

Lady Rose's Daughter

PART II

BY MRS. HUMPHRY WARD

CHAPTER III

IT was nearly four o'clock. Sir Wilfrid had just closed Lady Henry's door behind him, and was again walking along Bruton Street.

He was thinking of the little scene of Mademoiselle Le Breton's appearance on the threshold of Lady Henry's dining-room; of the insolent sharpness with which Lady Henry had given her order upon order, as to the dogs, the books for the circulating library, a message for her dressmaker, certain directions for the tradesmen, etc., etc., as though for the mere purpose of putting the woman who had dared to be her rival in her right place before Sir Wilfrid Bury. And at the end, as she was departing, Mademoiselle Le Breton, trusting no doubt to Lady Henry's blindness, had turned towards himself, raising her downcast eyes upon him suddenly, with a proud, passionate look. Her lips had moved; Sir Wilfrid had half risen from his chair. Then, quickly, the door had closed upon her.

Sir Wilfrid could not think of it without a touch of excitement.

"Was she reminding me of Gherardtsloo?" he said to himself. "Upon my word, I must find some means of conversation with her—in spite of Lady Henry."

He walked towards Bond Street, pondering the situation of the two women,—the impotent jealousy and rancor with which Lady Henry was devoured, the domestic slavery contrasted with the social power of Mademoiselle Le Breton. Through the obscurity and difficulty of circumstance, how marked was the conscience of race in her,—and, as he also thought, of high intelligence! The old man was deeply interested. He felt a certain indulgent pity for his life-long friend Lady Henry; but he could not get Mademoiselle Julie out of his head.

"Why on earth does she stay where she is?"

He had asked the same question of Lady Henry, who had contemptuously replied:

"Because she likes the flesh-pots, and won't give them up.—No doubt she doesn't find my manners agreeable; but she knows very well that she wouldn't get the chances she gets in my house anywhere else. I give her a foothold. She'll not risk it for a few sour speeches on my part. I may say what I like to her—and I intend to say what I like! Besides—you watch her, and see whether she's made for poverty! She takes to luxury as a fish to water. What would she be if she left me? A little visiting teacher, perhaps, in a Bloomsbury lodging! That's not her line at all."

"But somebody else might employ her as you do?" Sir Wilfrid had suggested.

"You forget I should be asked for a character," said Lady Henry. "Oh! I admit there are possibilities—on her side. That silly goose Evelyn Crowborough would have taken her in—but I had a few words with Crowborough—and he put his foot down. He told his wife he didn't want an intriguing foreigner to live with them. No—for the present we are chained to each other. I can't get rid of her,—and she doesn't want to get rid of me. Of course things might become intolerable for either of us. But at present self-interest on both sides keeps us going. Oh! don't tell me the thing is odious. I know it. Every day she stays in the house I become a more abominable old woman."

A more exacting one, certainly. Sir Wilfrid thought with pity and amusement of the commissions with which Mademoiselle Julie had been loaded. "She earns her money, anyway," he thought. "Those things will take her a

hard afternoon's work. But—bless my soul!"—he paused in his walk—"what about that engagement to Duchess Evelyn that I heard her make? Not a word, by-the-way, to Lady Henry about it! Oh! this is amusing!"

He went meditatively on his way, and presently turned into his club to write some letters. But at five o'clock he emerged, and told a hansom to drive him to Grosvenor Square. He alighted at the great red-brick mansion of the Crowboroughs, and asked for the Duchess. The magnificent person presiding over the hall, an old family retainer, remembered him, and made no difficulty about admitting him.

"Anybody with her Grace?" he inquired, as the man handed him over to the footman who was to usher him up stairs.

"Only Miss Le Breton and Mr. Delafield, Sir Wilfrid. Her Grace told me to say 'not at home' this afternoon,—but I am sure, sir, she will see you."

Sir Wilfrid smiled.

As he entered the outer drawing-room the Duchess and the group surrounding her did not immediately perceive the footman nor himself, and he had a few moments in which to take in a charming scene.

A baby girl in a white satin gown down to her heels, and a white satin cap, lace-edged and tied under her chin, was holding out her tiny skirt with one hand and dancing before the Duchess and Miss Le Breton, who was at the piano. The child's other hand held up a morsel of biscuit, wherewith she directed the movements of her partner, a small black spitz, of a slim and silky elegance, who, straining on his hind legs, his eager attention fixed upon the biscuit, followed every movement of his small mistress; while she—her large blue eyes now solemn, now triumphant, her fair hair escaping from her cap in fluttering curls, her dainty feet pointed, her dimpled arm upraised—repeated in living grace the picture of her great-great-grandmother which hung on the wall in front of her—a masterpiece from Reynolds's happiest hours.

Behind Mademoiselle Le Breton stood Jacob Delafield; while the Duchess, in a low chair beside them, beat time

gayly to the gavotte that Mademoiselle Julie was playing, and laughed encouragement and applause to the child in front of her. She herself, with her cloud of fair hair, the delicate pink and white of her skin, the laughing lips, and small white hands that rose and fell with the baby's steps, seemed little more than a child. Her pale blue dress, for which she had just exchanged her winter walking costume, fell round her in sweeping folds of lace and silk: a French fairy dressed by Wörth, she was possessed by a wild gayety;—and her silvery laugh held the room.

Beside her, Julie Le Breton, very thin, very tall, very dark, was laughing too. The eyes which Sir Wilfrid had lately seen so full of pride were now alive with pleasure. Jacob Delafield also, from behind, grinned applause or shouted to the babe—"Brava, Tottie—well done!" Three people, a baby, and a dog more intimately pleased with each other's society it would have been difficult to discover.

