducing people to one another, and as she saw his good-natured face and his white hair her heart went out to him. If everyone were as kind as Uncle John how nice the world would be! Meanwhile her eyes anxiously watched the stairs, and as every woman turned the corner at the bottom the question was—"Was this May Eversley?"

There had been a battle about May. Aunt Adela did not like her, disapproved of her, would not hear of inviting her. Very well, then, Rachel would not come to the ball at all. They could give the ball for somebody else. If May were not asked Rachel would not come.

So Lady Eversley and May had both been asked, and of course they had accepted.

Rachel waited and gazed and was continually disappointed. The extra was over and soon the first dance would begin; with the second dance would arrive the Prince and Rachel would have no talk with May at all. It was too bad of May to be late. She had promised so faithfully—Ah! there she was with her air of one confidently conducting a most difficult campaign. She mounted the stairs like a general, gave Lady Adela the tiniest of smiles, and was at Rachel's side.

That clasp of May's hand filled Rachel's body with confident happiness. May's hardy self-control, her discipline derived from some stern old Puritans, dim centuries away, was all waiting there at Rachel's service.

"How late you are!"

"Mother was such a time. And then we couldn't get a cab. How are you, Rachel?"

"Dinner was terrible—all wrong. I hadn't a word to say to anyone. I'm better now that you've come."

"Is the Prince here?"

"Yes. I'm dancing the next dance with him. The Princess was very kind after dinner. Oh! May, dinner was a disaster, an absolute disaster!"

"Not nearly so bad as you thought, you may be sure. Things always seem so much worse."

And now May had been discovered. Gentlemen young and old dangled their programmes in front of her, were received, were dismissed. May had the air of a general, sitting fiercely in his tent and receiving reports from his officers as to the progress in the field. Confident young men were instantly timid before her.

The first dance was over. Against the white splendour vivid colours were flung and withdrawn. Threads and patterns crossed and recrossed, and then presently the glittering floor was waste and deserted; on its surface was reflected dark gold from the shining walls.

The second dance came, and with it the Prince. Rachel had now lost all sense of the ball having been given in any way for herself. The dancing, it comforted her to see, was not of the very best, and at once she found that she had herself nothing to fear. The Prince danced well, and soon she was lost to all sense of everything save the immediate joy of rhythm and

balance, and the perfect spontaneity of the music and her body's acknowledgment of it.

When it came to an end, and they were sitting in a corner, somewhere, he was a fat middle-aged man again, and she Rachel Beaminster, but she knew now for what life was intended.

After that, for a long period, her dancers did not concern her. They were there simply to supply her with that ecstasy of rhythm and movement. Sometimes they could not supply her because they were bad dancers, and one of her partners was indeed so bad that she ruthlessly suggested, after one turn round the room, that they should sit out. Then she sat in a room near at hand, irritated by the sound of that glorious music, and paying very scant attention to the young man's stammered apologies, his information about his experiences of Paris and the way that he shot birds in Scotland.

She was to go down to supper with Roddy Seddon, and she was waiting that experience with some curiosity. If her grandmother were so fond of him, then he must be a disagreeable young man, and yet his appearance was not disagreeable.

He looked as though, like Uncle John and Dr. Chris, he were one of the comfortable people. Dr. Chris, by the way, had not arrived. He had told her that he might not be able to escape until late hours.

And so, as the evening advanced, her happiness grew; impossible now to understand that speechlessness at dinner, impossible to find reasons for that earlier misery. She danced

now both with Lord Massiter and with Lord Crewner, and said exactly what she thought to both of them; impossible now to imagine anything but that the world was an enchanting, thrilling place especially invented for the happiness of Miss Rachel Beaminster.

III

Uncle John had been promised a dance; his moment arrived. He had watched her during the early part of the evening, and had been afraid that she was not at all happy.

She was so unlike other girls, and that first miserable hour seemed to him the most tragic omen of her future career.

"How is she *ever* to get on if she takes things as badly as this? I wish I could help her. I know so exactly how she must be feeling."

But imagine him now confronted with a figure that shone with happiness, with success, with splendour!

She caught his arm—"Come, Uncle John, we won't dance. We'll talk. Up here—There's no one in this room."

She ran ahead of him, found a corner for them both, and then, pushing him on to a sofa, twisted round in front of him, turning on her toes, flashing laughter at him, sitting down at last beside him, and then kissing him.

"Oh, my dear! I'm so glad," he said. "I thought you were miserable."

"So I was—at first—perfectly wretched. Now it's all splendid

—glorious!"

This was to him an entirely new Rachel. In her movement, her excitement, her immediate glad acceptance of the life that an hour ago she had feared with such alarm, he perceived an element that was indeed foreign to all things Beaminster. And this new attitude reminded him with renewed sharpness that he could not now hope to hold the old Rachel with the intimate affection that had been his before. She was slipping from him—slipping … even as he watched her, she was going.

She laid her hand upon his arm: "Uncle John, I'm a success! I am really. I can dance, dance beautifully! I can put these young men in their places. They're frightened!… really frightened."

"Of course—you're lovely—the biggest success there's ever been. But what was the matter with you at dinner?"

"Yes. Wasn't that dreadful? Everything went wrong, and the only thing I could think of was how glad grandmamma would be. I had a kind of paralysis."

Uncle John nodded his head. "I know exactly what it's like."

"Well, I shall never let myself be so stupid again—never! I swear it!" They sat in silence for some time, she, restless, straining towards the music, he a little overcome by her happiness.

There was a pause between the dances and then the band began once more.

"Have you danced with Roddy Seddon yet?"

"No. What's he like?"

"Oh! he's nice—you'll like him."

"I don't expect to. He's a friend of grandmamma's. Hark! There's the band again!… Come along, back we go!"

Smiling, radiant, she hung upon his arm. Afterwards, standing in a doorway, he watched her.

He sighed. "What a selfish old pig I am!… But she'll never be mine again."

IV

Uncle John held only for a moment Rachel's attention. No single person now, but rather a gorgeous pattern that the whole evening was weaving about her. She saw the lights, she heard the music, she felt the movement of her body, she gathered through a haze of happiness the faces of her uncles and Aunt Adela and others whom she knew, but now for the first time in her life she knew what happiness, happiness without thought, or doubt, or foreboding could be.

Thus it was that she came to Roddy Seddon, who was certainly enjoying himself: this, however, was not the first ball of his life nor even, if all the truth were known, his best. He had expected it to be solemn and sedate—you could not hope to find here the jolly kind of dance that they had had at the Menets', for instance, last week; that would not be possible in a Beaminster household.

It was all, to be honest, a little old-fashioned. Things were moving a bit faster nowadays. Waltzes and Lancers were all very

well, but one might have had a cotillon, something unexpected! However, May Eversley and one or two other girls had had the right kind of go about them. He smiled a little and tugged at his short bristling yellow moustache, and then discovered that it was time to take Rachel Beaminster down to supper.

This event was of more than ordinary interest to him. He was perfectly aware that most of his friends and relatives thought that it would be a very good thing for him to marry Rachel Beaminster. He was, himself, not scornful of this idea.

He was thirty-two, and it was time that Seddon Court in Sussex had a mistress; his life had been varied and exciting and it was right now that he should make some ties. There were a number of other reasons in favour of his marrying.

As to Rachel Beaminster, she was not pretty, but she was interesting. She was unusual; moreover she was a Beaminster, and an alliance with that ancient family would be, past dispute, a magnificent alliance. But the element in it all that intrigued him most was the fact that nobody could tell him anything about Rachel, even May Eversley who knew her so well was not sure about her. "You'll go on being surprised," she had said.

Surprise, indeed, was waiting for him this evening. On the few occasions that he had seen Rachel he had seen her grave, shy, a little awkward, most reserved. Now she met him as though she had known him for years, glowing, almost pretty, so burning were her eyes. At supper she laughed, called across the room to May, agreed with everything that everybody said, and with it all was

younger than any girl that he had ever known. The girls who were Roddy's friends talked about life at times more boldly than he would have talked with his men friends, and were, at all events, for ever hinting at the things that they knew.

Rachel hinted at nothing; she kept nothing back, she allowed him no disguises.

"Oh! don't I wish," she cried, "that this night could go on for ever just like this"—and he, taking the compliment to himself, agreed with her. He had expected to find someone haughty and cold, a young Aunt Adela with a dash of foreign temper.

He found someone entirely delightful. Afterwards, when they sat out on a balcony overlooking Portland Place, he was encouraged to talk about himself.

"I like all this, you know," he said, waving his hand at the grey mysterious street that the pale lamps so mournfully guarded. "I like this air comin' along from the park. I'm all for the open, Miss Beaminster—horses and dogs and rushin' along with the wind at your back. It's a rippin' little place I've got down in Sussex. I hope you'll see it one day—old as anything, with jolly Roman roads and such hangin' around, and the most spiffin' lot of gees. Look, the sun will be gettin' above the houses soon. I've seen some sunrises in my day. You ought to be on the Downs at night, Miss Beaminster."

Roddy was surprised at himself at the way that he was talking, but she really looked quite beautiful there in the window with her dark hair and her eyes and white dress.

"I can't tell you," she said, when it was time for them to part, "how much all you say interests me. I love horses too, and I adore dogs–"

"I've got a dog I'd like you to have," he began. "It's a–"

"Oh no," she answered. "Aunt Adela would never let me keep one here. Thank you all the same. But you'll let me come down to Seddon Court one day, won't you?"

"Let you!" Roddy could find no words.

She flung one glance at the square, where the dawn was beginning, and then was back in the ballroom again, dancing, dancing, dancing....

The sky was all pink above the roofs, and the birds were making a whirl of chattering, when her bedroom received her again.

Her maid was sleepy but proud.

"They all say it's been a great success, Miss Rachel."

"Success!" She stood for a moment in the middle of the room with her arms extended. "Oh! It's been glorious, glorious. I've never–"

She paused. Her arms fell to her sides—"Oh! Dr. Chris! Dr. Chris! He never came—he said that he mightn't be able. It was the only thing that was wrong"—Then more slowly, as she moved to her dressing-table—"And all the last part I never missed him."

"Well, I dare say," said Lucy, standing behind Rachel's chair and staring at the white face in the mirror, "that with his patients and the rest he couldn't get away–"

"Oh! But I ought to have missed him," said Rachel, and afterwards, lying in bed, sleepless with excitement, it was Dr. Christopher's face that she saw.

CHAPTER VI
FANS

"Il est doux de sommeiller a l'ombre chaude, sur le tiède oreiller d'un mal épicurisme et d'une intelligence ironique, très simple, assez curieuse, et prodigieusement indifferente, au fond."
Romain Rolland.

