



**ILLUSTRATED BY
HOWARD CHANDLER CHRISTY**

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ILLUSTRATION

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LADY ROSE'S DAUGHTER

I

"Hullo! No!--Yes!--upon my soul, it *is* Jacob! Why, Delafield, my dear fellow, how are you?"

So saying--on a February evening a good many years ago--an elderly gentleman in evening dress flung himself out of his cab, which had just stopped before a house in Bruton Street, and hastily went to meet a young man who was at the same moment stepping out of another hansom a little farther down the pavement.

The pleasure in the older man's voice rang clear, and the younger met him with an equal cordiality, expressed perhaps through a manner more leisurely and restrained.

"So you *are* home, Sir Wilfrid? You were announced, I saw. But I thought Paris would have detained you a bit."

"Paris? Not I! Half the people I ever knew there are dead, and the rest are uncivil. Well, and how are you getting on? Making your fortune, eh?"

And, slipping his arm inside the young man's, the speaker walked back with him, along a line of carriages, towards a house which showed a group of footmen at its open door. Jacob Delafield smiled.

"The business of a land agent seems to be to spend some one else's--as far as I've yet gone."

"Land agent! I thought you were at the bar?"

"I was, but the briefs didn't come in. My cousin offered me the care of his Essex estates. I like the country--always have. So I thought I'd better accept."

"What--the Duke? Lucky fellow! A regular income, and no anxieties. I expect you're pretty well paid?"

"Oh, I'm not badly paid," replied the young man, tranquilly. "Of course you're going to Lady Henry's?"

"Of course. Here we are."

The older man paused outside the line of servants waiting at the door, and spoke in a lower tone. "How is she? Failing at all?"

Jacob Delafield hesitated. "She's grown very blind--and perhaps rather more infirm, generally. But she is at home, as usual--every evening for a few people, and for a good many on Wednesdays."

"Is she still alone--or is there any relation who looks after her?"

"Relation? No. She detests them all."

"Except you?"

Delafield raised his shoulders, without an answering smile. "Yes, she is good enough to except me. You're one of her trustees, aren't you?"

"At present, the only one. But while I have been in Persia the lawyers have done all that was necessary. Lady Henry herself never writes a letter she can help. I really have heard next to nothing about her for more than a year. This morning I arrived from Paris--sent round to ask if she would be at home--and here I am."

"Ah!" said Delafield, looking down. "Well, there is a lady who has been with her, now, for more than two years--"

"Ah, yes, yes, I remember. Old Lady Seathwaite told me--last year. Mademoiselle Le Breton--isn't that her name? What--she reads to her, and writes letters for her--that kind of thing?"

"Yes--that kind of thing," said the other, after a moment's hesitation. "Wasn't that a spot of rain? Shall I charge these gentry?"

And he led the way through the line of footmen, which, however, was not of the usual Mayfair density. For the party within was not a "crush." The hostess who had collected it was of opinion that the chief object of your house is not to entice the mob, but to keep it out. The two men mounted the stairs together.

"What a charming house!" said the elder, looking round him. "I remember when your uncle rebuilt it. And before that, I remember

his mother, the old Duchess here, with her swarm of parsons. Upon my word, London tastes good--after Teheran!"

And the speaker threw back his fair, grizzled head, regarding the lights, the house, the guests, with the air of a sensitive dog on a familiar scent.

"Ah, you're fresh home," said Delafield, laughing. "But let's just try to keep you here--"

"My dear fellow, who is that at the top of the stairs?"

The old diplomat paused. In front of the pair some half a dozen guests were ascending, and as many coming down. At the top stood a tall lady in black, receiving and dismissing.

Delafield looked up.

"That is Mademoiselle Le Breton," he said, quietly.

"She receives?"

"She distributes the guests. Lady Henry generally establishes herself in the back drawing-room. It doesn't do for her to see too many people at once. Mademoiselle arranges it."

"Lady Henry must indeed be a good deal more helpless than I remember her," murmured Sir Wilfrid, in some astonishment.

"She is, physically. Oh, no doubt of it! Otherwise you won't find much change. Shall I introduce you?"