"Sir Wilfrid!"

The Duchess sprang up astonished, and in a moment, to Sir Wilfrid's chagrin, the little scene fell to pieces. The child dropped on the floor, defending herself and the biscuit as best she could against the wild snatches of the dog. Delafield composed his face in a moment to its usual taciturnity. Mademoiselle Le Breton rose from the piano.

"No, no!" said Sir Wilfrid, stopping short and holding up a deprecating hand. "Too bad!—Go on."

"Oh! we were only fooling with baby!" said the Duchess. "It is high time she went to her nurse. Sit here, Sir Wilfrid. Julie, will you take the babe, or shall I ring for Mrs. Robson?"

"I'll take her," said Mademoiselle Le Breton.

She knelt down by the child, who rose with alacrity. Catching her skirts round her, with one eye half laughing, half timorous, turned over her shoulder towards the dog, the baby made a wild spring into Mademoiselle Julie's arms, tucking up her feet instantly, with a shriek of delight, out of the dog's way. Then she nestled her fair head down upon her bearer's shoulder, and, throbbing with joy and mischief, was carried away.

Sir Wilfrid, hat in hand, stood for a moment watching the pair. A bygone marriage uniting the Lackington family with that of the Duchess had just occurred to him. In some bewilderment he sat down beside his hostess, while she made him some tea. But no sooner had the door of the further drawing-room closed behind Mademoiselle Le Breton than, with a dart of all her lively person, she pounced upon him.

"Well, so Aunt Flora has been complaining to you?"

Sir Wilfrid's cup remained suspended in his hand. He glanced first at the speaker, and then at Jacob Delafield.

"Oh! Jacob knows all about it," said the Duchess, eagerly. "This is Julie's headquarters; *we* are on her staff. *You* come from the enemy!"

Sir Wilfrid took out his white silk handkerchief and waved it.

"Here is my flag of truce," he said. "Treat me well."

"We are only too anxious to parley with you," said the Duchess, laughing. "Aren't we, Jacob?"

Then she drew closer.

"What has Aunt Flora been saying to you?"

Sir Wilfrid paused. As he sat there, apparently studying his boots, his blond hair, now nearly gray, carefully parted in the middle above his benevolent brow, he might have been reckoned a tame and manageable person. Jacob Delafield, however, knew him of old.

"I don't think that's fair," said Sir Wilfrid at last, looking up. "I'm the new-comer—I ought to be allowed the questions."

"Go on," said the Duchess, her chin on her hand. "Jacob and I will answer all we know."

Delafield nodded. Sir Wilfrid, looking from one to the other, quickly reminded himself that they had been playmates from the cradle,—or might have been.

"Well, in the first place," he said, slowly, "I am lost in admiration at the rapidity with which Mademoiselle Le Breton does business. An hour and a half ago"—he looked at his watch—"I stood by while Lady Henry enumerated commissions it would have taken any ordinary man-mortal half a day to execute."

The Duchess clapped her hands.

"My maid is now executing them," she said with glee. "In an hour she will be back. Julie will go home with everything done, and I shall have had nearly two hours of her delightful society. What harm is there in that?"

"Where are the dogs?" said Sir Wilfrid, looking round.

"Aunt Flora's dogs? In the house-keeper's room, eating sweet biscuit. They adore the groom of the chambers."

"Is Lady Henry aware of this—this division of labor?" said Sir Wilfrid, smiling.

"Of course not," said the Duchess, flushing. "She makes Julie's life such a burden to her that something has to be done. Now what *has* Aunt Flora been telling you? We were certain she would take you into council—she has dropped various hints of it. I suppose she has been telling you that Julie has been intriguing against her—taking liberties—separating her from her friends,—and so on?"

Sir Wilfrid smilingly presented his cup for some more tea.

"I beg to point out," he said, "that I have only been allowed *two* questions so far. But if things are to be at all fair and equal, I am owed at least six."

The Duchess drew back, checked, and rather annoyed. Jacob Delafield, on the other hand, bent forward.

"We are *anxious*, Sir Wilfrid, to tell you all we know," he replied, with quiet emphasis.

Sir Wilfrid looked at him. The flame in the young man's eyes burnt clear and steady. But flame it was. Sir Wilfrid remembered him as a lazy, rather somnolent youth; the man's advance in expression, in significant power, of itself told much.

"In the first place—can you give me the history of this lady's antecedents?"

He glanced from one to the other.

The Duchess and Jacob Delafield exchanged glances. Then the Duchess spoke—uncertainly:

"Yes, we know. She has confided in us. There is nothing whatever to her discredit—"

Sir Wilfrid's expression changed.

"Ah!" cried the Duchess, bending forward. "You know too?"

"I knew her father and mother," said Sir Wilfrid, simply.

The Duchess gave a little cry of relief. Jacob Delafield rose, took a turn across the room, and came back to Sir Wilfrid.