I

On the afternoon that followed the ball Lady Adela took Rachel to tea with Lord Richard.

It was a superb May afternoon; white clouds, bolster-shaped, were piled in the heavens and made, so rounded were they, the blue sky seem an infinite distance away. It was a day of sparkling dazzling gaiety—the air seemed electric with the happiness of the world, and, as they drove down to Grosvenor Street, Rachel felt that the little breeze that just touched the hats and coats of the people on the omnibuses was created simply by the joy of the beautiful weather.

As they moved slowly down Bond Street Rachel looked at the world and thought of last night. She looked at the men with their shining hats and shining boots; at the messenger boys and the young women with parcels and the young women without; at

the old men who thought themselves young and the young men who thought themselves old; at the fish shops and the picture galleries, at the jewellers' and the book shops, at the place where they taught you Swedish exercises and the place where there was a palmist with a Japanese name, and it was all splendid and magnificent and simply carried on the glories of the night before. Before the turning into Grosvenor Street there was a great crush of carriages and a long pause. In the carriage next to Rachel there was a very stout, very richly coloured lady with a strong scent and a pug dog. A little farther away there were two young gentlemen in a smart little carriage, and their hats were so large and their expression so haughty and the top of their canes so golden that it seemed absurd that they should have to wait for anybody, and near them was a small boy on a little butcher's cart and near him an omnibus with a red-faced driver and any number of interested ladies, and all these incongruities seemed only to add to the haphazard happiness of this shining afternoon.

Rachel had many things to consider as she sat there. Aunt Adela did not interfere with her thoughts, because she never talked when she was in a carriage, but always sat up and looked wearily at the people about her. She had never very much to say, but the open air made her feel stupid.

Rachel was aware that last night had altered her point of view for all time. She was aware, as she sat there in sunshine, of a new world. By one glance at Aunt Adela was this new world made apparent. Aunt Adela had hitherto been important—Aunt Adela

was now unimportant.

Had this afternoon been wet and gloomy, then Rachel might have doubted that passionate discovery of the world that she now felt was hers, but here with this blazing sun and sky the note was sustained. Surely never again would Rachel be afraid of her grandmother, surely never again would she be afraid of anyone. Holding herself very proudly in a dress that was a soft primrose colour and in a hat that was dark and shady, Rachel looked round about her on the world.

"There's Lady Massiter!" Lady Adela smiled lightly and bowed a very little—"Monty Carfax is with her."

Rachel thought of Lord Massiter, and wondered again at last night's dinner—"How could I have been like that? How *could* I?"

There passed them a very handsome carriage with a little dark handsome lady who looked happily round about her, all alone in her magnificence. Rachel did not know whether her aunt had seen or no: here was the Beaminster arch-enemy, Mrs. Bronson, a young American widow, incredibly rich, incredibly fascinating, incredibly bold. Mrs. Bronson had been in London only a year, had snapped her jewelled fingers at the Beaminsters and everything that they stood for, had laughed at snubs and threats, was intending, so it was said, to have London at her feet in a season or two.

Rachel considered her. She was like some jewelled bird of paradise. She was—one must admit it—better suited to this glorious day than was Aunt Adela.

Why need Aunt Adela refuse to be glad because the sun was shining? Why could not Aunt Adela have said something pleasant about last night's dance? Why must this absurd outward dignity be so carefully maintained? Why when one was looking attractive in a primrose dress could one's aunt not say so?

That reminded her of Roddy Seddon.

She liked him. He might be a real friend like Dr. Christopher. The thought of him made her, as she sat there in the sun, feel doubly certain that the world was a comfortable, reassuring place and that that vision of cold spaces and dark forests that had been so often with her was now to be banished like an evil dream never to return.

At the end of Grosvenor Street the trees were so green that they might have been painted, and here they were at Uncle Richard's house.

II

But, with the closing of Uncle Richard's doors the sun was taken from the world. Uncle Richard's house was always soft and dim, like one of those little jewel cases, all wadding and dark wood. Uncle Richard's carpets were so thick and soft that everyone seemed to walk on tip-toe, and the wonderful old prints in the hall and the beautiful dark carving on the staircase and the sudden swiftness of the doors as they closed behind you only helped to increase the impression that everything here, yourself

included, was in for a beautiful exhibition, and that light might hurt the exhibits.

Uncle Richard's study, where they always had tea, was lined from roof to ceiling with book-cases, and behind the shining glass there gleamed the backs of the haughtiest and proudest books in the world. For, were they old and dingy, then they were first editions of transcendent value, and were they new and shining, then were they "Editions de luxe," or some of Uncle Richard's favourites bound in the most intricate and precious of bindings.

Some china on the mantelpiece was so valuable that housemaids must surely have a sleepless time because of it, and all the furniture was so conscious of its rich and ancient glories that to sit down on the chairs or to lean on the tables was to offer them terrible insults.

Two Conders and a Corot shone from the grey walls.

In the midst of this was Uncle Richard, elaborately, ironically indifferent to all emotions. "I have governed the country, yes—but really, my friends, scarcely a job for a fine spirit nowadays. I have collected these few things—yes, but after all what does it come to? Don't many pawn-brokers do the same?"

Rachel, as she stood in the room, felt that her newly found independence was slipping away from her. With the departure of the sun had fled also that consciousness of last night's splendours. About her again was creeping that atmosphere that was always with her in this room, something that made her feel that she was

a wretched, ignorant Beaminster, and that even if she did learn the value of all these precious things, why then that knowledge was of little enough use to her.

Uncle Richard with his high white forehead, his long dark trousers, his grey spats and his great collar that bent back, in humble deference, before the nobility of his neck and chin, Uncle Richard required a great deal of courage.

"Well, dear, I hope you enjoyed your dance."

"Yes, Uncle Richard, thank you."

"I left early, but everything seemed to be going very well."

"Yes, I think it was all right."

How different this from the fashion in which she had intended to fling her enthusiasm upon him. What, she wondered, would have been the effect had she done so? How would he have taken it? Could she have pierced that melancholy ironical armour that always kept the real man from her?

Meanwhile she was now back again in the old, old world; tea was brought, the footman and butler moved softly about the room. Aunt Adela said a little, Uncle Richard said a little … the lid was down upon the world.

Meanwhile, impossible to imagine that only a quarter of an hour ago there had been that gay confusion in Bond Street, impossible to believe Mrs. Bronson in her carriage anything but common and vulgar, impossible to prefer that dazzling sun to this cloistered quiet.

A wonderful lacquered clock ticked the minutes away. "I'm in

a cage—I'm in a cage—and I want to get out," someone in Rachel Beaminster was crying, and someone else replied, "Thank God that you are allowed to be in such a cage at all. There's no other cage so splendid."

Her primrose gown was forgotten; when Uncle Richard asked her questions she answered "Yes," or "No." Her old terrors had returned.

Upon the three of them, sitting thus, Roddy Seddon was announced. Roddy had assaulted and conquered Lord Richard in as masterly a fashion as he had subdued the Duchess and Lady Adela. He had done it simply by presenting so boisterous and honest an allegiance to the Beaminster standard. Lord Richard's irony had been useless against Roddy's ingenuous appeal. Moreover, there was the Duchess's advocacy—young Seddon was the hope of the party.

Roddy brought to view no evidence of last night's energies; he was as fresh, as highly coloured, as browned and bronzed and clear as any pastoral shepherd, his skin was so finely coloured that clothes always seemed, with him, a pity. Lord Richard's melancholy cynicism had poor chance against such vigour.

His eyes, as they fastened upon Rachel, brightened. She gave that dim room such fresh pleasure, sitting there in her primrose frock with her serious eyes and long hands. No, she was not beautiful; he knew that his last night's impression had been the true one; but she was unusual, she would make, he was sure, a most unusual companion. "You wouldn't think it," May Eversley

had said, "but there's any amount of fun in Rachel—you'll find it when you know her."

He was not sure but that he saw it now, lurking in her eyes, her mouth, as she sat there, so gravely, opposite to her uncle and aunt.

"How d'ye do, Lady Adela? How d'ye do, Miss Beaminster? How are you, sir? Thanks—I will have some tea. Pretty gorgeous day, ain't it? Rippin' dance of yours last night, Lady Adela."

Meanwhile, Rachel knew that she had nothing to say to him. Out there in the sunlight she might, perhaps, have maintained that relationship that had been begun between them the night before, but in here, with Aunt Adela and Uncle Richard so consciously an audience, with the air so dim and the walls so grey, Roddy Seddon seemed the most strident of strangers.

She sat, silently, whilst he talked to Aunt Adela. "I've never had so toppin' a dance as last night—'pon my soul, no. Young Milhaven, whom I tumbled on at Brook's at luncheon, said the same. Band first-rate, and floor spiffin'."

"I'm glad you liked it, Roddy," said Lady Adela, with a dry little smile. "I must confess to being glad that it's over."

Roddy glanced a little shyly at Rachel. "I suppose you're goin' hard at it now, Miss Beaminster?"

She looked across the tea-table at him. "There's Lady Grode's and Lady Massiter's, and Lady Carloes is giving one for her niece–"

"The Massiter thing ought to be a good one. Always do it well," said Roddy. "'Pon my word, on a day like this makes one

hot to think of dancing."

He was perplexed. He had instantly perceived that he had here a Rachel Beaminster very different from last night's heroine. She was now beyond all contemplated intimacy. He had heard others speak of that aloofness that came like a cloud about her. He now saw it for himself.

After a time he came across to her whilst Lady Adela and her brother talked as though the world consisted of one Beaminster railed round by high palings over which a host of foolish people were trying to climb.

He stood beside her smiling in that slightly embarrassed manner of his, a manner that caused those who did not know him to say that they liked Roddy Seddon because he was so modest.

"Such a day it seems a shame to be in town."

"Yes—isn't it lovely?"

"The opera's pretty hot in the evenin' just now. Have you been yet?"

"I've been in Munich often. I've never been here."

"My word! Haven't you really? Wish I could say the same. I'm always bein' dragged–"

"Why do you go if you don't care about it?"

"Can't think—always askin' myself. Why do half the Johnnies go? And yet in a way I like some sorts o' music."

"*What* kind of music?"

"Sittin' in the dark, in a room, with someone just strokin' the piano up and down—just strokin' it—not hammerin' it. I don't

care what the old tune is–"

Rachel laughed a little, but said nothing. Of course, she thought him the most thundering kind of fool, and this made him eager to display to her his wisdom and common sense.

But he could say nothing. There followed the most awkward silence. She did not try to help him, but sat there quietly looking in front of her.