They were approaching a woman whose tall slenderness, combined with a remarkable physiognomy, arrested the old man's attention. She was not handsome--that, surely, was his first impression? The cheek-bones were too evident, the chin and mouth too strong. And yet the fine pallor of the skin, the subtle black-and-white, in which, so to speak, the head and face were drawn, the life, the animation of the whole--were these not beauty, or more than beauty? As for the eyes, the carriage of the head, the rich magnificence of hair, arranged with an artful eighteenth-century freedom, as Madame Vigie Le Brun might have worn it--with the second glance the effect of them was such that Sir Wilfrid could not cease from looking at the lady they adorned. It was an effect as of something over-living, over-brilliant--an animation, an intensity, so

strong that, at first beholding, a by-stander could scarcely tell whether it pleased him or no.

"Mademoiselle Le Breton--Sir Wilfrid Bury," said Jacob Delafield, introducing them.

"Is she French?" thought the old diplomat, puzzled. "And--have I ever seen her before?"

"Lady Henry will be so glad!" said a low, agreeable voice. "You are one of the old friends, aren't you? I have often heard her talk of you."

"You are very good. Certainly, I am an old friend--a connection also." There was the slightest touch of stiffness in Sir Wilfrid's tone, of which the next moment he was ashamed. "I am very sorry to hear that Lady Henry has grown so much more helpless since I left England."

"She has to be careful of fatigue. Two or three people go in to see her at a time. She enjoys them more so."

"In my opinion," said Delafield, "one more device of milady's for getting precisely what she wants."

The young man's gay undertone, together with the look which passed between him and Mademoiselle Le Breton, added to Sir Wilfrid's stifled feeling of surprise.

"You'll tell her, Jacob, that I'm here?" He turned abruptly to the young man.

"Certainly--when mademoiselle allows me. Ah, here comes the Duchess!" said Delafield, in another voice.

Mademoiselle Le Breton, who had moved a few steps away from the stair-head with Sir Wilfrid Bury, turned hastily. A slight, small woman, delicately fair and sparkling with diamonds, was coming up the stairs alone.

"My dear," said the new-comer, holding out her hands eagerly to Mademoiselle Le Breton, "I felt I must just run in and have a look at you. But Freddie says that I've got to meet him at that tiresome Foreign Office! So I can only stay ten minutes. How are you?"--then, in

a lower voice, almost a whisper, which, however, reached Sir Wilfrid Bury's ears--"worried to death?"

Mademoiselle Le Breton raised eyes and shoulders for a moment, then, smiling, put her finger to her lip.

"You're coming to me to-morrow afternoon?" said the Duchess, in the same half-whisper.

"I don't think I can get away."

"Nonsense! My dear, you must have some air and exercise! Jacob, will you see she comes?"

"Oh, I'm no good," said that young man, turning away. "Duchess, you remember Sir Wilfrid Bury?"

"She would be an unnatural goddaughter if she didn't," said that gentleman, smiling. "She may be your cousin, but I knew her before you did."

The young Duchess turned with a start.

"Sir Wilfrid! A sight for sair een. When did you get back?"

She put her slim hands into both of his, and showered upon him all proper surprise and the greetings due to her father's oldest friend. Voice, gesture, words--all were equally amiable, well trained, and perfunctory--Sir Wilfrid was well aware of it. He was possessed of a fine, straw-colored mustache, and long eyelashes of the same color. Both eyelashes and mustache made a screen behind which, as was well known, their owner observed the world to remarkably good purpose. He perceived the difference at once when the Duchess, having done her social and family duty, left him to return to Mademoiselle Le Breton.

"It *was* such a bore you couldn't come this afternoon! I wanted you to see the babe dance--she's *too* great a duck! And that Canadian girl came to sing. The voice is magnificent--but she has some tiresome tricks!--and I didn't know what to say to her. As to the other music on the 16th--I say, can't we find a corner somewhere?" And the Duchess looked round the beautiful drawing-room, which she and her companions had just entered, with a dissatisfied air.

"Lady Henry, you'll remember, doesn't like corners," said Mademoiselle Le Breton, smiling. Her tone, delicately free and allusive, once more drew Sir Wilfrid's curious eyes to her, and he caught also the impatient gesture with which the Duchess received the remark.

"Ah, that's all right!" said Mademoiselle Le Breton, suddenly, turning round to himself. "Here is Mr. Montresor--going on, too, I suppose, to the Foreign Office. Now there'll be some chance of getting at Lady Henry."

Sir Wilfrid looked down the drawing-room, to see the famous War Minister coming slowly through the well-filled but not crowded room, stopping now and then to exchange a greeting or a farewell, and much hampered, as it seemed, in so doing, by a pronounced and disfiguring short-sight. He was a strongly built man of more than middle height. His iron-gray hair, deeply carved features, and cavernous black eyes gave him the air of power that his reputation demanded. On the other hand, his difficulty of eyesight, combined with the marked stoop of overwork, produced a qualifying impression--as of power teased and fettered, a Samson among the Philistines.