"Now we can really speak frankly," he said. "The situation has grown very difficult; and we did not know—Evelyn and I—whether we had a right to explain it. But now that Lady Henry—"

"Oh yes," said Sir Wilfrid—"that's all right. The fact of Mademoiselle Le Breton's parentage—"

"Is really what makes Lady Henry so jealous!" cried the Duchess, indignantly. "Oh! she's a tyrant, is Aunt Flora! It is because Julie is of her own world—of *our* world—by blood, whatever the law may say—that she can't help making a rival out of her, and tormenting her, morning, noon, and night. I tell you, Sir Wilfrid, what that poor girl has gone through no one can imagine!—but we who have watched it. Lady Henry owes her *everything*, this last three years! Where would she have been without Julie? She talks of Julie's separating her from her friends, cutting her out, imposing upon her—and nonsense of that kind! How would she have kept up that salon, alone, I should like to know—a blind old woman who can't write a note for herself, or recognize a face? First of all she throws everything upon Julie, is proud of her cleverness, puts her forward in every way, tells most unnecessary falsehoods about her.—Julie has felt *that* very much,—and then, when Julie has a great success, when people begin to come to Bruton Street for her sake as well as Lady Henry's, then Lady Henry turns against her, complains of her to everybody, talks about treachery and disloyalty and Heaven knows what,—and begins to treat her like the dirt under her feet! How can Julie help being clever and agreeable—she *is* clever and agreeable! As Mr. Montresor said to me yesterday, 'As soon as that woman comes into a room, my spirits go up!—And why? Because she never thinks of herself,—she always makes other people show at their best.' And then Lady Henry behaves likes this!"—The Duchess threw out her hands in scornful reprobation.—"And the question is, of course—Can it go on?"

"I don't gather," said Sir Wilfrid—hesitating—"that Lady Henry wants immediately to put an end to it."

Delafield gave an angry laugh.

"The point is whether Mademoiselle Julie and Mademoiselle Julie's friends can put up with it much longer."

"You see," said the Duchess, eagerly, "Julie is such a loyal, affectionate creature. She knows Lady Henry was kind to her, to begin with, that she gave her great chances—and that she's getting old and infirm. Julie's awfully sorry for her. She doesn't want to leave her all alone—to the mercy of her servants—"

"I understand the servants, too, are devoted to Mademoiselle Julie?" said Sir Wilfrid.

"Yes; that's another grievance," said Delafield, contemptuously. "Why shouldn't they be? When the butler had a child very ill, it was Mademoiselle Julie who went to see it in the mews, who took it flowers and grapes—"

"Lady Henry's grapes?" threw in Sir Wilfrid.

"What does it matter!" said Delafield, impatiently. "Lady Henry has more of everything than she knows what to do with.—But it wasn't grapes only! It was time, and thought, and consideration. Then when the younger footman wanted to emigrate to the States, it was Mademoiselle Julie who found a situation for him—who got Mr. Montresor to write to some American friends—and finally sent the lad off, devoted to her, of course, for life. I should like to know when Lady Henry would have done that kind of thing! Naturally the servants like her—she deserves it."

"I see—I see," said Sir Wilfrid, nodding gently, his eyes on the carpet. "A very competent young lady."

Delafield looked at the older man—half in annoyance, half in perplexity.

"Is there anything to complain of in that?" he said, rather shortly.

"Oh! nothing, nothing!" said Sir Wilfrid, hastily.—"And this word intrigue that Lady Henry uses? Has Mademoiselle always steered a straightforward course with her employer?"

"Oh! well," said the Duchess, shrugging her shoulders—"how can you always be perfectly straightforward with such a tyrannical old person! She *has* to be

managed. Lately, in order to be sure of every minute of Julie's time, she has taken to heaping work upon her to such a ridiculous extent that unless I come to the rescue the poor thing gets no rest and no amusement. And last summer there was an explosion, because Julie, who was supposed to be in Paris for her holiday with a school friend, really spent a week of it with the Duncombes, Lady Henry's married niece,—who has a place in Kent. The Duncombes knew her at Lady Henry's parties, of course. Then they met her in the Louvre—took her about a little—were delighted with her—and begged her to come and stay with them—they have a place near Canterbury—on the way home. They and Julie agreed that it would be best to say nothing to Lady Henry about it—she is too absurdly jealous—but then it leaked out unlookily—and Lady Henry was furious."

"I must say," said Delafield, hurriedly, "I always thought frankness would have been best there."

"Well, perhaps," said the Duchess, unwillingly, with another shrug. "But now what is to be done? Lady Henry really must behave better, or Julie can't and sha'n't stay with her. Julie has a great following,—hasn't she, Jacob? They won't see her harassed to death."

"Certainly not," said Delafield. "At the same time we all see"—he turned to Sir Wilfrid—"what the advantages of the present combination are. Where would Lady Henry find another lady of Mademoiselle Le Breton's sort, to help her with her house and her salon? For the last two years the Wednesday evenings have been the most brilliant and successful things of their kind in London.—And of course for Mademoiselle Le Breton it is a great thing to have the protection of Lady Henry's name—"

"A great thing?" cried Sir Wilfrid. "Everything!—my dear Jacob."

"I don't know," said Delafield, slowly. "It may be bought too dear."

Sir Wilfrid looked at the speaker with curiosity. It had been at all times possible to rouse Jacob Delafield—as child, as school-boy, as undergraduate—from an habitual carelessness and idleness, by an act or a tale of injustice or oppression. Had the Duchess pressed him into her service, and was he merely taking sides

for the weaker, out of a natural bent towards that way of looking at things? Or—

"Well, certainly we must do our best to patch it up," said Sir Wilfrid, after a pause. "Perhaps Mademoiselle Le Breton will allow me a word with her by-and-by. I think I have still some influence with Lady Henry. But,—dear goddaughter!"—he bent forward and laid his hand on that of the Duchess—"don't let the maid do the commissions!"

"But I must!" cried the Duchess. "Just think, there is my big bazar on the 16th. You don't know how clever Julie is at such things. I want to make her recite—her French is too beautiful! And then she has such inventiveness, such a head! Everything goes if she takes it in hand. But if I say anything to Aunt Flora, she'll put a spoke in all our wheels. She'll hate the thought of anything in which Julie is successful and conspicuous. Of course she will!"

"All the same, Evelyn," said Delafield, uncomfortable apparently for the second time, "I really think it would be best to let Lady Henry know."