Suddenly she said: "Uncle Richard, I want to see your fans again. I haven't seen them for a long time. I know you've added some lately. Sir Roderick, have you ever seen my uncle's fans?"

"No," he said. "I'd be delighted–"

Lord Richard's eyes lifted. The lines of his mouth grew softer.

Rachel watched him. "Now he'll pretend," she said, "that he doesn't care. He'll pretend that they're nothing to him at all."

He went, in his solemn guarded manner, to a place in the room where a large cabinet was let into the wall. He drew this cabinet forward, and then, out of it, moving his hands almost pontifically, he pulled trays, and on these trays lay the fans.

The others had gathered around him. There were nearly five hundred fans—fans Dutch and Italian and French and Chinese and Japanese; fans of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, of the eighteenth and of the Empire—modern Japanese heavy with iron spokes, others light as gossamer, with spokes of ivory or tortoise shell. There were French fans, painted only on one side, with pictures of fantastic shepherds and shepherdesses; there were Chinese fans with bridges and mandarins and towers;

Empire fans perforated with tinsel and such lovely shades of colour that they seemed to change as one gazed.

There they all lay in that rich solemn room, quietly, proudly conscious of their beauty, needing no word of praise, catching all the colour and the daintiness and fragrance that had ever been in the world.

Rachel drank in their splendour and then looked about her.

Uncle Richard's eyes were flaming and his hands trembling against the case.

Then she looked at Roddy Seddon. His head was flung back; with eyes and mouth, with every vein, and fibre of his body he was drinking in their glory.

His eyes were suddenly caught away. He was staring at her before she looked away—Her eyes said to him, "Why! Do you care like *that*? Do those things mean *that* to you?"

She smiled across at him. They were in communion again as they had been last night.

He was surprised that he should be so glad.

CHAPTER VII
IN THE HEART OF THE HOUSE

"Our interest's on the dangerous edge of things
The honest thief, the tender murderer,
The superstitious atheist, demirep,
That loves and saves her soul in new French books—
We watch while these in equilibrium keep
The giddy line midway: one step aside,
They're classed and done with. I, then, keep the line
—"

Bishop Blougram's Apology.

I

The Duchess could but dimly guess at the splendour of that fine May afternoon.

It had been her complaint lately that she was always cold and now the blinds and curtains were closely drawn and a huge fire was blazing. Her chair was close to the flame: she sat there looking, in the fierce light, small and shrivelled; she was reading intently and made no movement except now and again when she turned a page. Dorchester was the only other person there and she sat a little in the shadow, busily sewing.

From where she sat she could see her mistress's face, and

behind her carved chair there were the blue china dragons and the deep heavy red curtains and a black oak table covered with little golden trays and glass jars and silver boxes.

Neither heat nor cold nor youth nor age had any effect upon Dorchester. No one knew how old she was, nor how long she had been with her mistress, nor her opinions or sentiments concerning anything in the world.

She was tall and gaunt and snapped her words as she might snap a piece of thread.

From Mrs. Newton and Norris downwards the servants were afraid of her. She made a confidant of no one, was supposed to have no emotions of any kind, absurd and fantastic stories were told of her; she was certainly not popular in the servants' hall and yet at a word from her anything that she requested was done.

With Miss Rand only was it understood that she had a certain friendly relationship; it was said that she liked Miss Rand.

Dorchester had witnessed the whole of the Duchess's career.

As she sat now in the shadow every now and again she looked up and glanced at that sharp white face and those thin hands. What a little body it was to have done so much, to have battled its way through such a career, to have fought and to have won so many conflicts! It seemed to Dorchester only yesterday that splendid time, when the Duchess had been queen of London. Dorchester also had been young then and had had an energy as enduring, a will as finely tempered as had her mistress.

What a character it had been then with its furies and its

disciplines, its indulgences and its amazing restrictions, its sympathies and cold clodded cruelties, its tremendous sense of the dramatic moment so that again and again a position that had been nearly surrendered was held and saved. She had never been beautiful, always little and sharp and sometimes even wizened. But she gained her effects one way or another and beat beautiful and wise and wonderful women off the field.

And then sweeping down upon her had come disease. At first it had been fought and magnificently fought. But it was the horror of its unexpected ravages that had been so difficult to combat. She had never known when the pain would be upon her—it might seize her at any public moment and her retreat be compelled before the whole world. There had been doctors and doctors and doctors, and then operation after operation, but no one had done any good until Dr. Christopher had come to her, and now, for years, he had been keeping her alive.

Out of that very necessity of disease, however, had she dragged her drama. She had retired from the world, not as an old woman beaten by pain, but as a priestess might withdraw within her sanctuary or some great queen demand her privacy.

And it had its effect. Very, very carefully were chosen to see her only those who might convey to the world the right impression. The world was given to understand that the Duchess was now more wonderful than she had ever been, and it was so long since the world at large had seen her that every sort of story was abroad.

Certain old ladies like Lady Carloes who played bridge with her gained most of their public importance from their intimacy with her. It was rumoured that at any moment she might return and take her place again in the world, old though she was.

All this was known to Dorchester and she smiled grimly as she thought of it. The real Duchess! Perhaps she and Dr. Christopher alone in all the world knew the intricacies, the inconsistencies of that amazing figure. From the moment that illness had come every peculiarity had grown. Her self-indulgences, her temper, her pride, her egotism—now knew, in private, no restraint. And yet when her friends were there or anyone at all from the outside world she displayed the old dignity, the old grand air, the old imperious quiet that belonged to no one else alive.

But what, during these last years, Lady Adela had suffered! Dorchester herself had had many moments when it had seemed that she had more to control than her strength could maintain, but long custom, an entire absence of the nervous system, and a comforting sense that she was, after all, paid well for her trouble, sustained her endurance.

But Lady Adela had nothing.

The Duchess had always hated her children, but had used them, magnificently, for her purposes. They had all been fools, but they were just the kind of fools that the Beaminster tradition demanded.

Lady Adela had from the first been more of a fool than the others. She had never had the gift of words and before her mother

was, as a rule, speechless, and it had been only by her changing colour that an onlooker could have told that her mother's furies moved her.

Often Dorchester had attempted interference, but had found at last that it was better to allow the fury to spend its force. Then also Dorchester had noticed a curious thing. The Duke, Lord Richard, Lord John, Lady Adela were proud of these prides and tempers. They were proud of everything that their mother did; they might suffer, their backs might wince under the blows, but it was part of the tradition that their mother should thus behave.

Dorchester fancied that sometimes there was flashed upon them a sudden suspicion that their mother was in these days only an old, ailing, broken woman—no great figure now, no magnificent tyrant, no mysterious queen of society. And then Dorchester fancied that she had noticed that when such a suspicion had come upon them they had put it hastily aside and locked it up and abused themselves for such baseness.

Curious people, these Beaminsters!

Well, it was no business of hers. And, perhaps, after all she had herself some touch of that feeling, some fierce impatient pride in those very tempests and rebellion. After all, was there anyone in the world like this mistress of hers? Was there another woman who would bear so bravely the pain that she bore? And was not that fierce clutch on life, that energy with which she tried still to play her part in the great game, grand in its own fashion?

Would not Dorchester also fight when her time came?

She looked across the firelight at her mistress. When would arrive the inevitable moment of surrender? How imminent that moment when in the eyes of all those about her the old woman would see that all that was now hers was a quiet abandonment to death!

Well, there would be some fine, savage struggling when that crisis struck into their midst. Dorchester smiled grimly, and then, in spite of herself, sighed a little.

They were all growing old together.

II

At five o'clock came Dr. Christopher, and Dorchester moved into the other room and left the two together. With his large limbs and cheerful smile he made the Duchess seem slighter and more fragile than ever, and she herself felt always with his coming some addition of warmth and strength; each visit, so she might have expressed it, gave her life for at least another tiny span.

That he, knowing so much of the follies and catastrophes of life, should yet be an optimist, would have proved him in her opinion a fool had she not known, by constant proof, that he was anything but that. "Well, one day he will discover his mistake," she would say, and yet, perversely, would cling to him for the sake of this very illusion. He helped her courage, he helped her battle with her pain, he gave her, sometimes, some shadowy sense of shame for her passions and rebellions, but, more than all this, he

yielded her a reassurance that life, precious, adorable, wonderful life, was yet for a little time to be hers.

He knew well enough the influence that he possessed, and when, as on this afternoon, he felt it his duty to avail himself of it, he could not pretend that he faced his task with any exultation.

That he should rouse her fury, as he had one or twice already roused it, meant humiliation for him as well as for herself, and afterwards embarrassment for them both as they saw those scenes in retrospect.

She glanced up at him carefully as he came in and knew him well enough to realize that there was something that he must say to her. There had been other such occasions, she remembered them all. Sometimes she herself had been the subject of them, something that was injuring her health, some indulgence that he could not allow her. Sometimes the battle had been about others; she had fought him and on occasions it had seemed that their relationship was broken once and for all, that nothing could cover the words that had been spoken—but always through everything she had admired his courage.

The way had always been to stand up to her.

For a little time they talked about her health, and then there fell a pause. She, leaning back in her chair with her thin, sharp hands on her lap, watched him grimly as he sat on the other side of the fireplace, leaning forward a little, looking into the fire.

"Well," she said at last. "What is it?" Her voice was deep, but every word was clear-cut, resonant.

"There *is* something—two things," he answered her slowly. "You can dismiss me for an interfering old fool, you know. You often have been tempted to do it before, I dare say."

"I have," she said. "Go on."

But as she spoke she drew her hands a little more closely together. She was not quite so ready for these battles as she had once been. She was afraid a little now. A new sensation for her; she hated that restricting awkwardness that would remain between them for days afterwards.

She looked at his red, cheerful face and wondered impatiently why he must always be meddling in other people's affairs. She hated Quixotes.

"Your Grace," he began again, "has only got to stop me and I'll say no more."

"Oh yes, you will," she said impatiently. "I know you. Say what you please."

"I want to speak about Francis Breton–" He paused, but she said nothing, only for an instant her whole face flashed into stone. The firelight seemed for an instant to hold it there, then, as the flame fell, she was once again indifferent.

Christopher had grasped his courage now. He went on gravely:

"I must speak about him. I know how unpleasant the whole subject is to you. We've had our discussions before and I've fought his battles with all the world more times than I can count. You must remember that I've known Frank all his life—I knew his unhappy father. I've known them both long enough to realize

that the boy's been heavily handicapped from the beginning–"

"Must you," she said, looking him now full in the face, "must it be this? Have we not thrashed it out thoroughly enough already? I don't change, you know."