"My dear lady, good-night. I must go and fight with wild beasts in Whitehall--worse luck! Ah, Duchess! All very well--but you can't shirk either!"

So saying, Mr. Montresor shook hands with Mademoiselle Le Breton and smiled upon the Duchess--both actions betraying precisely the same degree of playful intimacy.

"How did you find Lady Henry?" said Mademoiselle Le Breton, in a lowered voice.

"Very well, but very cross. She scolds me perpetually--I haven't got a skin left. Ah, Sir Wilfrid!--*very* glad to see you! When did you arrive? I thought I might perhaps find you at the Foreign Office."

"I'm going on there presently," said Sir Wilfrid.

"Ah, but that's no good. Dine with me to-morrow night?--if you are free? Excellent!--that's arranged. Meanwhile--send him in, mademoiselle--send him in! He's fresh--let him take his turn." And the Minister, grinning, pointed backward over his shoulder towards an

inner drawing-room, where the form of an old lady, seated in a wheeled invalid-chair between two other persons, could be just dimly seen.

"When the Bishop goes," said Mademoiselle Le Breton, with a laughing shake of the head. "But I told him not to stay long."

"He won't want to. Lady Henry pays no more attention to his cloth than to my gray hairs. The rating she has just given me for my speech of last night! Well, good-night, dear lady--good-night. You *are* better, I think?"

Mr. Montresor threw a look of scrutiny no less friendly than earnest at the lady to whom he was speaking; and immediately afterwards Sir Wilfrid, who was wedged in by an entering group of people, caught the murmured words:

"Consult me when you want me--at any time."

Mademoiselle Le Breton raised her beautiful eyes to the speaker in a mute gratitude.

"And five minutes ago I thought her plain!" said Sir Wilfrid to himself as he moved away. "Upon my word, for a *dame de compagnie* that young woman is at her ease! But where the deuce have I seen her, or her double, before?"

He paused to look round the room a moment, before yielding himself to one of the many possible conversations which, as he saw, it contained for him. It was a stately panelled room of the last century, furnished with that sure instinct both for comfort and beauty which a small minority of English rich people have always possessed. Two glorious Gainsboroughs, clad in the subtlest brilliance of pearly white and shimmering blue, hung on either side of the square opening leading to the inner room. The fair, clouded head of a girl, by Romney, looked down from the panelling above the hearth. A gowned abbi, by Vandyck, made the centre of another wall, facing the Gainsboroughs. The pictures were all famous, and had been associated for generations with the Delafield name. Beneath them the carpets were covered by fine eighteenth-century furniture, much of it of a florid Italian type subdued to a delicate and faded beauty by time and use. The room was cleverly broken into various circles and centres for conversation; the chairs were

many and comfortable; flowers sheltered tje-`-tjtes or made a setting for beautiful faces; the lamps were soft, the air warm and light. A cheerful hum of voices rose, as of talk enjoyed for talking's sake; and a general effect of intimacy, or gayety, of an unfeigned social pleasure, seemed to issue from the charming scene and communicate itself to the onlooker.

And for a few moments, before he was discovered and tumultuously annexed by a neighboring group, Sir Wilfrid watched the progress of Mademoiselle Le Breton through the room, with the young Duchess in her wake. Wherever she moved she was met with smiles, deference, and eager attention. Here and there she made an introduction, she redistributed a group, she moved a chair. It was evident that her eye was everywhere, that she knew every one; her rule appeared to be at once absolute and welcome. Presently, when she herself accepted a seat, she became, as Sir Wilfrid perceived in the intervals of his own conversation, the leader of the most animated circle in the room. The Duchess, with one delicate arm stretched along the back of Mademoiselle Le Breton's chair, laughed and chattered; two young girls in virginal white placed themselves on big gilt footstools at her feet; man after man joined the group that stood or sat around her; and in the centre of it, the brilliance of her black head, sharply seen against a background of rose brocade, the grace of her tall form, which was thin almost to emaciation, the expressiveness of her strange features, the animation of her gestures, the sweetness of her voice, drew the eyes and ears of half the room to Lady Henry's "companion."

Presently there was a movement in the distance. A man in knee-breeches and silver-buckled shoes emerged from the back drawing-room. Mademoiselle Le Breton rose at once and went to meet him.