"Well, then, we may as well give it up!" said the Duchess, pettishly, turning aside.

Delafield, who was still pacing the carpet, suddenly raised his hand in a gesture of warning. Mademoiselle Le Breton was crossing the outer drawing-room.

"Julie!—come here!" cried the Duchess, springing up and running towards her.—"Jacob is making himself so disagreeable. He thinks we ought to tell Lady Henry about the 16th."

The speaker put her arm through Julie Le Breton's, looking up at her with a frowning brow. The contrast between her restless prettiness, the profusion of her dress and hair, and Julie's dark, lissome strength, gowned and gloved in neat, close black, was marked enough.

As the Duchess spoke, Julie looked smiling at Jacob Delafield.

"I am in your hands," she said, gently. "Of course I don't want to keep anything from Lady Henry. Please decide for me."

Sir Wilfrid's mouth showed a satirical line. He turned aside and began to play with a copy of the *Spectator*.

"Julie," said the Duchess, hesitating

—"I hope you won't mind, but we have been discussing things a little with Sir Wilfrid. I felt sure Aunt Flora had been talking to him—"

"Of course," said Julie. "I knew she would." She looked towards Sir Wilfrid, slightly drawing herself up. Her manner was quiet, but all her movements were somehow charged with a peculiar and interesting significance. The force of the character made itself felt through all disguises.

In spite of himself, Sir Wilfrid began to murmur apologetic things.

"It was natural, Mademoiselle, that Lady Henry should confide in me. She has perhaps told you that for many years I have been one of the trustees of her property. That has led to her consulting me on a good many matters. And evidently—from what she says, and what the Duchess says—nothing could be of more importance to her happiness, now, in her helpless state, than her relations to you."

He spoke with a serious kindness in which the tinge of mocking habitual to his sleek and well-groomed visage was wholly lost. Julie Le Breton met him with dignity.

"Yes, they are important. But—I fear they cannot go on as they are."

There was a pause. Then Sir Wilfrid approached her—

"I hear you are returning to Bruton Street immediately. Might I be your escort?"

"Certainly."

The Duchess, a little sobered by the turn events had taken, and the darkened prospects of her bazar, protested in vain against this sudden departure. Julie resumed her furs, which, as Sir Wilfrid, who was curious in such things, happened to notice, were of great beauty; and made her farewells. Did her hand linger in Jacob Delafield's? Did the look with which that young man received it express more than the steadiest support which justice offers to the oppressed? Sir Wilfrid could not be sure.

As they stepped out into the frosty, lamp-lit dark of Grosvenor Square, Julie Le Breton turned to her companion.

"You knew my mother and father," she said, abruptly—"I remember your coming."

What was in her voice—her rich, beau-

tiful voice? Sir Wilfrid only knew that, while perfectly steady, it seemed to bring emotion near, to make all the aspects of things dramatic.

"Yes—yes," he replied, in some confusion. "I knew her well—from the time when she was a girl in the school-room. Poor Lady Rose!"

The figure beside him stood still.

"Then, if you were my mother's friend," she said, huskily, "you will hear patiently what I have to say, even though you are Lady Henry's trustee."

"Indeed I will!" cried Sir Wilfrid; and they walked on.

CHAPTER IV

"BUT first of all," said Mademoiselle Le Breton, looking in some annoyance at the brace of terriers circling and barking round them, "we must take the dogs home, otherwise no talk will be possible."

"You have no more business to do?"

His companion smiled.

"Everything Lady Henry wants is here," she said, pointing to the bag upon her arm, which had been handed to her, as Sir Wilfrid remembered, after some whispered conversation, in the hall of Crowborough House, by an elegantly dressed woman, who was no doubt the Duchess's maid.

"Allow me to carry it for you."

"Many thanks," said Mademoiselle Le Breton, firmly retaining it, "but those are not the things I mind!"

They walked on quickly to Bruton Street. The dogs made conversation impossible. If they were on the chain, it was one long battle between them and their leader. If they were let loose, it seemed to Sir Wilfrid that they ranged every area on the march, and attacked all elderly gentlemen and most errand-boys.

"Do you always take them out?" he asked, when both he and his companion were crimson and out of breath.

"Always."

"Do you like dogs?"

"I used to. Perhaps some day I shall again!"

"As for me, I wish they had but one neck!" said Sir Wilfrid, who had but just succeeded in dragging Max, the bigger of the two, out of the interior of

a pastry-cook's hand-cart, which had been rashly left with doors open for a few minutes in the street, while its responsible guardian was gossiping in an adjacent kitchen. Mademoiselle Julie meanwhile was wrestling with Nero, the younger, who had dived to the very heart of a peculiarly unsavory dust-box, standing near the entrance of a mews.

"So you commonly go through the streets of London in this whirlwind?" asked Sir Wilfrid again, incredulous, when at last they had landed their charges safe at the Bruton Street door.

"Morning and evening," said Mademoiselle Julie, smiling. Then she addressed the butler—"Tell Lady Henry, please, that I shall be at home in half an hour."

As they turned westward, the winter streets were gay with lights and full of people. Sir Wilfrid was presently conscious that among all the handsome and well-dressed women who brushed past them, Mademoiselle Le Breton more than held her own. She reminded him now not so much of her mother as of Marriott Dalrymple. Sir Wilfrid had first seen this woman's father at Damascus, when Dalrymple, at twenty-six, was beginning the series of Eastern journeys which had made him famous. He remembered the brilliance of the youth; the power, physical and mental, which radiated from him, making all things easy; the scorn of mediocrity, the incapacity for subordination—

"I should like you to understand," said the lady beside him, "that I came to Lady Henry prepared to do my very best."