He understood that she was appealing to his regard for their own especial relationship. But there was a note of control in her voice; he knew that now she would listen:

"I've cared for Frank during a number of years. I know he's weak, impulsive, incredibly foolish. He's always been his own worst enemy. I know that the other day he wrote a most foolish letter–"

"It was a letter beyond forgiveness," she said, her voice trembling.

"Yes, I would give anything to have prevented it. I know that when he was in England before I pleaded for him, as I am doing now, and that by a thousand foolhardy actions he negatived anything that I could say for him.

"I'm urging no defence for the things that he did, the shady, disreputable things. But he has come back now, I do verily believe, ready, even eager, to turn over a new leaf. I–"

She interrupted him, smiling.

"Yes. That letter–"

"Oh, I know. But isn't it a very proof of what I say—would anyone but a foolhardy boy have done such a thing? Sheer bravado, hoping behind it all to be taken back to the fold—eager, at any rate, not to show a poor spirit, cowardice."

"Over thirty now—old for a boy–"

"In years, yes. But younger, oh! ages younger than that in spirit, in knowledge of the world, in everything that matters—I know," he went on more slowly, smiling a little, "that you've called me sentimentalist times without number—but really here I'm not urging you to anything from sentimental reasons. I'm not asking you to take him back and kill the fatted calf for him.

"I'm asking nothing absurd—only that you, his relations, all that he has of kith and kin, should not be his enemies, should not drive him to desperation—and worse."

"If you imagine," she said steadily, "that his fate is of the smallest concern to me you know me very little. I care nothing of what becomes of him. He and I have been enemies for many years now and a few words from you cannot change that."

"I'm only asking you," he replied, "to give him a chance. See what you can make of him, instead of sending him into the other camp—use him even if you cannot care for him. There's fine stuff there in spite of his follies. The day might come, even now, when you will own yourself proud of him–"

But she had caught him up, leaning forward a little, her voice now of a sharper turn. "The other camp? What other camp?"

He caught the note of danger. "I only mean," he said, choosing now his words with the greatest care, "that if you turn Frank definitely, once and for all, from your doors, there may be others ready to receive him–"

"His men and his women," she broke in scornfully; "don't

I know them? I've not lived these years without knowing the raffish tenth-rate lot that failures like Frank Breton affect–"

"No—there are others," Christopher said firmly, "Mrs. Bronson, for instance–"

At that name she broke in.

"Yes—exactly. Mrs. Bronson. Oh! I know the kind of crowd that Mrs. Bronson and her like can gather. They are welcome to Francis and he to them."—She paused. He saw that she was controlling herself with a great effort. For a little while there was silence and then she went on, more quietly:

"There, now you have it. That is why there can never be any truce between Francis and myself. It is more than Francis—it is all the things that he stands for, all the things that will soon make England a rubbish heap for every dirty foreigner to dump his filth on to. Hate him? Why, I'll fight him and all that he stands for so long as there's breath in my body–"

"But Frank is with you," Christopher urged eagerly, "if you'll let him be. He's only in need of your hand and back he'll come. He's waiting there now—longing, in spite of his defiance, for a word. Give him it and in the end I know as surely as I sit here that he'll be worth your while–"

"What can he do for me?"

"Ah! He'll show you. After all, he is one of the family; he's miserable there in his exile. He's got your own spirit—he'd die rather than own to defeat—but he'll repay you if you have him."

He saw then, as she turned towards him, that he had done no

good.

"Listen," she said, "I've heard you fairly. Let us leave this now, once and for all. I tell you finally no word that God Almighty could speak on this business could change me one atom. Francis Breton and I are foes for all time. I hate not only himself and the miserable mess that he's made of his life, I hate all this new generation that he stands for.

"I hate these new opinions, I hate this indulgence now towards everything that any fool in the country may choose to think or say. In my day we knew how to use the fools. Took advantage of their muddle, ran the world on it. I loathe this tendency to make everyone as intelligent as they can be! Why! in God's name! Give me two intelligent men and a dozen fools and you'll get something done. Take a wastrel like Frank and turn him out. Take muddlers like my family and keep 'em muddled. Richard ran the country well enough for a time or two, and he's been a muddler from his childhood.

"All this cry to educate the people, to be kind to thieves and murderers! to help the fools—my God! If I still had my say—Whilst there's breath in me I'll fight the lot of them."

She leant back in her chair, waited for breath, and then went on more mildly:

"You may like all this noise and clamour, Doctor. You may like your Mrs. Bronson and the rest—common, vulgar, brainless—ruling the world. Every decent law that held society together is being broken and nobody cares.

"Frank Breton may find his place in this new world. He has no place in mine."

Then she added: "So much for that—what's the other thing?"

But he hesitated. Her voice was tired, even tremulous, and he was aware as he looked across at her that her emotions now treated her more severely than they had once done. At the same time he was aware that giving free play to her temper always did her good.

"Well—perhaps—another day–"

"No—now. I may as well take my scoldings together—it saves time!"

He stood up and, leaning on the mantelpiece with one arm, looked down upon her.

"Here," he said, "I'm afraid I may seem doubly impertinent, but it's a matter that is closer to me than anything in the world. You know that I'm a lonely old bachelor and that all those sentiments that you accuse me of must find some vent somewhere. I'm fonder of Rachel, I think, than I am of anyone in the world, and it's only that affection and the feeling that, in some ways, I know her better than any of you do that give me courage to speak."

He could see that now she was reaching the limits of her patience.

"Well—what of Rachel?"

"I understand—I know—that you—that all of you intend that she shall marry young Seddon–"

"Well?"

"I know that it is impertinent of me, but, as I have said, I think I know Rachel differently from anyone else in the world. She is strange—curiously ignorant of life in many ways, curiously wise in others. Her simplicity—the things that she takes on trust—there is no end to it. The things, too, that she cannot forgive—she doesn't know how often, later on, she will have to forgive them—

"But the first man who breaks her trust–"

"Thank you for this interesting light on Rachel's character. What does it mean?"

"It means," he said abruptly, "that she mustn't be hurt. Your Grace may turn me out of the house here and now if you will, but Seddon is the wrong man for her to marry–"

"What are his crimes?" Her voice was rising, and her hand tapped impatiently on her dress.

"I know him only slightly, but common repute—anyone who is in the London world at all will tell you—his reputation is bad. I've nothing against him myself, but his affairs with women have been many. He is no worse, I dare say, than a thousand others. At least he's young—and I myself, God knows, am no moralist. But to marry him to Rachel will be a crime."

He knew as he heard his own voice drop that the scene that he dreaded was upon him. The air was charged with it. In the strangest way everything in the room seemed to be changed because of it. The furniture, the dragons, the tables, the very trifles of gold and silver, seemed to withdraw, leaving the air

weighted with passion.

She was trembling from head to foot. Her voice was very low.

"You've gone too far. What business is this of yours? How dare you come to me with these tales? How dare you? You've taken too much on your shoulders. See to your own house, Doctor–"

He stepped back from the fireplace.

"Please—to-morrow–"

"No. Here and now." Her words flashed at him. "You've begun to think yourself indispensable. Because I've shown you that I rely upon you—Because, at times, I've seemed to need your aid —therefore you've interfered in matters that are no concern of yours."

"They are concerns of mine," he answered firmly, "in so far as this affair is connected with my friend."

"Your friend and my granddaughter," she retorted. "But it is not only that. I will return you your own words. You say that your friend is in danger—what of mine? You have dared to attack someone who is more to me than you and all the rest of the world put together. Someone whom I care for as I have never cared for my own sons. It was bold of you, Dr. Christopher, and I shall not forget it."

He took it without flinching. "Very well," he said. "But my word to the end is the same. If you marry Seddon to your granddaughter you do your own sense of justice wrong."

At that the last vestige of restraint left her. Leaning forward

in her chair she poured her words upon him in a torrent of anger. Her voice was not raised, but her words cut the air, and now and again she raised her hands in a movement of furious protest.

She spared him nothing, dragged forward old incidents, old passages between them that he had thought long ago forgotten, reminded him of occasions when he had been mistaken or over-certain, accused him of crimes that would have caused him to leave the country had there been a vestige of truth in her words; at last, beaten for breath, gasped out: "Sir Roderick Seddon shall know of what you accuse him. He shall deal with you–"

"I have nothing," Christopher answered gravely, "against Seddon—nothing except that he should not marry Rachel!"

"You have attacked him!" she gasped out. "He—shall—answer."

But her rage had exhausted her. She lay back against her chair, heaving, clutching at the arms for support.

He summoned Dorchester, but when he approached the Duchess feebly motioned him away.

"I've—done—with you—never again," she murmured.

She seemed then most desperately old. Her dress was in disorder, her face wizened with deep lines beneath her eyes and hollows in her cheeks.

Christopher waited while Dorchester helped her mistress into the farther room. For some time there was silence. The room was stifling, and, impatiently, he pulled back the heavy red curtains.

He sat, waiting, eyeing the stupid dragons, every now and

again glancing at his watch.

Even now the room seemed to vibrate with her voice, and he could imagine that the French novel, fallen from her lap on to the carpet, winked at him as much as to say:

"Oh, we're up to her tempers, aren't we? We know what they're worth. *We* don't care!"

At last Dorchester appeared.

"Her Grace is in bed and will see you, sir," she said.

Her face was grave and without expression.

After another glance at his watch he passed into the bedroom.

CHAPTER VIII
THE TIGER

"For every Manne there lurketh hys Wilde Beast."
Sardus Aquinas (1512).

I

Brun, meeting Christopher one day, had asked him to tea in his flat, and then, remembering his interest in the Beaminster history, invited him to bring Breton with him.

"I haven't seen him for years. I'd like to see him again."

Christopher had accepted this invitation, and now on a sultry afternoon in June found himself sitting in Brun's rooms. Brun's sitting-room had a glazed and mathematical appearance as though, from cushions to ceiling, it had been purchased at a handsome price from a handsome warehouse. It was not comfortable, it was very hot.... The narrow street squeezed between Portland Square and Great Portland Street lay on its back, the little windows of its mean houses gasping like mouths for air, the hard sun pouring pitilessly down.

No weather nor atmosphere ever affected Brun. His clothes as well as his body had that definite appearance of something outside change or disorder. He might have been, one would

allow, something else at earlier stages before this final result had been achieved (as a painting is presented to the observer before its completion), but surely now nothing would ever be done to him again. Surveying him, he appeared less a man with a history, origins, destinies about him than an opinion or a criticism. He was designed exactly by Nature for cynical observation, and was intended to play no other part in life.