"The Bishop has had a long innings," said an old general to Sir Wilfrid Bury. "And here is Mademoiselle Julie coming for you."

Sir Wilfrid rose, in obedience to a smiling sign from the lady thus described, and followed her floating black draperies towards the farther room.

"Who are those two persons with Lady Henry?" he asked of his guide, as they approached the *penetralia* where reigned the mistress of the house. "Ah, I see!--one is Dr. Meredith--but the other?"

"The other is Captain Warkworth," said Mademoiselle Le Breton. "Do you know him?"

"Warkworth--Warkworth? Ah--of course--the man who distinguished himself in the Mahsud expedition. But why is he home again so soon?"

Mademoiselle Le Breton smiled uncertainly.

"I think he was invalided home," she said, with that manner, at once restrained and gracious, that Sir Wilfrid had already observed in her. It was the manner of some one who *counted*; and--through all outward modesty--knew it.

"He wants something out of the ministry. I remember the man," was Sir Wilfrid's unspoken comment.

But they had entered the inner room. Lady Henry looked round. Over her wrinkled face, now parchment-white, there shone a ray of pleasure--sudden, vehement, and unfeigned.

"Sir Wilfrid!"

She made a movement as though to rise from her chair, which was checked by his gesture and her helplessness.

"Well, this is good fortune," she said, as she put both her hands into both of his. "This morning, as I was dressing, I had a feeling that something agreeable was going to happen at last--and then your note came. Sit down there. You know Dr. Meredith. He's as quarrelsome as ever. Captain Warkworth--Sir Wilfrid Bury."

The square-headed, spectacled journalist addressed as Dr. Meredith greeted the new-comer with the quiet cordiality of one for whom the day holds normally so many events that it is impossible to make much of any one of them. And the man on the farther side of Lady Henry rose and bowed. He was handsome, and slenderly built. The touch of impetuosity in his movement, and the careless ease with which he carried his curly head, somehow surprised Sir Wilfrid. He had expected another sort of person.

"I will give you my chair," said the Captain, pleasantly. "I have had more than my turn."

"Shall I bring in the Duchess?" said Mademoiselle Le Breton, in a low tone, as she stooped over the back of Lady Henry's chair.

That lady turned abruptly to the speaker.

"Let her do precisely as she pleases," said a voice, sharp, lowered also, but imperious, like the drawing of a sword. "If she wants me, she knows where I am."

"She would be so sorry--"

"Ne jouez pas la comédie, ma chère! Where is Jacob?"

"In the other room. Shall I tell him you want him?"

"I will send for him when it suits me. Meanwhile, as I particularly desired you to let me know when he arrived--"

"He has only been here twenty minutes," murmured Mademoiselle Le Breton. "I thought while the Bishop was here you would not like to be disturbed--"

"You thought!" The speaker raised her shoulders fiercely. "Comme toujours, vous vous jetez trop bien amusée pour vous souvenir de mes instructions--voilà la vérité! Dr. Meredith," the whole imperious form swung round again towards the journalist, "unless you forbid me, I shall tell Sir Wilfrid who it was reviewed his book for you."

"Oh, good Heavens! I forbid you with all the energy of which I am capable," said the startled journalist, raising appealing hands, while Lady Henry, delighted with the effect produced by her sudden shaft, sank back in her chair and grimly smiled.

Meanwhile Sir Wilfrid Bury's attention was still held by Mademoiselle Le Breton. In the conversation between her and Lady Henry he had noticed an extraordinary change of manner on the part of the younger lady. Her ease, her grace had disappeared. Her tone was humble, her manner quivering with nervous anxiety. And now, as she stood a moment behind Lady Henry's chair, one trembling hand steadying the other, Sir Wilfrid was suddenly aware of yet another impression. Lady Henry had treated her companion with a contemptuous and haughty ill-humor. Face to face with her mistress, Mademoiselle Le Breton had borne it with submission, almost with servility. But now, as she stood silent behind the blind old lady

who had flouted her, her wonderfully expressive face, her delicate frame, spoke for her with an energy not to be mistaken. Her dark eyes blazed. She stood for anger; she breathed humiliation.

"A dangerous woman, and an extraordinary situation," so ran his thought, while aloud he was talking Central Asian politics and the latest Simla gossip to his two companions.

Meanwhile, Captain Warkworth and Mademoiselle Le Breton returned together to the larger drawing-room, and before long Dr. Meredith took his leave. Lady Henry and her old friend were left alone.