"I am sure of that," said Sir Wilfrid, hastily recalling his thoughts from Damascus. "And you must have had a very difficult task."

Mademoiselle Le Breton shrugged her shoulders.

"I knew of course it must be difficult. And as to the drudgery of it—the dogs—and that kind of thing—nothing of that sort matters to me in the least. But—I cannot be humiliated before those who have become my friends—entirely because Lady Henry wished it to be so!"

"Lady Henry at first showed you every confidence?"

"After the first month or two, she put

everything into my hands: her household, her receptions, her letters,—you may almost say her whole social existence. She trusted me with all her secrets—"No! no! my dear lady!" thought Sir Wilfrid—she let me help her with all her affairs. And honestly I did all I could to make her life easy."

"That I understand from herself."

"Then why," cried Mademoiselle Le Breton, turning round to him with sudden passion—"why couldn't Lady Henry leave things alone? Are devotion, and—and the kind of qualities she wanted, so common? I said to myself that, blind and helpless as she was, she should lose nothing. Not only should her household be well kept, her affairs well managed, but her salon should be as attractive, her Wednesday evenings as brilliant, as ever. The world was deserting her; I helped her to bring it back. She cannot live without social success; yet now, she hates me for what I have done. Is it sane—is it reasonable?"

"She feels, I suppose," said Sir Wilfrid, gravely, "that the success is no longer hers."

"So she says. But will you please examine that remark? When her guests assemble, can I go to bed and leave her to grapple with them? I have proposed it often, but of course it is impossible. And if I am to be there, I must behave, I suppose, like a lady, not like a housemaid! Really Lady Henry asks too much! In my mother's little flat in Bruges, with the two or three friends who frequented it, I was brought up in as good society and as good talk as Lady Henry has ever known."

They were passing an electric lamp, and Sir Wilfrid, looking up, was half thrilled, half repelled, by the flashing energy of the face beside him. Was ever such language on the lips of a paid companion before? His sympathy for Lady Henry revived.

"Can you really give me no clew to the—to the sources of Lady Henry's dissatisfaction?" he said at last, rather coldly.

Mademoiselle Le Breton hesitated.

"I don't want to make myself out a saint," she said at last, in another voice, and with a humility which was in truth hardly less proud than her self-asser-

tion. "I—I was brought up in poverty—and my mother died when I was fifteen. I had to defend myself as the poor defend themselves—by silence. I learnt—not to talk about my own affairs. I couldn't afford to be frank—like a rich English girl. I dare say—sometimes I have concealed things—which had been better made plain. They were never of any real importance—and if—Lady Henry had shown any consideration—"

Her voice failed her a little, evidently to her annoyance. They walked on without speaking—for a few paces. "Never of any real importance?" Sir Wilfrid wondered.

Their minds apparently continued the conversation, though their lips were silent, for presently Julie Le Breton said, abruptly:

"Of course I am speaking of matters where Lady Henry might have some claim to information. With regard to many of my thoughts and feelings, Lady Henry has no right whatever to my confidence."

"She gives us fair warning!" thought Sir Wilfrid.

Aloud he said—

"It is not a question of thoughts and feelings, I understand—but of actions."

"Like the visit to the Duncombes?" said Mademoiselle Le Breton, impatiently. "Oh! I quite admit it—that's only one of several instances Lady Henry might have brought forward. You see—she led me to make these friendships; and now, because they annoy her, I am to break them. But—she forgets. Friends are too—too new in my life—too precious—"

Again the voice wavered. How it thrilled and penetrated! Sir Wilfrid found himself listening for every word.

"No," she resumed. "If it is a question of renouncing the friends I have made in her house,—or going,—it will be going. That may as well be quite clear."

Sir Wilfrid looked up.

"Let me ask you one question, Mademoiselle."

"Certainly. Whatever you like."

"Have you ever had—have you now any affection for Lady Henry?"

"Affection?—I could have had—plenty! Lady Henry is most interesting to

watch. It is magnificent—the struggle she makes with her infirmities."

Nothing could have been more agreeable than the modulation of these words—the passage of the tone from a first note of surprise to its grave and womanly close. Again, the same suggestions of veiled and vibrating feeling. Sir Wilfrid's nascent dislike softened a little.

"After all," he said, with gentleness, "one must make allowance for old age and weakness, mustn't one?"

"Oh! as to that, you can't say anything to me that I am not perpetually saying to myself," was her somewhat impetuous reply. "Only, there is a point when ill temper becomes not only tormenting to me, but degrading to herself. . . . Oh! if you only knew"—the speaker drew an indignant breath—"I can hardly bring myself to speak of such *misères*. But everything excites her—everything makes her jealous. It is a grievance that I should have a new dress,—that Mr. Montresor should send me an order for the House of Commons,—that Evelyn Crowborough should give me a Christmas present. Last Christmas Evelyn gave me these furs—she is the only creature in London from whom I would accept a farthing or the value of a farthing."

She paused, then rapidly threw him a question—

"Why, do you suppose, did I take it from her?"

"She is your kinswoman," said Sir Wilfrid, quietly.

"Ah, you knew that! Well, then,—mayn't Evelyn be kind to me, though I am—what I am! I reminded Lady Henry, but she only thought me a mean parasite, sponging on a duchess for presents above my station. She said things hardly to be forgiven. I was silent. But I have never ceased to wear the furs."

With what imperious will did the thin shoulders straighten themselves under the folds of chinchilla! The cloak became symbolic—a flag not to be struck.

"I never answer back—please understand—never!" she went on, hurriedly. "You saw to-day how Lady Henry gave me her orders. There is not a servant in the house with whom she would dare such a manner. Did I resent it?"