"Well, Christopher?" said Brun. "Hot, isn't it?"

"My word—yes. Breton's coming along presently."

"Good. I've asked Arkwright the explorer. Nice fellow." They sat in silence for a little. Then Brun said:

"Interested in writers, Christopher?"

"Not very much. Why?"

"Just been lunching with a young novelist, Westcott. What he said interested me. Of course, he's very young, got no humour, takes himself dreadfully seriously, but he asked my advice—and it is as a sign of the times over here that I mention it."

"Go ahead."

"He tells me that a number of young novelists are going to band themselves into a kind of Artists' Young Liberty movement—artists, poets, novelists, some thirty altogether—going to have a magazine, do all kinds of things. Some of the older men will scoff. At the same time–"

"Well?" said Christopher.

"They'd asked him to join. He wanted my opinion."

"What did you say?"

"He interested me—he was a kind of test case. It would mean that, commercially, from the popular point of view, it would put him back for years. Those young men will all be put down as conceited cranks. They will tilt at the successful popular men like Lawson and the others, will worship at the feet of the unsuccessful 'Great' men like Lester and Cotton. The papers will hate 'em, the public will be indifferent. The result will be that, in the end, they may do a big thing—at any rate they'll have done a fine thing, but they'll all die on the way, I expect."

Brun spoke with enthusiasm unusual for him.

"How was this a test of Westcott?" asked Christopher.

"Well—would he go or no? He's at the kind of parting of the ways. I believe success is coming to him, if he wants it; but he'll have to build another wall in front of his Tiger either before the success or after. If he joins this crowd of men, there'll be no walls for him ever again."

Christopher knew that when Brun had some idea that he was pleasantly pursuing and had secured an audience nothing would stay or hinder him.

He pushed a chair towards him.

"What do you mean by your Tiger?" he asked.

"My Tiger is what every man has within him—I don't mean, you know, a nasty habit or a degrading passion or anything of necessity vicious—only my theory is that every man is given at the outset of life a Beast in the finest, noblest sense with whom through life he has got to settle. It may be an Ambition, or a

Passion, or a Temptation, or a Virtue, what you will, but with that Beast he's got to live. Now it's according to his dealings with the Beast that the man's great or no. If he faces the Beast—and the Beast is generally something that a man knows about himself that nobody else knows—the Beast can be used, magnificently used. If he's afraid, pretends the Tiger isn't there, builds up walls, hides in cities, does what you will, then he must be prepared for a life of incessant alarm, and he may be sure that at some moment or another the Tiger will make his spring—then there'll be a crisis!

"Over here in England you're hiding your Tigers all the time. That's why you're muddled—about Art, Literature, Government, everything that matters—and an old woman like the Duchess of Wrexe—sharp enough herself, mind you—uses all of you.

"No Beaminster has ever faced his or her Tiger yet, and they're down, like knives, on everyone who does and everything that shows the Tiger's bright eyes–

"But I see—oh, Lord! I see—a time coming, yes, here in England, when the Individual, the great man, is coming through, when the Duchess will be dead and the Beaminster driven from power and every man with his Tiger there in front of him, faced and trained, will have his chance—

"More brain, more courage, no muddle—God help the day!"

"You see things moving—everywhere?"

"Everywhere. These fellows, Randall and the rest, are bringing their Tigers with 'em. They're going to put them there for all the world to see. It's only another party out against the Duchess, *she*

wants all the Tigers hidden—only herself to know about them—then she can do her work. She'll hate these fellows until they've made their stand and then she'll try to adopt them in order to muzzle them the better in the end.

"If Westcott hides his Tiger, forgets he's there, his way's plain enough. He'll make money, the Duchess will ask him to tea. Let him join these fellows and his Tiger may tear all his present self to pieces."

"What about yourself, Brun?"

"Oh, I'm nothing! I'm the one great exception. No Tiger thinks me worth while. I merely observe, I don't feel—and you have to feel to keep your Tiger alive."

Brun's little lecture was over. He suddenly drew his body together, clapped his mental hands to dismiss the whole thing and was drawing Westcott to the door.

"But I talk—how I talk! You bear with me, Christopher, because I must go on, you know. It means nothing—absolutely nothing. But they will have arrived now, so down we go. I go on in my sleep, exactly the same. And now tea—and I will talk less because Breton talks a great deal and so does Arkwright, and so do you...."

II

Arkwright came, and after a little, Breton. But the meeting was not a success. Arkwright had heard a good deal about

Breton's reputation, and although, on the whole, he was tolerant of any backsliding in women, he made what he called his liking for "clean men" an excuse for much narrow-mindedness.

It is quite a mistake to suppose that living in solitude and danger makes a human being tolerant. It has the precisely opposite effect. Arkwright was more frightened of a man who was not "quite right with society" than of any number of enraged natives. With natives one knew where one was. Whereas with a man like this …

Breton, anxious to please, made the mistake of showing his anxiety. Seeing an enemy round every corner he was a little theatrical, too demonstrative, too foreign. Arkwright disliked his beard and the movement of his hands. "He wouldn't have come, had he known...."

Breton had, of course, at once perceived this man's hostility. Returning to England had involved, as he had known that it must, a life of battles, skirmishes, retreats, wounds, and every kind of hostility. People did not forget and even had they desired to do so, his relationship family history prevented Breton's oblivion.

He was ready for discourtesy, however eager he may have been for friendship. But what the Devil, he thought, is this fellow doing here at all? If Brun brought him in he must have told him just whom he was to meet, and if he came with that knowledge about him, why then should he not behave like a gentleman? Breton's half timid advance towards friendliness now yielded to curt hostility.

Brun maintained his silence and only watched the two men with an amusement just concealed. Conversation at last ceased and the heat beat, in waves, through the open windows and the air seemed now to be stiffened into bronze. Beyond the room all the city lay waiting for the cool of the evening.

Christopher liked Arkwright and Arkwright liked Christopher.

Christopher had read one of Arkwright's books and spoke of it with praise and also intelligence, and nothing goes to an author's heart like intelligent appreciation from an unbiassed critic. But Breton was not to be won over. He sat deep in his chair and replied in sulky monosyllables whenever he was addressed.

Christopher soon gave him up and the three men talked amongst themselves.

The heat of the afternoon passed and a little breeze danced into the room, and the hard brightness of the sky changed to a pale primrose that had still some echo of the blue in its faint colour.

The city had uttered no sound through the heat of the day, but now voices came up to the windows: the distant crying of papers, the call of some man with flowers, then the bells of the Round Church began to ring for evensong.

Breton sat there, wrapped in sulky discontent. In his heart he was wretched. Christopher had deserted him; these men would have nothing to do with him. As was his nature everything about him was exaggerated. He had come to Brun's rooms

that afternoon, feeling that men had taken him back to their citizenship again. Now he was more urgently assured of his ostracism than before. Who were these men to give themselves these airs? Because he had made one slip were they to constitute themselves his judges? These Beaminster virtues again—the trail of his family at every step, that same damnable hypocrisy, that same priggish assumption of the right to judge. Better to die in the society of those friends of his who had suffered as he had done, from the judgment of the world—no scorn of sinners there, no failure in all sense of true proportion.

Christopher got up to go. He gave Arkwright his card. "Come in and dine one night and tell me all you're doing–"

"Of course I'll come," Arkwright said. "Only you're much too busy–"

"Indeed no," said Christopher. "One day next week you'll hear from me–"

Breton got up. "I'll come with you," he said to Christopher.

The two men went away together.

When they were gone Arkwright said to Brun, "Now that's the kind of man I like–"

"Yes," said Brun, laughing. "Better than the other fellow, eh?"

Arkwright smiled. "More my sort, I must confess."

III

Christopher and Breton did not speak until they reached

Oxford Circus. Here everything, flower-women, omnibuses, grey buildings, grimy men and women—was drowned in purple shadow. It might be only a moment's beauty, but now beneath the evening star, frosted silver and alone in a blue heaven, sound advanced and receded with the quiet rhythm of water over sand. For an instant a black figure of an omnibus stood against the blue and held all the swell, the glow, the stir at a fixed point—then life was once more distributed.

Here, as they turned down Oxford Street Christopher broke silence. He put his arm through Breton's:

"Well, Frank? Sulks not over yet?"

Breton broke away. "It's all very well, but I suppose I'm to pretend that I like being insulted by any kind of fool who happens to turn up. Good God, Chris, you'd think I was a child by the way you talk to me."

"And so you are a child," said Christopher impatiently, "and a thankless child too. Sometimes I wonder why I keep on bothering with you."

Christopher was, like other Scotchmen, a curious mixture of amiability and irascibility; his temper came from his pride and Breton had learnt, many years ago, to fear it. In fact, of all the things in life that he disliked doing, quarrelling with Christopher was the most agreeable. Then there were stubbornness and tenacity that were hard indeed to deal with. But to-day he was reckless; the heat of the afternoon and now the beauty of the evening had both, in their different ways, contributed to his ill-

temper. He knew, even now, that afterwards he would regret every word that he uttered, but he let his temper go.

"I wonder that you do bother," he said. "Let me alone and let me find my own way."

"Don't be a fool," Christopher answered. "There's nothing in the world for us to quarrel about, only I can't bear to see you giving such a wrong impression of yourself to strangers—sulking there as though you were five years old–"

"All very well," retorted Breton; "you didn't hear the way that fellow insulted me. I'll wring his neck if I meet him again. I'll–"

"Now, enough of that!" Christopher's voice was stern. "You know quite well, Frank, that you're hardly in a position to wring anyone's neck. You remember the account I gave you of my little dispute with your grandmother–"

"Thank you," said Breton fiercely. "You remind me rather frequently of the kind things you do for me."

And all the time something in him was whispering to him, "*What* a fool you are to talk like this!"

Christopher's voice now was cold: "That's hardly fair of you. I'm turning up here–" They paused. Breton looked away from him up into the quiet blue recesses of the side street. Christopher went on: "I only mean that if I were you I should drop hanging on to the skirts of a family who don't want you. I should set about and get some work to do, cut all those rotten people you go about with, and behave decently to strangers when you meet them. That's all. Good night."

And Christopher was gone.

Breton stood there, for a moment, with the tide of his misery full upon him. Then he turned down Oxford Street and drove his way through the crowds of people who were coming up towards the Circus. He was alone, utterly alone in all the world. Everyone else had a home to go to, he alone had nowhere.

Only a few weeks ago he had come back to England, with money enough to keep him alive and a fine burning passion of revenge. That family of his should lament the day of his birth, that old woman should be down on her knees, begging his mercy. Now how cold and wasted was that revenge! What a fool was he wincing at the ill-manners of a stranger, quarrelling with the best friend man ever had.