"I am sorry to hear that your sight troubles you more than of old," said Sir Wilfrid, drawing his chair a little nearer to her.

Lady Henry gave an impatient sigh. "Everything troubles me more than of old. There is one disease from which no one recovers, my dear Wilfrid, and it has long since fastened upon me."

"You mean old age? Oh, you are not so much to be pitied for that," said Sir Wilfrid, smiling. "Many people would exchange their youth for your old age."

"Then the world contains more fools than even I give it credit for!" said Lady Henry, with energy. "Why should any one exchange with me--a poor, blind, gouty old creature, with no chick or child to care whether she lives or dies?"

"Ah, well, that's a misfortune--I won't deny that," said Sir Wilfrid, kindly. "But I come home after three years. I find your house as thronged as ever, in the old way. I see half the most distinguished people in London in your drawing-room. It is sad that you can no longer receive them as you used to do: but here you sit like a queen, and people fight for their turn with you."

Lady Henry did not smile. She laid one of her wrinkled hands upon his arm.

"Is there any one else within hearing?" she said, in a quick undertone. Sir Wilfrid was touched by the vague helplessness of her gesture, as she looked round her.

"No one--we are quite alone."

"They are not here for *me*--those people," she said, quivering, with a motion of her hand towards the large drawing-room.

"My dear friend, what do you mean?"

"They are here--come closer, I don't want to be overheard--for a *woman*--whom I took in, in a moment of lunacy--who is now robbing me of my best friends and supplanting me in my own house."

The pallor of the old face had lost all its waxen dignity. The lowered voice hissed in his ear. Sir Wilfrid, startled and repelled, hesitated for his reply. Meanwhile, Lady Henry, who could not see it, seemed at once to divine the change in his expression.

"Oh, I suppose you think I'm mad," she said, impatiently, "or ridiculous. Well, see for yourself, judge for yourself. In fact, I have been looking, *hungering*, for your return. You have helped me through emergencies before now. And I am in that state at present that I trust no one, talk to no one, except of *banalitis*. But I should be greatly obliged if *you* would come and listen to me, and, what is more, advise me some day."

"Most gladly," said Sir Wilfrid, embarrassed; then, after a pause, "Who is this lady I find installed here?"

Lady Henry hesitated, then shut her strong mouth on the temptation to speak.

"It is not a story for to-night," she said; "and it would upset me. But, when you first saw her, how did she strike you?"

"I saw at once," said her companion after a pause, "that you had caught a personality."

"A personality!" Lady Henry gave an angry laugh. "That's one way of putting it. But physically--did she remind you of no one?"

Sir Wilfrid pondered a moment.

"Yes. Her face haunted me, when I first saw it. But--no; no, I can't put any names."

Lady Henry gave a little snort of disappointment.

"Well, think. You knew her mother quite well. You have known her grandfather all your life. If you're going on to the Foreign Office,

as I suppose you are, you'll probably see him to-night. She is uncannily like him. As to her father, I don't know--but he was a rolling-stone of a creature; you very likely came across him."

"I knew her mother and her father?" said Sir Wilfrid, astonished and pondering.

"They had no right to be her mother and her father," said Lady Henry, with grimness.

"Ah! So if one does guess--"

"You'll please hold your tongue."

"But at present I'm completely mystified," said Sir Wilfrid.

"Perhaps it'll come to you later. You've a good memory generally for such things. Anyway, I can't tell you anything now. But when'll you come again? To-morrow--luncheon? I really want you."

"Would you be alone?"

"Certainly. *That*, at least, I can still do--lunch as I please, and with whom I please. Who is this coming in? Ah, you needn't tell me."

The old lady turned herself towards the entrance, with a stiffening of the whole frame, an instinctive and passionate dignity in her whole aspect, which struck a thrill through her companion.

The little Duchess approached, amid a flutter of satin and lace, heralded by the scent of the Parma violets she wore in profusion at her breast and waist. Her eye glanced uncertainly, and she approached with daintiness, like one stepping on mined ground.

"Aunt Flora, I must have just a minute."

"I know no reason against your having ten, if you want them," said Lady Henry, as she held-out three fingers to the new-comer. "You promised yesterday to come and give me a full account of the Devonshire House ball. But it doesn't matter--and you have forgotten."

"No, indeed, I haven't," said the Duchess, embarrassed. "But you seemed so well employed to-night, with other people. And now--"

"Now you are going on," said Lady Henry, with a most unfriendly suavity.