"You behaved with great forbearance. I watched you with admiration."

"Ah!—*forbearance!* I fear you don't understand one of the strangest elements in the whole case. I am *afraid* of Lady Henry—mortally afraid! When she speaks to me, I feel like a child who puts up its hands to ward off a blow. My instinct is not merely to submit—but to grovel. When you have had the youth that I had—when you have existed, learnt, amused yourself on sufferance—when you have had somehow to maintain yourself among girls who had family, friends, money, name—while you—"

Her voice stopped—resolutely silenced before it broke. Sir Wilfrid uncomfortably felt that he had no sympathy to produce worthy of the claim that her whole personality seemed to make upon it. But she recovered herself immediately.

"Now I think I had better give you an outline of the last six months," she said, turning to him. "Of course it is my side of the matter. But you have heard Lady Henry's."

And with great composure she laid before him an outline of the chief quarrels and grievances which had embittered the life of the Bruton Street house during the period she had named. It was a wretched story, and she clearly told it with repugnance and disgust. There was in her tone a note of offended personal delicacy—as of one bemired against her will.

Evidently Lady Henry was hardly to be defended. The thing had been "odious" indeed. Two women of great ability, and different ages, shut up together, and jarring at every point,—the elder furiously jealous, and exasperated by what seemed to her the affront offered to her high rank and her past ascendancy, by the social success of her dependent—the other defending herself first by the arts of flattery and submission, and then, when these proved hopeless, by a social skill that at least wore many of the aspects of intrigue,—these were the essential elements of the situation, and as her narrative proceeded, Sir Wilfrid admitted to himself that it was hard to see any way out of it. As to his own sympathies, he did not know what to make of them.

"No!—I have been only too yielding," said Mademoiselle Le Breton, sorely, when her tale was done. "I am ashamed when I look back on what I have borne.

But now it has gone too far, and something must be done. If I go—frankly—Lady Henry will suffer."

Sir Wilfrid looked at his companion.

"Lady Henry is well aware of it."

"Yes," was the calm reply,— "she knows it,—but she does not realize it. You see, if it comes to a rupture, she will allow no half-measures. Those who stick to me will have to quarrel with her. And there will be a great many who will stick to me."

Sir Wilfrid's little smile was not friendly.

"It is indeed evident," he said, "that you have thought it all out."

Mademoiselle Le Breton did not reply. They walked on a few minutes in silence, till she said, with a suddenness and in a low tone that startled her companion:

"If Lady Henry could ever have felt that she *humbled* me!—that I acknowledged myself at her mercy! But she never could! She knows that I feel myself as well born as she,—that I am *not* ashamed of my parents—that my principles give me a free mind about such things—"

"Your principles?" murmured Sir Wilfrid.

"You were right,"—she turned upon him with a perfectly quiet but most concentrated passion. "I have *had* to think things out! I know, of course, that the world goes with Lady Henry. Therefore I must be nameless and kinless, and hold my tongue. If the world knew, it would expect me to hang my head. I *don't!* I am as proud of my mother as of my father. I adore both their memories! Conventionalities of that kind mean nothing to me!—"

"My dear lady—"

"Oh! I don't expect you or any one else to feel with me!" said the voice, which, for all its low pitch, was beginning to make him feel as though he were in the centre of a hail-storm. "You are a man of the world—you knew my parents—and yet I understand perfectly that for you too I am disgraced. So be it! So be it! I don't quarrel with what any one may choose to think, but—"

She recaptured herself with difficulty, and there was silence. They were walking through the purple February dusk

towards the Marble Arch. It was too dark to see her face under its delicate veil, and Sir Wilfrid did not wish to see it. But before he had collected his thoughts sufficiently, his companion was speaking again, in a wholly different manner:

"I don't know what made me talk in this way. It was the contact with some one, I suppose, who had seen us at Gherardtsloo." She raised her veil, and he thought that she dashed away some tears. "That never happened to me before in London.—Well, now,—to return. If there is a breach—"

"Why should there be a breach?" said Sir Wilfrid. "My dear Miss Le Breton, listen to me for a few minutes. I see perfectly that you have a great deal to complain of; but I also see that Lady Henry has something of a case."

And with a courteous authority and tact worthy of his trade, the old diplomat began to discuss the situation.

Presently he found himself talking with an animation, a friendliness, an intimacy, that surprised himself. What was there in the personality beside him that seemed to win a way inside a man's defences in spite of him? Much of what she had said had seemed to him arrogant or morbid. And yet as she listened to him, with an evident dying down of passion, an evident forlornness, he felt in her that woman's weakness and timidity of which she had accused herself in relation to Lady Henry, and was somehow—manlike—softened and disarmed. She had been talking wildly, because no doubt she felt herself in great difficulties. But when it was his turn to talk, she neither resented nor resisted what he had to say. The kinder he was, the more she yielded—almost eagerly at times, as though the thorniness of her own speech had hurt herself most, and there were behind it all a sad life, and a sad heart that only asked in truth for a little sympathy and understanding.

"I shall soon be calling her 'my dear' and patting her hand!" thought the old man at last, astonished at himself. For the dejection in her attitude and gait began to weigh upon him; he felt a warm desire to sustain and comfort her. More and more thought, more and more con-

trivance, did he throw into the straightening out of this tangle between two excitable women,—not, it seemed, for Lady Henry's sake—not, surely, for Miss Le Breton's sake?—but— Ah! those two poor dead folk, who had touched his heart long ago,—did he feel the hovering of their ghosts beside him, in the wintry wind?