How evilly could Life desert a man and kill him with loneliness.

And then his mood changed; if Christopher and the rest intended to cast him off, let them. There were his old friends—men and women who had been ostracized by the world as he had been—they would know how to treat him.

He turned into the silence and peace of Saxton Square and there met Miss Rand, who was also walking home. The statue was wrapped in blue mist, the trees were fading into grey and the evening star seemed to have taken Saxton Square under its special protection.

"Good evening, Miss Rand."

"Good evening, Mr. Breton."

"Isn't it a lovely evening?"

"Yes. But *hasn't* it been hot?"

Miss Rand did not look as though she could ever, under any possible circumstances, be hot, so neat and cool was she, but she said yes it had been.

"Isn't it odd the way that as soon as it's fine people begin to complain just as they do when it's wet?"

"It gives them something to talk about—just as it's giving us something now," said Miss Rand, laughing.

Breton looked at her and liked her. She seemed so strong and wise and safe. She would surely always give one the kind of sensible encouragement that one needed. She would be a good person in whom to confide.

They were on the top doorstep now.

"No. I've got a key." He let her pass him.

They stood for a moment in the hall together.

He spoke, as he always did, on the instant's inspiration:

"Miss Rand?"

"Yes."

"I'm alone such a lot—in my evenings I mean. I wonder—might I come down sometimes and just talk a little? You don't know how bad thinking too much is for me, and if I might–"

"Why, of course, Mr. Breton—whenever you like."

Seeing her now, he thought, just now, with her sudden colour she looked quite pretty.

"I expect you could advise me—help me in lots of ways–"

"If there's anything mother or I can do, Mr. Breton, you've only got to ask—Good night–"

The door closed behind her.

He went up to his room, a less miserable man.

CHAPTER IX
THE GOLDEN CAGE

"She gives away because she overflows. She has her own feelings, her own standards; she doesn't keep remembering that she must be proud."
—The Lesson of the Master.

I

Those weeks were, to Rachel, a golden time. She did not pretend to deny or examine their golden quality—they were far, far better than she had imagined anything could ever be, and that was enough. She had never, very definitely, imagined to herself this "coming out," but it had been, at any rate, behind its possible glories, a period of terror. "All those people" was the way that, with frightened eyes, she had contemplated it.

And now the kindness that there had been! All the London world had surely nothing to do but to pay her compliments, to surround her with courtesies, to flatter her every wish. Even Aunt Adela had under the general enthusiasm, blossomed a little into good-will, even Uncle Richard had remembered to wish her well, even the Duke had cracked applause, and as for Uncle John! … he was like an amiable conjurer whose best (and also most

difficult) trick had achieved an absolute triumph.

And behind all this there was more. May, June and the early part of July showered such weather upon London as had surely never been showered before, and these brilliant days dressed, for Rachel, her brilliant success in cloth of gold and emblazoned robes. She felt the presence of London for the first time, as the hot weather came beating up the streets and the brilliant whites and blues and greens and reds flung back to the burning blue their contrast and splendour.

She felt, for the first time, her own especial London, and now the grey cool cluster of buildings at one end of blazing Portland Place and the dark green of the hovering park at the other end had a new meaning for her, as though she had only just come to live here and was seeing it all for the first time. In the streets that hung about Portland Place she noticed little shops—little bakers and little shoemakers and little tailors and little sweetshops—and they were all furtive and dark and shabby.

And these little shops led to the growth in her mind of an especial picture of her square of London life, Portland Place white and shining in the middle, with the Circus like a fair at one end of it, the park like a mystery at the other end of it, and, on either side, little secret shops and little dim squares hanging about it, and Harley Street sinister and ominous by its side.

Every element of Life and Death was there, the whole History of Man's Journey Through This World to the Next.

Behind all the joy and overflowing happiness of these weeks

this sudden setting of London about her was consciously present.

II

Since that meeting with Miss Rand on the day before the ball Rachel had often spoken to her. They met at first by accident and then Rachel had gone to Lizzie's neat little sitting-room to ask for something and, after that, had looked in for five minutes or so, and they had talked very pleasantly about the hot weather and the theatres and the ways of the world.

Behind all the splendour there was, for Rachel, the dark shadow of suspense. Was it going to last? What was to follow it? When would those awkward uncertainties that had once kept her company return to her? Now whatever else might be doubtful about Miss Rand, one thing was certain, that she *would* last, would remain to the end the same clean, reliable, honest person that she was now.

Imagine Lizzie Rand unreliable and she vanishes altogether! Rachel welcomed this and she also admired the wonderful manner in which Miss Rand accomplished her gigantic task. To run a house like this one and at the end of it all to remain as composed and safe as though nothing had been done!

Rachel herself might carry off a difficult situation by riding desperately at it, stringing her resources to their highest pitch, but afterwards reaction would claim its penalty.

The penalties were never claimed from Miss Rand.

So, gradually, without any definite words or events, almost without active consciousness, they became friends.

Rachel, suddenly, on one afternoon early in July, determined to go and pay Lizzie Rand a visit in her house.

That house in Saxton Square had acquired a new romantic interest since Rachel had learnt that the abandoned, abominable cousin, who defied Grandmamma and whose name one was never to mention, lived there. Rachel had considered this cousin more than once during these last months. She had resented, from the first, the fact that he was to be given, by the family, no chance of redemption. However bad he had been (and he had apparently been very bad indeed) his opportunity should have been offered to him. His life, she knew, had been hard, he was, like herself, an orphan, and he hated, as she did, her grandmother. Of course, then, he interested her.

She did not now say to herself that if this romantic cousin had not been staying in that house she would not have contemplated a visit to Lizzie. The Beaminster in her had just now the upper hand, and the Beaminster simply said that Saxton Square would be a nice place in which Uncle John, who was, this afternoon, taking her out for a drive, might leave her whilst he went to the club; later he could pick her up and take her home.

The Beaminster part of her did not acknowledge the cousin.

Quite casually she said to Uncle John, "I want you to leave me at Miss Rand's for half an hour this afternoon—she is helping me about some clothes."

Now Uncle John had during these last weeks continually congratulated himself on the disappearance of Rachel's irritable, unsettled self. Always lately one had been presented with her delightful young eager self and always she had been anxious to agree with Uncle John's proposals. The world had been going smoothly for him in other ways of late, and no one had been disagreeable. How pleasant to keep the world in this amiable condition and how dangerous to risk anyone's displeasure!

He had moreover almost (not quite) forgotten that his rascal of a nephew was living in the same house as Miss Rand, and, even if he did remember it, well, it was quite another part of the house, and in all probability Miss Rand had never spoken to Frank Breton, nor so much as said good day to him.

Finally it was so sumptuous a day, and Rachel was clothed in so radiant a happiness and so fluttering and billowing and chuckling a dress of white and blue, and he himself was looking so handsome in the most shining of top-hats, the broadest of black bow ties, the most elegant of pepper-and-salt trousers and the whitest of white spats, that complaining or arguing or disputing was utterly out of the question.

"Miss Rand's, my dear? What's the address?… Right you are —" so off they went.

She arrived to find Miss Rand, a round chubby lady in bright pink, and a stranger having tea together. The chubby lady was Mrs. Rand and the stranger was Francis Breton. She had not expected that her arrival would cause such a disturbance, nor that

she herself would discover the right and easy words so difficult to say. The little room seemed to be crowded with furniture and tea-things, and she, quite deliberately, put off any consideration of her cousin until the atmosphere had been allowed, a little, to settle around them.

Miss Rand looked at her almost sternly and was, plainly, at a loss. Mrs. Rand was excited, and so nervous that her tea-cup rattled in her saucer and she stayed for quite a long time with her finger in the tea under the delusion that she was using a teaspoon.

Mrs. Rand's absence of mind was generally due to the fact that she read one novel a day all the year round and that her thoughts, her hopes, her despairs were always centred in the book of the day, although when to-morrow came she could not tell you the author nor the title nor any of the incidents. Had she been to a play, then, for twenty-four hours following, it was the drama that held the field.

She spent her life in an amiable desire to remember, for the sake of her friends, the plays and books of the past. But she was never successful. As she said, "The attempt to keep up with the literature and drama of the day, although praise-worthy, demands all one's time and energy."

The Beaminster family alone of all other interests in the wide world might be calculated to draw her out of the realms of the imagination, and Rachel's entrance scattered all plots to the four winds.

Rachel sat down and, for a little while, Mrs. Rand held the

field. She told them all that this visit of Miss Beaminster was the most wonderful and unexpected thing, that it was like a novel, and that she would never forget it. "But I always do say, Miss Beaminster, that it's the unexpected that happens. Life's stranger than fiction is my opinion, and I don't care who contradicts me I shall still hold it."

At length Rachel had leisure to consider her cousin and then was, instantly, convinced that she had met him before. She also knew that she could not have met him before.

In the strangest way he was connected with those early dream years which, now, she struggled so sternly to forget. The snow, the bleak sky, the silence, the sleigh-bells, some strange voice speaking high in air as though from a distant summit, and all this coming to her with a poignancy that, even now, brought the tears to her heart and filled it to overflowing.

As she saw his thin body, his eyes, his head and the attitude of the boy in all his movements and gestures she knew that, for her, he belonged to that earlier world. She knew it so certainly that, although he had not yet spoken, she could be sure of the exact quality that his voice would have.

And confused with this recognition of him was the alarm that she always felt when her early life returned to her.

Also she was young enough to be pleased at the agitation into which her coming had thrown him. It meant, plainly, so much to him; although he was silent he leant forward in his chair, with his eyes fixed upon her, waiting for his opportunity.

Miss Rand, watching him, saw how tremendously this meeting with one of the family excited him, and, seeing him, her heart filled with pity. "He's so young. It is hard. He does want someone to look after him."

Rachel's happiness had, now, returned to her. She liked them all so much, it was all so cosy, it was so good of them to wish to see her. She talked with Mrs. Rand about the theatre and the opera.

"We're going to the opera to-night—the *Meistersinger*. I've heard it in Munich twice, but never with Van Rooy, who's singing to-night. I believe that's an experience one never forgets–"

Mrs. Rand did not really care about opera; everything in opera happened so slowly, except in *Carmen*, and even that was better simply as a play. She liked musical comedy because there you could laugh, or plays like *The Mikado*, for instance.

She was vague as to the *Meistersinger* and she had never heard of Van Rooy, but she said, "I agree with you, Miss Beaminster. There's nobody like him."

At that Breton struck in with something about music that he had heard in strange places abroad, and then Rachel, looking in his face for the first time, asked him about his travels.

As their eyes and voices met she was again overwhelmed with the vivid consciousness of their earlier meeting. She thought, "If I were to ask him whether he remembered that same snow and silence he would say yes—I know he would say yes."

Miss Rand, with eyes that were kind but very, very sharp,

watched them. She noticed the eagerness of Breton and wished that he did not seem quite so anxious to please. "But that's because he's young," she thought again.

And, now that he had begun, the words poured from him. With gesticulation that was faintly foreign, ever so little dramatic, he unpacked his adventures. He spoke as though this were, beyond all time, *the* moment when he must make his effect.

He did it well, a born teller of tales. And yet Miss Rand wished that he had not had to do it at all, that there had been more reserve, less drama, less volubility.

Mrs. Rand, an older Desdemona, listened spellbound. This was as good as getting a circulating library without paying a subscription. As she said to her daughter afterwards: "He really was as good as those novels by what's his name—you know who I mean—those delightful stories about those foreign places—and the sea."

He spoke of the first time that he had actually been conscious of the jungle. "Of course I'd been into it dozens of times—often and often. But there was a day—I remember as though it were yesterday—when we went up in a boat—some river or another—That river was the most secret and sleepy green, and the place all closed about it as though we'd gone into a box, and they'd closed the lid. Nothing but the green river and all the forest getting closer and closer and darker and darker, all blacker than you can imagine, and worse still when it was lighter—a kind of twilight—and you could see enough to make you shiver—

no sound but the animals, and the branches and the great plants and brilliant flowers all creeping and crawling—Suddenly—all in a flash—I wanted a lamp-post and a public house, a wet night shining on streets, the rattle of a hansom—I was suddenly ghastly frightened, and we got deeper and deeper into it, and human beings further and further behind, and only the beastly monkeys and the alligators and the hideous flowers. I can feel it still–"

Rachel was enthralled. He called up, on every side about her, that stern life of hers. He knew and she knew—they alone out of all the world. All her gaiety, her happiness, her interest of the last weeks went now for nothing beside this experience. He was not now related to the Beaminsters—to Grandmother, to Aunt Adela, to Uncle John—but to *her* and to that part of her that had nothing to do with the Beaminsters at all. The room, the commonplace furniture, the pictures of "Lodore Falls" and "The Fighting Téméraire," the little glimpses of the square beyond the window, these things shared in the mystery.

Miss Rand had seen her caught and held. "*She's* very young too," she said to herself a little grimly and a little tenderly also —"All too sensational to be true," she thought. "There's a little bit of unreality in him all the way through."

Mrs. Rand said: "What do you think of alligators, Miss Beaminster? Don't you agree with me that they must be most unpleasant to meet? I always dislike their sluggish ways when I see them in the Zoological Gardens."

Then upon them all broke the little maid with a husky "Miss

Beaminster's carriage, please, mem."

Rachel, as she said good-bye, was aware of him again as "her scandalous cousin." He too was now awkward and embarrassed. They said good-bye hurriedly and there was between them both a consciousness that no word of the family or their relationship had been mentioned.

"Well," said Mrs. Rand, when the door was closed, "no one in the world could have been pleasanter...."

III

They did not arrive at the opera that night until the beginning of the second act. It was Lady Carloes' box and she and Uncle John and Roddy Seddon were Rachel's companions.

All the way home in the carriage Rachel had been silent and Lord John, perceiving uneasily that some of the old Rachel was back again, had said very little.

Her mind was confused. At one moment she felt that she did not want to see him again, that he disturbed her peace and worried her with memories that were better forgotten. At another moment she could have returned, then and there, to ask him questions, to know whether he felt this or that: had he ever pictured such a place? Had he…?

And then sharply she dismissed such thoughts. She would think of him no more—and yet he did not look a villain. How delightful to persuade the family to take him back. Why should

she not help towards a reconciliation? She was herself so happy now that she could not bear that anyone should feel outcast or lonely—they were all very hard upon him.

It was not until she heard the voices of the apprentices that thought of her cousin left her. As she groped her way in the dark box and heard Lady Carloes' stuffy whisper (she had the voice of a cracknel biscuit), "You sit there, my dear—Lord John here. That's right—I knew you'd be late because …" she was gloriously aware that quite close to her the music that she loved best in all the world was transforming existence. She touched Roddy's hand and then surrendered herself.

She had been to Covent Garden now on four or five occasions and from the first the shabby building with its old red and gold, its air of belonging to any period earlier than the one it was just then amusing, its attitude, above all, of indifference to its aspect—all this had attracted her and won her affection. London, she discovered, was always best when it was shabbiest and one could not praise it more highly than by declaring, with perfect truth, that it was the shabbiest city in the world. Now, feeling instinctively that English apprentices (she had had already some taste of the Covent Garden chorus) would act too much or too little, she closed her eyes.

Now, as the music reached her, the old red and gold seemed a cage, swinging, swinging higher and ever higher with old Lady Carloes and Roddy Seddon and all the brilliant people in the stalls, and all the enthusiastic people in the gallery, swinging,

swinging inside it. She could feel the lift of it, the rise and fall, and almost the clearer air about her as it rose into the stars.

Then there came to her the voice for which she had surely all her days been waiting. It enwrapped her round and comforted her, consoled her for all her sorrows, reassured her for all her fears. It filled the cage and the air beyond the cage, it was of earth and of heaven, and of all things good and beautiful in this world and the next.

For the second time to-day her early years came back to her; the voice had in it all those hours when someone's tenderness had made Life worth living. "Life is immortal," it cried. "And I am immortal, for I am Love and Charity, and, whatever the wise ones may tell you, I cannot die." She felt again the space and the silence and the snow, but now with no alarm, only utter reassurance. And the cage swung up and up and there were now only the stars and the wind around and about them.

Then, in an instant of time, the cage, with a crash, was upon the ground. Across her world had cut Lady Carloes' voice—"Oh yes, and there's Lord Crewner—no, not in that row—the one behind—next that woman with the silver thing in her hair—four from the end–"

And Roddy Seddon's voice—"Yes, I see him. Who's he got with him?"

Lady Carloes again: "I can't quite see—Miss Mendle as likely as not.... You know, old Aggie Mendle's daughter...."

Rachel felt in that moment that murder was assuredly no

crime. Her hands shook on her lap and one of those passions, that she had not known for many months, caught her so that she could have torn Lardy Carloes' hair from her head had the chairs been happily arranged.

Fortunately the interruption had been accompanied by Beckmesser's entrance: that other voice was, for the moment, still. Then, as Sachs caught up Beckmesser's serenade, there came again:

"Well, of course if you can't go that week-end I dare say she'll give you another. Only I know she's settling her dates now."

"Yes, but it's a bore havin' to fix up such a long way ahead and you don't know what old stumers you mayn't be boxed up with–"

Oh! It was abominable! She had been seeing a great deal of Roddy during these last weeks, and ever since that visit to Uncle Richard she had been conscious of an intimacy that she had certainly not resented.

But any favour that he may have had with her was certainly now forfeited. His voice was again superior to Beckmesser:

"And so of course I said that if they *would* go to such shockin' rot I wasn't goin' to waste my evenin's–"

She pushed her chair back against his knees: "Beg pardon, Miss Beaminster, afraid I jolted you–"

"Oh! Keep quiet! Keep quiet!"

Her whisper was so urgent, so packed with irritation that instantly there was, in the box, the deepest of silences.

She sat forward again, anger choking her: she could not

recover any illusion. She hated him, *hated* him! The crowd came on with a whirl. Then there was that last moment when the old watchman cries to the genial moon and the silvered roofs.

Then the curtain fell.

Without a word, her face white, her hands still trembling, she rose to leave the box. She passed out into the passage and found that Roddy was by her side.

"I say, Miss Beaminster, I am most awfully sorry, most awfully. I hadn't any idea, really, that I was kickin' up that row. I could have hit myself."

She walked down the passage and he followed her. She was superb, she was indeed, with her head up, that neck, those hands, those flashing eyes. He had never seen anyone so fine. She ought always to be enraged. That instant decided him. She was the woman for a man to have for his own, someone who could look like someone at the head of your table, someone with the right blood in her veins, someone....

"I could *beat* myself," he said again.

"How dared you–" she broke out at last. They were, by good luck, alone in the passage. "How could you? What do you come for if you care nothing for music at all? If you can hear a voice like that and then talk about your own silly little affairs.... And the selfishness of it! Of course you think of nobody but yourself!"

"Upon my word, Miss Beaminster!"

"No, I've no patience with you. Go to your musical comedy if you like, but leave music like this for people who can appreciate

it!"

Oh! she was superb! Entirely superb! She ought to be like this every day of her life! To think that he should have the chance of winning such a prize!

Nevertheless she would not speak to him again and they went back to the box. She would not speak to Lady Carloes nor to her uncle.

Then as the loveliest music in all opera flooded the building her anger began to melt.

He had looked so charmingly repentant and, after all, the *Meistersinger* was long for anyone who did not really care for music—and then they all did talk. It was only in the gallery that one found the proper reverence.

Her anger cooled and then descended upon her the quintet, and she was once again swept, in her cage, to the stars.

Now she and all live things seemed to be opening their hearts together to God—no shame now to speak of one's deepest and most sacred thoughts. No fear now of God nor the Archangels nor all the long spaces of Immortality. The cage had ascended to the highest of all the Heavens, and there, for a moment, one might stand, worshipping, with bowed head.

The quintet ceased and Rachel felt that she could never be angry with anyone again. She wished to tell him so.

At last, the revels were over, the "Prieslied" had won its praises, Sachs had been acclaimed by his world, and they were all in the lobby, waiting for carriages, talking, laughing, hurrying

to the restaurants.

Her face was lighted now with happiness. She touched his arm.

"I didn't mean to be angry—like that. It was silly and rude of me. Forgive me, please–"

He turned, stuttering. "Forgive you!" He took her hand—"I ought to have been shot—Yes, I'll never forgive myself. You—you–" And then he could say no more, but suddenly, raising his hat, bolted away.

As the door swung behind him Lady Carloes turned a perplexed face—

"Why! he said good night! And now I shall never find–"

But Lord John appeared just then and all was well.

Going back, in the dark brougham, Rachel put her head on her uncle's shoulder and, exhausted with excitement and happiness and something more than either of them, cried her eyes away.

CHAPTER X
LIZZIE AND BRETON

"What of Adam cast out of Eden?
(And O the Bower and the hour!)
Lo! with care like a shadow shaken
He kills the hard earth whence he was taken."

Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

I

To the ordinary observer Lizzie Rand was, during that hot July, as she had ever been.

The servants in 104 Portland Place could detect no change, but then they did not search for one, having long regarded Miss Rand as a piece of machinery, symbolized by that broad shining belt of hers, happily calculated to fit, precisely, the duties for which it was required.

But Miss Rand herself knew that there was a sharp, accurate, shrewd piece of machinery named Miss Rand, and a breathing, emotional, uncertain human being called Lizzie. There had always been those two, but since the inadequacy of her mother and sister had been confronted with the stern necessity of

making two ends meet, Miss Rand had been in constant demand and Lizzie had only, by her occasional obtrusion, made life complicated and disturbing.

Miss Rand had told herself that Lizzie was now almost an anachronism, that the emotions in life that aroused her were bad cheap emotions, and that this was an age that demanded increasingly of women a hard practical efficiency without sentiments or enthusiasms.

These forcible arguments had for a time kept Lizzie in a darkened background; it was some years since Miss Rand had been disturbed. But now in the warm weather of 1898 Lizzie had not only reappeared, but had leapt, an insistent, shining presence, into urgent life. Miss Rand faced her—what had created her? A little, the weather, the beauty of those brazen days—A little, Rachel's coming out into the world, an adventure that had stirred the whole house into a new and sympathetic excitement—a little, these things. But chiefly, and no pretence nor shame could conceal the fact, did this new Lizzie owe her creation to the appearance of Francis Breton.

Lizzie Rand had had, from her birth, a romantic heart; she had had also a prosaic practical exterior, and a mind as hard and clear, if necessary, as her own most lucent typewriter.

The romantic heart had, throughout these years, been there, and now this romantic, scandalous, youthful, engaging unfortunate had called it out.

She was never so warmly attracted as by someone lacking,

most obviously, in those qualities with which she herself abounded. That people should be foolish, impetuous, careless, haphazard commended them straight to her keeping. "Poor dears" had their instant claim upon her. Her mother and sister were "poor dears" and she had suffered from them now during many years. Francis Breton was most assuredly a "poor dear!"

Here the Duchess a little flung her shadow and confused the mind. Although Lizzie had never seen that splendid figure she was, nevertheless, acutely conscious of her. She was conscious of her through her own imagination, through her mother, finally through Lady Adela.

Her imagination painted the old lady, the room, the furniture fantastic, strangely coloured, always with dramatic effect. Her picture was never precisely defined, but in its very vagueness lay its terrors and its omens.

Miss Rand, the most practical and collected of young women, could never pass the Duchess's door without a "creep."

Through her mother the Duchess came to her as the head of society. Society had never troubled Lizzie's visions of Life. She had, in her years with the Beaminsters, seen it pass before her with all its comedy and pathos, and the figures that had been concerned in that procession had seemed to her exactly like the figures in any other procession except that they were dressed for their especial "subject." But oddly enough when, through her own observation, this life, seen accurately at first hand, amounted only to any other life, seen through the eyes of her mother, it

achieved another size.

She knew that her mother was a foolish woman, that her mother's opinions on life were absurd and untrue, and yet that dim, great figure that the Duchess assumed in her mother's eyes, in some odd way impressed her.

Lastly, and most strikingly of all, came Lady Adela's conception to her. Lady Adela was in terror of her mother; everyone knew it, friends, relations, servants. Lizzie herself saw it in a thousand different ways—saw it when Lady Adela spoke of her, saw it in the way that Lady Adela addressed Dorchester when that grim woman was interviewed by her, saw it when Lady Adela was suddenly summoned to that room upstairs.

Lizzie, during the hours when she was writing from Lady Adela's dictation or working with her, found her dry, stupid, sometimes kind, never emotional. It was to her, therefore, the most convincing proof of the Duchess's power, this emotion, this alarm drawn from so dry a heart.

Now the influence that the Duchess had upon Lizzie was always a confused one. Persuasion from this source followed lines of reasoning that were false and led to some conclusions that were muddled and untrue.

Through such minds as her mother's and Lady Adela's no clear truth could come, and yet it was through such minds as these that the Duchess's influence descended upon Lizzie.

It descended now with regard to Francis Breton. It told Lizzie that Breton had been proved by society to be a scoundrel, that he

should be no worthy man's friend, that he belonged to that world, the world of shadows and past misadventures, that no proper soul might, with honesty, investigate.

This was what the Duchess told to Lizzie and perhaps by so doing increased her sympathy with the sinner.

II

It must not be supposed that Mrs. Rand had not, at first, been unsettled by scruples.

The fact that Breton was, in the eyes of the Beaminster family, a ne'er-do-well who had brought disgrace upon the family name had, for a time, distressed her, but the romantic hope of being herself the agent of his restoration to his grandmother, and the delightful manners of the scoundrel when he appeared, killed her alarm. Mrs. Rand's mind was a dark misty place except when the candles of romance were lit; when *they* flamed, blown by the wind though they might be, there was, around the candlesticks at any rate, a real and even splendid blaze.

One afternoon, towards the end of July, Mrs. Rand meeting Breton on their doorstep was moved to ask him whether he would come in and spend the evening with them, if he had nothing better to do. They had only a simple little meal, and would he please not bother to dress? Breton said that he would be delighted.

Mrs. Rand had been, that afternoon, to a romantic comedy in

which ladies and gentlemen with French accents had made love and escaped together and been caught together and been married together. Mrs. Rand had gone quite alone into the pit and had returned with tears in her eyes and affection for all the world.

So she had asked Mr. Breton to dinner.

After a while, however, she was a little uncertain. Daisy was away in the country with friends. How would Lizzie then like this unexpected visitor? Mrs. Rand was, quite frankly, frightened of Lizzie and complained of her a good many times a week to Daisy. Lizzie was for ever interfering with innocent pleasures; Lizzie was mean and unromantic and unimaginative; Lizzie was thoroughly tiresome.

The fact that Lizzie worked incessantly for her mother and her sister never occurred to Mrs. Rand at all.

Lizzie objected to all innocent amusement and she would, in all likelihood, object now.

However, when Mrs. Rand with a fearful mind said, "Oh, Lizzie dear, I've had such a delightful afternoon. I went to *Love and the King* and it was too charming—you ought to go, really—and Mr. Breton's coming to dinner to-night," Lizzie only smiled a little and asked whether there was food enough. Lizzie was *so* strange....

Alone in her bedroom Lizzie wondered at her excitement. She looked at her trim, neat figure in the glass, with the hair so gravely brushed, with her collar and her cuffs, with her compact businesslike air: what had she to do with excitement because a

young man was coming to dinner? "It must be because I'm tired —this heat," she said to the mirror. And the mirror replied, "You know that you are glad because your sister Daisy is away."

And to that she had no answer.

When he arrived he was grave and seemed sad and tired, she thought. Dinner was a serious affair and Mrs. Rand, who disliked people when they refused to respond to her moods, wished, at first, that she had not asked him, and felt sure that there was much truth in what people said about his wickedness.

Then, when dinner was nearly over, he brightened up and told stories and was entertaining. Mrs. Rand noticed that he drank much claret, but this was, after all, a compliment to her housekeeping. By the end of dinner Mrs. Rand almost loved him and wished that Daisy had been here to entertain him.

Of course it must be dull for a man with only a plain cut-and-dried girl like Lizzie for company.

Lizzie, meanwhile, knew that he was waiting for an opportunity of speech. She had read an appeal in his eyes when he had first entered the room, and now she sat there, curiously, ironically amused at her own agitation. "Lizzie Rand," she said to herself, "you're only, after all, the kind of fool that you despise other people for being. What are you after in this *galère*?"

Nevertheless even now, in retrospect, how arid and sterile seemed all those other active useful days. One moment's little grain of sentiment and a life's hard work goes for nothing in comparison.

After dinner, when the lamp burnt brightly and the furniture seemed to be less anxious to fill every possible space and the windows were opened into the square with its stars and grey shadows, the room seemed, of a sudden, comfortable, and Mrs. Rand, sitting in an arm-chair, with a novel on her lap and spectacles on her nose, was almost cosy. She had left, before going to her matinee, *Just a Heroine* at one of its most thrilling crises, and Lizzie knew that the talk with Breton depended for its very existence on the relative strength of the play and the novel. If *Love and the King* were the more powerful, then would Mrs. Rand make a discursive third. But no, for a moment there was a pause, then, indecisively, Mrs. Rand took up her book. For a while she talked to Breton over its pages, then the light of excitement stole into her eyes, her soul was netted by the snarer, Breton was forgotten as though he had never been.

Their chairs were by the open window and a very little breeze came and played around them. In the square there was that sense of some imminent occurrence, a breathless suggestion of suspense, that a hot evening sometimes carries with it. The stars blazed in a purple sky and a moon was full rounded, a plate of gold; beneath such splendour the square was cool and dim.

"You mustn't think mother rude," Lizzie said with a little smile. "If she once gets deep into a book nothing can tear her from it."

He said something, but she could see that he was not thinking of Mrs. Rand. It was always in the evening, she thought, when

uncertain colours and shadows filled the air, that he looked his best. He touched, now, as he had touched on that day of their first meeting, a note of something fine and strange—someone, very young and perhaps very foolish and impetuous, but someone armoured in courage and set apart for some great purpose.

He sat back in his chair, flinging, every now and again, little restless glances beyond the window, pulling sometimes at his beard, answering her absent-mindedly. Then suddenly he began, fiercely, looking away from her—

"Miss Rand, I've got an apology to make to you–"

His voice was so low that she could only catch the words by leaning forward—"To me?"

"Yes—I've been wanting to speak all these weeks. It seemed right enough before, but since I've known you I've felt ashamed of it—as though I'd done something wrong."

"What is it, Mr. Breton?" Her clear grave eyes encouraged him.

"Why—I came to this house, took my rooms, simply because I knew that you were here–"

"That I was here?"

"Yes. I was looking about in this part of the world for rooms. I wanted to be—near Portland Place, you know. I came here and old Mrs. Tweed talked a lot and then, after a time, I said something—about my grandmother. And then she told me that someone who lived here did secretarial work for my aunt–"

He stopped abruptly.

"Well?" said Lizzie, laughing. "All this is not very terrible."

"Then, you see, I determined to stay. I was full of absurd ideas just at the time, thought that I was going to take some great revenge—I was quite melodramatic. And so I thought that I'd use you, get to know you and then, through you—do something or another."

Lizzie eyed him with merriment. "Upon my word, what were you going to make me do? Carry bombs into your aunt's bedroom or set fire to the Portland Place house? Tell me, I should like to know–"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.