At any rate, he abounded in shrewd and fatherly advice, and Mademoiselle Le Breton listened with a most flattering meekness.

"Well, now I think we have come to an understanding," he urged, hopefully, as they turned down Bruton Street again.

Mademoiselle Le Breton sighed.

"It is very kind of you.—Oh! I will do my best. But—"

She shook her head uncertainly.

"No—no 'buts'!" cried Sir Wilfrid, cheerfully. "Suppose—as a first step"—he smiled at his companion—"you tell Lady Henry about the bazar?"

"By all means. She won't let me go. But Evelyn will find some one else."

"Oh! we'll see about that!" said the old man, almost crossly. "If you'll allow me, I'll try my hand."

Julie Le Breton did not reply, but her face glimmered upon him with a wistful friendliness that did not escape him even in the darkness. In this yielding mood her voice and movements had so much subdued sweetness, so much distinction, that he felt himself more than melting towards her.

Then, of a sudden, a thought—a couple of thoughts—sped across him. He drew himself rather sharply together.

"Mr. Delafield, I gather, has been a good deal concerned in the whole matter?"

Mademoiselle Le Breton laughed and hesitated.

"He has been very kind. He heard Lady Henry's language—once—when she was excited. It seemed to shock him. He has tried once or twice to smooth her down. Oh! he has been most kind."

"Has he any influence with her?"

"Not much."

"Do you think well of him?"

He turned to her with a calculated abruptness. She showed a little surprise.

"I? But—everybody thinks well of

him! They say the Duke trusts everything to him."

"When I left England he was still a rather lazy and unsatisfactory undergraduate. I was curious to know how he had developed. Do you know what his chief interests are now?"

Mademoiselle Le Breton hesitated.

"I am really afraid I don't know!" she said at last, smiling, and, as it were, regretful. "But Evelyn Crowborough, of course, could tell you all about him. She and he are very old friends."

"No birds out of that cover!" was Sir Wilfrid's inward comment.

The lamp over Lady Henry's door was already in sight when Sir Wilfrid, after some talk of the Montresors, with whom he was going to dine that night, carelessly said,

"That's a very good-looking fellow, that Captain Warkworth, whom I saw with Lady Henry last night."

"Ah, yes. Lady Henry has made great friends with him," said Mademoiselle Julie, readily. "She consults him about her memoir of her husband."

"Memoir of her husband!" Sir Wilfrid stopped short. "Heavens above!—memoir of Lord Henry?"

"She is half-way through it. I thought you knew."

"Well, upon my word! Whom shall we have a memoir of next? Henry Delafield!—Henry Delafield!—Good gracious!"

And Sir Wilfrid walked along, slashing at the railings with his stick, as though the action relieved him. Julie Le Breton quietly resumed:

"I understand that Lord Henry and Captain Warkworth's father went through the Indian Mutiny together, and Captain Warkworth has some letters—"

"Oh, I dare say, I dare say!" muttered Sir Wilfrid.—"What's this man home for just now?"

"Well,—I *think* Lady Henry knows," said Mademoiselle Julie, turning to him an open look, like one who—once more—would gladly satisfy a questioner if one could. "He talks to her a great deal. But—why shouldn't he come home?"

"Because he ought to be doing disagreeable duty with his regiment, instead of always racing about the world in search of something to get his name up,"

said Sir Wilfrid, rather sharply. "At least, that's the view his brother officers mostly take of him."

"Oh!" said Mademoiselle Julie, with amiable vagueness. "Is there anything particular that you suppose he wants?"

"I am not at all in the secret of his ambitions," said Sir Wilfrid, lifting his shoulders. "But you and Lady Henry seemed well acquainted with him."

The straw-colored lashes veered her way.

"I had some talk with him in the Park this morning," said Julie Le Breton, reflectively. "He wants me to copy his father's letters for Lady Henry, and to get her to return the originals as soon as possible. He feels nervous when they are out of his hands."

"Hm," said Sir Wilfrid.

At that moment Lady Henry's door-bell presented itself. The vigor with which Sir Wilfrid rang it may perhaps have expressed the liveliness of his unspoken scepticism. He did not for one moment believe that General Warkworth's letters had been the subject of the conversation he had witnessed that morning in the Park, nor that filial veneration had had anything whatever to say to it.

Julie Le Breton gave him her hand.

"Thank you very much," she said, gravely and softly.

Sir Wilfrid, at the moment before, had not meant to press it at all. But he did press it, aware the while of the most mingled feelings.

"On the contrary, you were very good to allow me this conversation.—Command me at any time if I can be useful to you and Lady Henry."

Julie Le Breton smiled upon him, and was gone.

Sir Wilfrid ran down the steps, chafing at himself.

"She somehow gets round one," he thought, with a touch of annoyance. "I wonder whether I made any real impression upon her.—Hm.—Let's see whether Montresor can throw any more light upon her! He seemed to be pretty intimate. Her 'principles,' eh? A dangerous view to take—for a woman of that *provenance*!"

An hour or two later Sir Wilfrid Bury

presented himself in the Montresors' drawing-room in Eaton Place. He had come home feeling it essential to impress upon the cabinet a certain line of action with regard to the policy of Russia on the Persian Gulf. But the first person he perceived on the hearth-rug, basking before the Minister's ample fire, was Lord Lackington. The sight of that vivacious countenance, that shock of white hair, that tall form still boasting the spareness and almost the straightness of youth, that unsuspecting complacency, confused his ideas, and made him somehow feel the whole world a little topsy-turvy.

Nevertheless, after dinner he got his fifteen minutes of private talk with his host, and conscientiously made use of them. Then, after an appointment had been settled for a longer conversation on another day, both men felt that they had done their duty, and, as it appeared, the same subject stirred in both their minds.

"Well—and what did you think of Lady Henry?" said Montresor, with a smile, as he lighted another cigarette.

"She's very blind," said Sir Wilfrid, "and more rheumatic. But else there's not much change—on the whole she wears wonderfully well."

"Except as to her temper, poor lady," laughed the Minister. "She has really tried all our nerves of late. And the worst of it is that most of it falls upon that poor woman who lives with her"—the Minister lowered his voice—"one of the most interesting and agreeable creatures in the world."

Sir Wilfrid glanced across the table. Lord Lackington was telling scandalous tales of his youth to a couple of Foreign Office clerks, who sat on either side of him, laughing and spurring him on. The old man's careless fluency and fun were evidently contagious; animation reigned around him; he was the spoilt child of the dinner, and knew it.

"I gather that you have taken a friendly interest in Miss Le Breton," said Bury, turning to his host.

"Oh!—the Duchess and Delafield and I have done our best to protect her—and to keep the peace. I am quite sure Lady Henry has poured out her grievances to you—hasn't she?"

"Alack,—she has."

"I knew she couldn't hold her tongue to you—even for a day. She has really been losing her head over it. And it is a thousand pities."

"So you think all the fault's on Lady Henry's side?"

The Minister gave a shrug.

"At any rate, I have never myself seen anything to justify Lady Henry's state of feeling. On the famous Wednesdays, Mademoiselle Julie always appears to make Lady Henry her first thought. And in other ways she has really worn herself to death for the old lady. It makes one rather savage sometimes to see it!"

"So in your eyes she is a perfect companion?"

Montresor laughed.

"Oh!—as to perfection!—"

"Lady Henry accuses her of intrigue. You have seen no traces of it?"

The Minister smiled a little oddly.

"Not as regards Lady Henry.—Oh! Mademoiselle Julie is a very astute lady." A ripple from some source of secret amusement spread over the dark-lined face.

"What do you mean by that?"

"She knows how to help her friends—better than most people. I have known three men—at least—*made* by Mademoiselle Le Breton within the last two or three years. She has just got a fresh one in tow."

Sir Wilfrid moved a little closer to his host. They turned slightly from the table, and seemed to talk into their cigars.

"Young Warkworth?" said Bury.

The Minister smiled again and hesitated.

"Oh! she doesn't bother me—she is much too clever.—But she gets at me in the most amusing indirect ways. I know perfectly well when she has been at work. There are two or three men—high up, you understand—who frequent Lady Henry's evenings—and who are her very good friends. . . . Oh! I dare say she'll get what she wants," he added, with nonchalance.

"Between you and me—do you suspect any direct interest in the young man?"

Montresor shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know. Not necessary. She loves to feel herself a power—all the more, I think, because of her anomalous

position. It is very curious—at bottom very feminine and amusing—and quite harmless.”

“You and others don’t resent it?”

“No—not from her,” said the Minister, after a pause. “But she is rather going it, just now. Three or four batteries have opened upon me at once. She must be thinking of little else.”

Sir Wilfrid grew a trifle red. He remembered the comedy of the door-step. “Is there anything that he particularly wants?” His tone assumed a certain asperity.

“Well, as for me, I cannot help feeling that Lady Henry has something to say for herself. It is very strange—mysterious even—the kind of ascendancy this lady has obtained for herself, in so short a time.”

“Oh, I dare say it’s hard for Lady Henry to put up with,” mused Montresor. “Without family—without connections—”

He raised his head quietly and put on his eye-glasses. Then his look swept the face of his companion.

Sir Wilfrid with a scarcely perceptible yet significant gesture motioned towards Lord Lackington. Mr. Montresor started. The eyes of both men travelled across the table, then met again.

“You know?” said Montresor, under his breath.

Sir Wilfrid nodded. Then some instinct told him that he had now exhausted the number of the initiated.

When the men reached the drawing-room, which was rather emptily waiting for the “reception” Mrs. Montresor was about to hold in it, Sir Wilfrid fell into conversation with Lord Lackington. The old man talked well, though flightily,

with a constant reference of all topics to his own standards, recollections, and friendships, which was characteristic, but in him not unattractive. Sir Wilfrid noticed certain new and pitiful signs of age. The old man was still a rattle. But every now and then the rattle ceased abruptly; and a breath of melancholy made itself felt—like a chill and sudden gust from some unknown sea.

They were joined presently, as the room filled up, by a young journalist—an art critic, who seemed to know Lord Lackington and his ways. The two fell eagerly into talk about pictures, especially of an exhibition at Antwerp, from which the young man had just returned.

“I looked in at Bruges on the way back, for a few hours,” said the newcomer, presently. “The pictures there are much better seen than they used to be. When were you there last?” He turned to Lord Lackington.

“Bruges?” said Lord Lackington, with a start. “Oh! I haven’t been there for twenty years.”

And he suddenly sat down, dangling a paper-knife between his hands, and staring at the carpet. His jaw dropped a little. A cloud seemed to interpose between him and his companions.

Sir Wilfrid, with Lady Henry’s story fresh in his memory, was somehow poignantly conscious of the old man. Did their two minds hold the same image—of Lady Rose, drawing her last breath in some dingy room beside one of the canals that wind through Bruges, laying down there the last relics of that life, beauty, and intelligence that had once made her the darling of the father, who, for some reason still hard to understand, had let her suffer and die—alone?

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

Love’s Fragrance

BY CURTIS HIDDEN PAGE

THERE came a touch of softness in the air,
And with a throb of longing, ere I knew
A hint of violets, a thought of you . . .
For whom it was, my heart breathed up a prayer.